# Appendix A: Detailed Analysis of Implementation

Queensland

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- Part B. Quality of the government-community partnership
- Part C. Quality of social and economic improvements
- Conclusion – Queensland

Northern Territory

- Part A. Quality of whole-of-government coordination
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- Part C. Quality of social and economic improvements
- Conclusion – Northern Territory

South Australia

- Part A. Quality of whole-of-government coordination
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Western Australia

- Part A. Quality of whole-of-government coordination
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Tasmania

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APPENDIX A: DETAILED ANALYSIS OF IMPLEMENTATION

This appendix presents my detailed analysis about how well the COAG Trials Project’s two aims, namely whole-of-government coordination and government-community partnership, were implemented at each of the eight COAG trial sites. The analytical method is outlined in Chapter 2: Research Method but essentially the assessment for each aim involved comparing the developments at each trial site against the respective set of twelve key characteristics that were extrapolated from the literature review presented in Part A of Chapter 4: Implementation. The two sets of key characteristics are listed below. For more detail see Table 6, pp. 193-194 and Table 7, p. 237 respectively.

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<td>- Skills Training</td>
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<td>- Performance Monitoring</td>
<td>- Shared responsibility for expenditure</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Baseline data</td>
<td>- Full access to information</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The trial sites are appraised in chronological order of their public announcement:

- Queensland (Qld) – 25 September 2002
- Northern Territory (NT) – 19 November 2002
- South Australia (SA) – 22 May 2003
- Western Australia (WA) – 2 July 2003
- Victoria (Vic) – 30 July 2003
- Tasmania (Tas) – 28 August 2003
- New South Wales (NSW) – 1 September 2003

The results of this analysis are employed to inform primarily the appraisal in Chapter 4: Implementation, however, some of the findings were also drawn upon for other chapters in the thesis and are referenced accordingly.

My analysis for each trial site concludes with a description of the socioeconomic improvements for the Indigenous trial populations as reported by the government-commissioned evaluation. We start with the Queensland COAG trial.
Queensland

Part A. Quality of whole-of-government coordination

This Part appraises how the aim for whole-of-government coordination was pursued in the Queensland COAG trial. The appraisal considers what occurred in the trial against the twelve key characteristics of such an approach, which were drawn-up earlier in this chapter.

Lead agencies

The Commonwealth Government’s lead agency for the Queensland trial was the Department for Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR) with the Secretary Dr Peter Boxall assigned the role of ‘trial sponsor’, which involved accepting personal responsibility for the progress of the trial (MAC 2004, p. 159; Gray and Sanders 2006, p. 15). The lead agency for the Queensland Government was the Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy (DATSIP).

The Auditor-General (2007b) described the responsibilities of the lead agency:

For whole-of-government initiatives, a lead agency should have the role of ensuring that:

- Programme implementation is meeting the Government’s objective;
- A process has been established where information is shared and flows between the agencies involved;
- Performance is monitored; and
- The commitment by other agencies (as well as their own), is being met (Auditor-General 2007b, p. 30).

The evaluation reported on the performance of DEWR. It did not have access to an objective set of performance indicators and therefore simply paraphrased observations gleaned from interviews with some of the stakeholders. It reported:
A number of people noted that DEWR had taken its role as lead agency seriously, that it had devoted substantial resources to the Trial, that it had appointed senior members of staff to work on the Trial, and that these staff had had strong support at the most senior level of the Department (Urbis Keys Young 2006c, p. 12) (my emphasis).

However, there is little evidence in the evaluation that demonstrates that DEWR’s lead agency status contributed to the achievement of the two aims of the COAG Project. Essentially, the evaluation found that the arrangements for whole-of-government coordination essentially involved the Queensland COAG trial loosely tacked onto the Queensland Government’s pre-existing strategy for Cape York. The Cape York strategy evolved into a state-wide strategy soon after the COAG trial commenced and therefore had a remit well beyond the scope of the Commonwealth’s Queensland trial. The evaluation concluded:

While there was close contact between DEWR and DATSIP (for example, DEWR staff worked out of DATSIP’s Cape York Strategy Unit in Cairns), conduct of the COAG Trial as such did not involve a State/Commonwealth partnership (Urbis Keys Young 2006c, p. i).

The evaluation reports that DEWR’s lead agency status was “instrumental” in the establishment of a Commonwealth Government Regional Managers forum for the entire state of Queensland (Urbis Keys Young 2006c, p. 16). Again, this was well beyond the scope of the Queensland COAG trial, which by this time was reportedly focused on only five communities on the Cape. Further, this Commonwealth Managers forum was established in late 2005, at a point when many stakeholders thought the Queensland trial had concluded. The evaluation does not explain how or what contribution this forum made to the specific aims of the COAG Trials Project.

The evaluation of the Queensland trial reported that DEWR had withdrawn from its lead agency role prior to the conclusion of the COAG Trials Project (Urbis Keys Young 2006c, p. ii).
The circumstances of this withdrawal warrant description for the purposes of this appraisal. On 3 November 2005, Dr Peter Boxall, Secretary of DEWR, told a Senate supplementary estimates hearing that discussions regarding the handover of lead agency status had occurred between officials from DEWR and the Office of Indigenous Policy Coordination (OIPC), which was based in the Department of Immigration, Multicultural Indigenous Affairs (DIMIA). Dr Boxall stated that the decision to handover was “confirmed” at a meeting of the Secretaries Group on Indigenous Affairs in “May or June” 2005 (Senate Employment Workplace Relations and Employment Legislation Committee 2005, p. 34). Despite the handover occurring over a period of five months, the evaluation found the handover was not widely known and that activity in the trial had stalled:

At the end of 2005 DEWR announced that it would no longer act as lead agency for the Cape York Trial, given that since the Australian Government’s introduction of new Indigenous Affairs arrangements in mid–2004 the OIPC [Office of Indigenous Policy based in DIMIA] had increasingly played a key whole-of-government role. Since late 2005 there has not been any activity specifically relating to the Cape York Trial, and many stakeholders have accordingly concluded that the Trial is over. However, there has been no formal end to the process (Urbis Keys Young 2006c, p. ii).

The evaluation also found:

DEWR’s expectation was that the Cairns ICC [Indigenous Coordination Centre, a regional office of the OIPC] would take over its role in the Trial, but for various reasons this has not happened (Urbis Keys Young 2006c, p. 12).

The confusion about the status of the lead agency is an indication of poor communication between the stakeholders and it led the evaluators to make the following extraordinary recommendation:
There is a need for a COAG or Australian Government decision on whether there is to be any further action on the Cape York Trial, and clear communication of this to all relevant parties (Urbis Keys Young 2006c, p. ii).

Therefore, when measured against the Auditor-General (2007) description of the role of a lead agency in a whole-of-government approach, the performance of DEWR and DATSIP for the Queensland trial warrants a poor rating.

FUNCTIONALITY – POOR

Framework agreement

The DIMIA Annual Report 2003-2004 reported that a framework agreement had been successfully negotiated for the Queensland trial. DIMIA clearly stated:

As at 30 June 2004, Shared Responsibility Agreements had been negotiated in trial sites in the ACT, Cape York in Queensland, Wadeye in the Northern Territory, Murdi Paaki in New South Wales and Shepparton in Victoria.

The five agreements were signed in a spirit of partnership between representatives of the Indigenous communities, the Australian Government and the relevant state or territory government. The agreements recognise and respect each of the parties’ rights and responsibilities and set out the key strategic priorities and agreed outcomes that form the basis for collaborative cooperation between the community representatives and governments (DIMIA 2004, pp. 174-5).

However, the evaluation of the Queensland COAG trial does not mention this framework agreement. The evaluation simply ignores this key characteristic and leads the reader to the conclusion that a framework agreement between the Commonwealth and Queensland Governments to formalise a whole-of-government approach for the Queensland COAG trial was not successfully negotiated. The subsequent Synopsis Review of the COAG Trial Evaluations explicitly states that a framework agreement was not successfully negotiated for the Queensland trial albeit buried in a table in attachment two of the report (Morgan Disney et al 2006d, p. 34).
It is not known what happened to the framework agreement that DIMIA reported had been successfully negotiated. Curiously, it seems the framework agreement disappeared. There is other evidence that indicates lengthy negotiations to develop a framework agreement for the Queensland COAG trial had occurred. In January 2004, Dr Jonas reported that such negotiations commenced shortly after it was announced (in September 2002) and were still continuing approximately eighteen months later (ATSI SJC 2004, p. 243). Unfortunately, for learning purposes, the evaluation makes no reference to these lengthy negotiations. The evaluation of the Queensland trial did not investigate the reasons for the failed negotiations or discussed what ramifications this may have had for achieving a whole-of-government approach to the Queensland trial. This undermined COAG’s original intent for learning from the trials “to be applied more broadly” (COAG 2002b).

Another significant development that the evaluation overlooked is ATSIC, the Queensland Premier Peter Beattie and the Queensland Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy signing a formal agreement called “A Commitment to Partnership” in July 2002 (ATSIC 2003, p. 223). It is not known why the evaluation did not refer to this agreement, which clearly involved the State and Commonwealth Governments (through ATSIC).

The lack of a framework agreement for the Queensland trial is likely to have led to the confusion in the Queensland trial about its objectives. The evaluation of the Queensland trial reports that “there was criticism of what was seen as a lack of clear objectives for the COAG Trial and of a strategic approach to achieving long-term changes” (Urbis Keys Young 2006c, p. ii). The evaluation stated:

It was argued, for example, that despite the use of the term ‘trial’, there was neither any clear hypothesis being examined nor any particular strategy being tested; it was not necessarily clear, even to people quite closely involved, what the Trial was expected to achieve. A related point made by some of those consulted was that many of the activities
undertaken as part of the Trial seemed ad hoc or opportunistic: ‘there
didn’t seem to be any sort of strategic approach’ (Urbis Keys Young 2006c,
p. 25).

To illustrate the stakeholder confusion about the objectives of the trial, the evaluation stated that one of DEWR’s project officers “reported having had a clear brief to work on a whole-of-government, systematic approach to addressing Indigenous disadvantage and the problems of government in servicing remote communities” (Urbis Keys Young 2006c, p. 9). The evaluation also reports that the lead agency DEWR “made reference to” a list of seven broad objectives but none of these refer to a whole-of-government approach (Urbis Keys Young 2006c, p. 9). The status of this list of seven broad objectives is unclear.

The list of seven objectives first appeared in the February 2003 version of the overall COAG Project’s performance monitoring and evaluation framework. The objectives were described as “other broad strategies that have been agreed for the trial” (ICCT 2003a, pp. 2-3) (my emphasis). The same list was later presented in the October 2003 version of the Project’s performance monitoring and evaluation framework but in this instance the objectives were described as “[O]ther broad strategies that may be adopted for particular trials” (ICCT 2003d, p. 3) (my emphasis). In another instance, the subsequent Synopsis Review of all trial site evaluations, which was conducted in late 2006, described the list of seven points as, “The objectives of the Trials, as stated on the COAG Indigenous Trials website” (Morgan Disney et al 2006c, p. 4). None of the evaluation reports of the seven other trial sites refer to this list of seven broad objectives.

Therefore, apart from the media announcement, there was confusion about the objectives of the Queensland trial at the beginning, during its implementation and in the evaluation stages. The lack of a framework agreement for the trial likely contributed to this confusion.

FUNCTIONALITY – POOR
**Joint steering committee**

There is no evidence in the evaluation that a joint steering committee of Commonwealth, State and Local Governments with shared responsibility for the conduct of the Queensland trial was established. The evaluation concluded, “conduct of the COAG Trial as such did not involve a State/Commonwealth partnership” (Urbis Keys Young 2006c p. i). It stated:

> ...stakeholders who were consulted during this study saw the Cape York COAG Trial itself as essentially an Australian Government (and specifically a DEWR) initiative” (Urbis Keys Young 2006c. p. i).

The evaluation points to Commonwealth Government involvement in pre-existing Queensland Government processes to suggest there was some intergovernmental arrangement for the conduct of the Queensland trial. It reports that the Commonwealth Government “sensibly chose to ‘piggy-back’” on the State Government structures and processes (Urbis Keys Young 2006c, p. 11).

There is evidence in another documentary source that DEWR, ATSIS and ICCT were represented on the Cape York CEO Steering Committee (Director General, DATSIP 2003 as quoted in ATSI SJC 2004, p. 244), which it appears continued to operate after the Cape York Partnerships strategy evolved into a state-wide Meeting Challenges Making Choices (MCMC) strategy in 2002. The Commonwealth agencies were represented on the state-wide MCMC CEO Steering Committee (Director General, DATSIP 2003 as quoted in ATSI SJC 2004, p. 244) but its remit was well beyond the five targeted communities for the Queensland COAG trial. It was hardly an adequate substitute for a joint steering committee that was focused on service delivery in partnership with the five targeted Cape York communities.

Perhaps as a part of the substitute for establishing a joint steering committee specifically established for the Queensland COAG trial, the evaluation highlighted DEWR’s recruitment of four different project officers to work out of the Queensland Government’s Cape York
Strategy Unit. The Unit was based in Cairns to drive the Cape York Partnerships strategy. The evaluation states:

In order to pursue its role as lead Australian Government agency, DEWR in 2003 appointed a departmental officer to work in Cairns on the planning and implementation of relevant activities (Urbis Keys Young 2006c, p. 10).

The evaluation reported that DEWR’s project officers were particularly concerned with the five ‘Trial communities’ and on identifying ways in which they could access government support for projects or initiatives that were important to those communities (Urbis Keys Young 2006c, p. 15). The evaluation reported that this arrangement was described by “numbers of stakeholders ... as appropriate and useful in ensuring clear State/Australian Government communication” (Urbis Keys Young 2006c, p. 10).

Overall, a rating of satisfactory is awarded because it is clear that DEWR had attempted to be involved in a joint Commonwealth and State process (and avoid duplication of whole-of-government strategies) as part of its lead agency role. The appointment of the project officer position also was an attempt to give substance to its joint participation on the Queensland processes. This approach however failed ultimately to fulfil the purpose of the key characteristic under consideration here. A successful approach would have resulted in all the relevant agencies jointly developing and overseeing the implementation of a holistic strategy for the five targeted Cape York communities for the duration of the trial.

FUNCTIONALITY – SATISFACTORY

Implementation plan

The evaluation makes no reference to an implementation plan for the Queensland trial. Relevantly, the evaluation reports:

A so-called ‘hundred day planning agenda’ was set up to provide a government/community forum for regular monitoring of current initiatives
in Cape York and for assessing new project ideas and proposals; this process involves OIPC, DEWR, Cape York Partnerships and other relevant organisations. There were some stakeholders who felt that this collaborative effort had fallen off somewhat over the past year or so (p. 16).

There is no further detail about this “hundred day planning agenda” in the evaluation. It is unknown when it was established, who established it or whether it was effective. The Queensland trial operated for approximately five years.

**FUNCTIONALITY – POOR**

*Mapping and developing whole-of-government funding arrangements*

There is no evidence in the evaluation report that the Commonwealth and State Governments attempted to draw up a comprehensive financial picture of combined government expenditure for the strategic planning and coordination of services for the Queensland trial. The evaluation does not highlight that the drawing up of such a financial picture would have been an integral step in applying a whole-of-government approach for the Queensland trial. It is a critical oversight for an evaluation of a whole-of-government approach.

There was a need for a whole-of-government expenditure arrangement. The evaluation reports there was significant Commonwealth and State Government expenditure in Cape York over the duration of the Queensland trial. In relation to Commonwealth expenditure, the evaluation states the Commonwealth Government “provided more than $7 million in additional funding for initiatives” (p. 23). It is reported in two different Senate Estimates Committee hearings that a total of more than $11.5 million was expended in the trial region over the duration of the trial. DEWR reported expenditure of $8,515,322\(^1\) and the Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services (FaCS) reported total

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\(^1\) Reported expenditure by DEWR on Cape York between 2002-03 and 2005-06 (till 31 October 2005) (Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education Legislation Committee 2006c, *Answer to Question on Notice No. w454-06*, tabled March 2006).
expenditure $3,000,000 to the Cape York Institute over 2004-05 and 2005-06. Table 8a illustrates DEWR’s departmental expenses amounted to just over $2 million and there is no detail provided in relation to the $6.5 million in administered expenditure.

### Table 8a: Reported expenditure by DEWR in Cape York, by financial year from 2002-03 to 2005-06

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Financial Year</th>
<th>Administered</th>
<th>Departmental</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Spent in 2002-03</td>
<td>$1,077,799</td>
<td>$287,893</td>
<td>$1,365,692</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spent in 2003-04</td>
<td>$1,752,411</td>
<td>$744,384</td>
<td>$2,496,795</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spent in 2005-06*</td>
<td>$564,045</td>
<td>$225,097</td>
<td>$789,142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Spent Funds</strong></td>
<td><strong>$6,502,391</strong></td>
<td><strong>$2,012,931</strong></td>
<td><strong>$8,515,322</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*As at 31 October 2005*

Source: (Senate Employment Workplace Relations and Education Legislation Committee 2005, Answer to Question on Notice W454-06, 2 & 3 November 2005, Commonwealth of Australia).

The evaluation also reports significantly more expenditure by the Queensland Government for the Cape York region over the duration of the Queensland trial totalling $132.5 million (p. 8). In addition, ATSIC reported expenditure of $54.76 million in programs and services for the Cape York region in 2002-2003 (ATSIC 2003, p. 16). In relation to this key characteristic, the evaluation found:

> ...the Trial did not involve any breakthrough in terms of the ‘silos’ within which each government agency operates. There was no progress, for example, towards joint contracts or an integrated approach to funding; these remain major barriers on the road to effective collaboration and coordination (Urbis Keys Young 2006c. p. 26).

**FUNCTIONALITY – POOR**

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2 Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee 2006a, Answer to Question on Notice No. 075 tabled October 2006, p. 174.
**Protocols and dispute resolution**

There is no evidence in the evaluation that a set of protocols, including a dispute resolution process, were specifically developed to progress the whole-of-government aim of the COAG Trials Project. The evaluation indicates that the lead agency DEWR had a broad intent to rely on the protocols established for the Queensland Government’s state-wide *Meeting Challenges Making Choices* strategy. This may have avoided a duplication of strategies with similar principles but in implementation, it was inadequate because the Queensland strategy had different objectives and priorities to the COAG Trials Project. For example, there is no evidence in the evaluation that the Queensland’s strategy’s ‘negotiation tables’ were utilised to drive a whole-of-government approach in partnership with any of the five communities being targeted by the Queensland COAG trial.

FUNCTIONALITY – POOR

**Realistic timeframes**

The evaluation does not refer to the lead agencies setting any timeframes to measure the achievement of milestones or agreed priorities.

FUNCTIONALITY – POOR

**Risk assessment**

The evaluation makes no reference to any risk assessment on the barriers to whole-of-government coordination being undertaken in relation to the implementation of the Queensland trial. Such an assessment may have assisted in ameliorating some of the incongruences between the Queensland and Commonwealth Governments’ separate whole-of-government strategies.

FUNCTIONALITY – POOR
Trust and collaboration between the agencies

This discussion appraises whether a climate of trust and collaboration of a kind necessary to support a whole-of-government approach was systematically promoted as a key characteristic of all trial’s interactions. Was there some sort of formalisation to promote this as an ongoing feature of the trial. The lack of a formal agreement and the lack of a joint steering committee for the trial are indicative. The word ‘trust’ does not appear in the evaluation report, which is another indication of the lack of attention to developing trustful relationships in the implementation stage.

The evaluation presented some weak evidence to indicate a degree of cooperation between the two government jurisdictions:

One stakeholder who had had fairly close involvement with the Cape York Trial saw its achievements in terms of promoting better communication between the Australian and Queensland Governments around Indigenous affairs (p. 21) (my emphasis).

Evidence from one stakeholder of better communication alone cannot be considered evidence of trust and collaboration in the conduct of the trial. The evaluation also reported there was some progress by the trial towards trust and collaboration:

There were some stakeholders who felt that this collaborative effort had fallen off somewhat over the past year or so. Others regarded it as a valuable legacy of the Trial; it was said to be the first ‘the first time that all these senior people came together like that’. ‘The Trial did move us further down the whole-of-government track’, said a senior Commonwealth officer (p. 16).

It is not known who was making these vague contentions of progress and overall there is a lack of concrete evidence to support this contention. Overall, it is concluded that there was some collaboration between the Commonwealth and State Governments over the duration of the trial but the evidence suggests that this collaboration attended to some broader
aspects of Indigenous affairs or for a small number of specific programs, rather than being focused on the holistic coordination of government services for the five targeted communities.

A rating of poor has been deemed because while there was close contact between DEWR and DATSIP (for example, DEWR staff worked out of DATSIP’s Cape York Strategy Unit in Cairns). The co-location of field officers is viewed as evidence of employing a structural solution to enhance collaboration but in itself, it is not evidence that the degree of trust and collaboration sought by COAG was present. Finally, the evaluation found “conduct of the COAG Trial as such did not involve a State/Commonwealth partnership” (Urbis Keys Young 2006c, p. 1).

**FUNCTIONALITY – POOR**

*Skills training*

There is no evidence in the evaluation report that any government officials involved with the Queensland trial underwent training in how to implement a whole-of-government approach.

**FUNCTIONALITY – POOR**

*Performance monitoring*

The evaluation reported that the “so-called hundred day planning agenda was set up to provide a government/community forum for regular monitoring of current initiatives in Cape York” (p. 16). The evaluation also reported, “this collaborative effort had fallen off somewhat over the past year or so” (p. 16).

There is no further information provided about this “hundred day” monitoring process and the evaluation does not refer to any performance data that emanated from it. The trial operated for approximately five years. Therefore, there is insufficient information to gauge
whether the reported monitoring process was partially implemented and resulted in “some functionality towards its purpose”. If there was, it would have gained a satisfactory quality rating.

FUNCTIONALITY – POOR

**Baseline indicators**

There is no evidence in the evaluation report that a set of baseline data was developed and agreed to early in the trial.

FUNCTIONALITY – POOR

**Summary of analysis of whole-of-government coordination**

The Queensland trial’s progress towards whole-of-government coordination is given a satisfactory rating for one key characteristic and a poor rating for eleven key characteristics (see Table 9).

The table of ratings illustrates an almost complete failure to achieve whole-of-government coordination in the Queensland trial. The government-commissioned evaluation did not explicitly make this finding nor demonstrate where the failures in the trial occurred. Rather, it concluded, “there were many examples of active State/Commonwealth cooperation” (Urbis Keys Young 2006c. p. i). This analysis concludes they were not examples of whole-of-government coordination.
Table 9: Ratings for the key characteristics of whole-of-government coordination, Queensland COAG trial

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>KEY CHARACTERISTIC</th>
<th>RATING</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lead agencies</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Framework agreement</td>
<td>Poor</td>
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<td>Joint steering committee</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Baseline data</td>
<td>Poor</td>
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</table>

There is corroboration for the results of this analysis in a separate evaluation of the Queensland trial, which was conducted by the Queensland Government in 2004. That evaluation found:

While overall engagement between the Queensland and Commonwealth Governments has been improved by the COAG trial, further work is required to set up joint government programs. Both Commonwealth and Queensland agencies would benefit from clearer funding responsibilities and standards of services, and the identification of future priorities (Premier of Queensland 2005 as quoted in ATSI SJC 2005, pp. 197-198).
Part B. Quality of the government-community partnership

This Part appraises how the aim for a government-community partnership was pursued in the Queensland COAG trial. The appraisal considers what occurred in the trial against twelve key characteristics of such an approach, which were drawn up earlier in this chapter.

The right partners

The Commonwealth lead agency partner was DEWR and the Queensland lead agency partner was DATSIP. There was no specific group of Indigenous people who agreed to be partners in the overall governance of the Queensland trial. This may be surprising in light of COAG’s explicit commitment to Reconciliation for “an approach based on partnerships and shared responsibilities with indigenous (sic) communities” (COAG 2000b). It is argued that the appropriate Indigenous partners should have been the recipients of the service delivery or their representatives. In this case, under the original scope of the Queensland trial, the potential recipients were the approximately 6,100 Indigenous people living on Cape York. Under the amended trial scope, the total population of the five targeted communities was 2,825 (Taylor and Bell 2002, p. 4).

Under the original scope of the Queensland trial, several Indigenous organisations could have been the right partners. Most of the thirteen communities had a local community council, including the five targeted communities (Phillpot 2005, p. 6). It is not known why formal partnership arrangements were not sought with these local community councils. At the regional level, ATSIC Peninsula Regional Council represented the Indigenous people. In addition, there were other significant regionally focused Indigenous organisations such as the Cape York Land Council and the Apunipima Cape York Health Council. The evaluation of the Queensland trial reported that “Cape York Partnerships, and its Director Noel Pearson in particular, were important early sources of information and advice” (Urbis Keys Young 2006c, p. 13). However, this cannot be equated to an ongoing partnership with Indigenous
people in the governance of the trial. There is no evidence in the evaluation indicating why a formal arrangement for the conduct of the Queensland trial was not made with any of these organisations.

It is stated in another documentary source that the ATSIC Peninsula Regional Council also played an early role in the Queensland trial (ATSI SJC 2004, p. 230). The role of ATSIC in the Queensland trial, prior to it being abolished as of 30 June 2005, resulted in significant contributions to achieving the aims, but the evaluation report did not present this information. For example, ATSIC’s Annual Report 2002-2003 states that it established a “Whole of Government Unit” in its Cairns Regional Office to work closely with the Queensland Government’s Cape York Strategy Unit, which was based in the Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy. The ‘Whole of Government Unit’ facilitated the establishment of the Cape York Leaders Forum in March 2003, which was chaired by the Peninsula ATSIC Regional Council Chairperson. Significantly, this Cape York Leaders Forum was nominated as a primary point for governments to engage with the communities of Cape York (ATSIC 2003, p. 16). The Cape York Leaders Forum was another potential partner that was formed four months after the Queensland COAG trial commenced.

ATSIC reported that it had spent $54.76 million in programs and services for the Cape York region in 2002-2003 (ATSIC 2003, p. 16). In comparison, the trial’s Commonwealth lead agency DEWR reported that it had spent $10.5 million in the Cape York region over the entire duration of the COAG trial (see Table 8a in chapter four of this thesis). In light of this information, it is curious why the role of ATSIC was not deemed relevant to be a formal partner early in the trial.

Despite the lack of formal Indigenous partners, the evaluation sought to demonstrate that there was some engagement with Indigenous people during the trial. It found:
Rather than seeking to set up any separate consultation structures for the purpose of the Trial, DEWR chose to work through the systems established by the Queensland Government. For example, DEWR’s project officers usually took part in the Negotiation Tables for the five Trial communities (p. 10).

There is no further detail about how many negotiation tables were held in the five Trial communities, what arose out of them, or the contribution afforded by the participation of DEWR’s project officers. This is unfortunate because it would appear that the negotiation tables might have presented an opportunity for the people of the five Trial communities to work in partnership with the Governments. This process could have enabled the participation of the right partners under the amended trial scope.

The evaluation notes that ATSIC and ATSIS were abolished “sometime after the COAG Trials commenced” (p. 1). In fact, the ATSIC Peninsula Regional Council functioned for the first two and a half years of the trial. The Office of Indigenous Policy Coordination (OIPC) was established as a replacement and the ATSIC Regional Offices were transformed to Indigenous Coordination Centres (ICC) (pp. 1-2). The evaluation reported that the ICC’s were not seen as an adequate substitute for ATSIC:

There was uncertainty about what role the ICCs were intended to perform; did they, for instance, have any influence over other Australian Government agencies? If not, what function did they have? ATSIC/ATSIS, by comparison, was described as having been better informed and more realistic, more flexible, more interested, and more accessible. Government agencies in general were seen as weak on consultation (‘They always think they know what’s best for us’; ‘They come in and tell us what’s going to happen’)” (pp. 26-27).

The evaluation pointed to the early role the Cape York Partnerships and its Director, Noel Pearson played, and an unknown degree of Indigenous participation in Queensland Government processes, as evidence of Indigenous participation in the COAG trial. Some
Participation in a negotiation table geared for State programs and services cannot be regarded as equivalent to a formal partnership for the overall conduct of the Queensland trial. Further, the evaluation overlooks the role that ATSIC may have played as an effective partner.

FUNCTIONALITY – POOR

**Partnership agreement**

A formal partnership agreement was not successfully negotiated between the Governments and Indigenous representatives for the conduct of the overall Queensland COAG trial. However, the evaluation reports that three Shared Responsibility Agreements (SRAs) were successfully negotiated during the period of the trial. Two SRAs were signed with Aboriginal lawyer Noel Pearson’s Hopevale community (who was the Aboriginal representative at the trial’s original media announcement) and one was signed with the Lockhart River community. It may be argued that these were in effect partnership agreements but a brief analysis refutes this argument.

The evaluation describes the three SRAs as “broad brush” (p. 14) and “light on content” (p. 19). The first SRA involved funding of $80,000 to employ two people to focus on alcohol diversion activities. There was no funding associated with the second SRA but rather the Australian Government “agreed to provide in-kind support” to:

- Facilitate improved relationships between and across agencies, organisations and communities, share information regarding what does and doesn’t work and why. Negotiate agreed priorities and actions (Urbis Keys Young 2006c, p. 18).

The evaluation reports that there “were no explicit obligations on the part of the community or families/individuals” in the first two SRAs (p. 17). In relation to the third SRA, the schedule:
...refers to Government responsibilities relating to refurbishment of a local community hall, purchase of sport and recreation equipment, and encouragement of other bodies ‘to provide or support youth related activities in Hope Vale’. The Hope Vale Shire Council also commits to contributing funds for the refurbishment of the hall, as well as ensuring community participation in the sport and recreation steering committee, encouraging regular school attendance, and encouraging local people to become community sport and recreation officers to assist in running the program. Families and individuals are to contribute to the initiative in various ways, such as ensuring that the hall and sport and recreation equipment are kept in good repair (p. 19).

This demonstrates the three SRAs were not akin to a partnership relationship and agreement. Nor were they a partnership agreement for the overall conduct of the Queensland trial.

**FUNCTIONALITY – POOR**

*Joint steering committee*

A joint steering committee comprised of senior representatives of the Indigenous and Government partners with overall responsibility for the conduct of the Queensland trial was not established.

**FUNCTIONALITY – POOR**

*Steering committee authority, vertically and horizontally*

A joint steering committee was not established for the Queensland COAG trial.

**FUNCTIONALITY – POOR**

*Respect for the partners’ value frameworks*

There is no evidence demonstrating mutual recognition of the stakeholders’ value frameworks under the banner of a COAG trial partnership agreement. The pre-existing Queensland Government processes appear to have incorporated this key characteristic, for
example, the ten-year *Cape York Partnerships* strategy and the *Commitment to Partnership* framework agreement. However, there was no formal commitment to this key characteristic under the banner of the COAG trial. A formal partnership agreement for the conduct of the Queensland trial could have incorporated this key characteristic.

**FUNCTIONALITY – POOR**

**Trust and collaboration between governments and community**

There was no formal partnership agreement to establish a joint commitment to nurture a climate of trust and collaboration for the governance and implementation of the trial. It may be argued that mechanisms were employed to nurture this climate in the absence of a formal agreement but there is no supporting evidence in the evaluation report. For example, there is no evidence in the evaluation that the government officials involved in the Queensland trial, or Indigenous people from the trial region, underwent training in partnership theory and practice, or cross-cultural training.

It was reported in another documentary source at the time that “progress is being made in developing a common understanding of what shared responsibility means in practical terms” for the Queensland trial (Abbott 2003 as quoted in ATSI SJC 2004, p. 244). The claim is not substantiated with further detail about the form of the “progress” or if any of the five targeted Cape York communities were involved. The nature of the SRAs were unlikely to endear a climate of trust and collaboration, though the evaluation reports that:

> Some of the stakeholders consulted believed that the early SRAs, even if ‘light on content’, had an important symbolic role in reflecting the concept of shared objectives and commitment (p. 19).

**FUNCTIONALITY – POOR**
Protocols for shared decision-making power and dispute resolution

The absence of a partnership agreement and a joint steering committee led to an absence of jointly agreed protocols, including a dispute resolution process, on how decision-making power was shared for the conduct of the Queensland trial. Evidence presented in the evaluation supports this conclusion. The evaluation found no evidence that the Cape York Indigenous communities were involved in setting the priorities for the Queensland trial. It states:

Given the limited documentation that has been available to the study team, it is difficult to know to what extent there was active community involvement in determining the priorities which DEWR and its dedicated officers sought to pursue (Urbis Keys Young 2006c, p. 13).

However, it is reported in another documentary source that there were attempts early in the trial to involve Indigenous people in priority setting. In September 2003, the COAG Project secretariat, the ICCT, reported that DEWR was still in “discussions” with Indigenous communities “about the COAG whole-of-government regional priorities” and stated, “a number of key issues had been identified” (as quoted in ATSI SJC 2004, p. 244). The claim was not substantiated with further detail, such as a description of the “discussions” or which communities were involved. The evaluation of the Queensland trial makes no reference to these discussions, or why they failed. From a learning perspective, the lack of attention to the detail of how the discussions proceeded is a missed opportunity.

The evaluation sought to attribute community participation in the Queensland Government’s negotiation tables as part of DEWR’s lead-agency strategy for the COAG trial, but it is not convincing. The evaluation reported:

It can also be said that communities on the Cape have responded to the opportunity to work with the Queensland Government champions, and to take part in the work of Negotiation Tables – adopted by DEWR as part of its consultation strategy (p. 14) (my emphasis).
Such participation, for which there is no detail, cannot be regarded as exemplary of protocols for shared decision-making in a partnership relationship for the overall conduct of the Queensland trial. Finally, the evaluation report describes the work practices of one of the four project officers who were based in the Cairns coordination unit as a “‘model’ of working with Indigenous communities”. Nonetheless, the evaluator’s description of this model indicates it did not equate to a partnership relationship with shared decision-making (p. 27).

FUNCTIONALITY – POOR

**Shared objectives and shared outcomes**

The lack of a partnership agreement demonstrates that there were no shared objectives and shared outcomes for the Queensland trial. The evaluation found:

> ...there was criticism of what was seen as a lack of clear objectives for the COAG Trial and of a strategic approach to achieving long-term changes (p. ii).

According to the evaluation, when asked about objectives for the Queensland trial, DEWR made reference to a list of seven objectives for the overall COAG Trials Project (p. 9) that were drawn up by the Project secretariat, the ICCT. The evaluation reproduced the seven objectives but it is evident these were not drawn up in partnership with Indigenous representatives at the national or Queensland trial-level. The evaluation then reported:

> “Conduct of the study did not reveal any further set of objectives relating specifically to the Cape York Trial” (p. 9).

FUNCTIONALITY – POOR

**Role clarity and early detailed planning**

The lack of an agreement between the stakeholders for the overall conduct of the trial prevented the implementation of this key characteristic. The evaluation found:
Conduct of this review suggested that neither governments nor communities made very clear or explicit commitments relating to the COAG Trial in Cape York (Urbis Keys Young 2006c, p. 13).

The evaluation reports that there were three Shared Responsibility Agreements (SRAs) successfully negotiated with two of the five targeted Cape York communities. The evaluation described them as “light on content” with the objectives and commitments “expressed in broad terms” (p. 19). Further, the evaluation found that “DEWR’s five priority communities had no explicit obligations relating to the Trial as such” (Urbis Keys Young 2006c, p. 14).

FUNCTIONALITY – POOR

**Sustained operation and membership of steering committee**

A joint steering committee comprised of Government and Indigenous representatives for the Queensland trial was not established.

FUNCTIONALITY – POOR

**Shared responsibility for whole-of-government expenditure in the trial region**

This key characteristic was not implemented despite, as highlighted earlier, significant government expenditure in the trial region during the period of the COAG Project. At best, the evaluation found there were “ongoing consultations”:

> People in the communities (especially Council members) were involved in ongoing consultations with both State Government and DEWR representatives, and took part in the Negotiation Tables (typically co-chaired by the local Mayor) (p. 15).

FUNCTIONALITY – POOR
Full access to information

Taking into account the absence of Indigenous partners, the lack of a partnership agreement and the lack of a joint steering committee, there was little opportunity for this characteristic to be implemented. The confusion regarding the scope of the trial and the status of the lead agencies further supports the conclusion that this characteristic was not fulfilled.

FUNCTIONALITY – POOR

Summary of analysis of government-community partnership

The Queensland trial’s progress towards a government-community partnership is deemed a poor rating for all twelve key characteristics (see Table 10).

Table 10: Ratings for the key characteristics of government-community partnership, Queensland COAG trial

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>KEY CHARACTERISTIC</th>
<th>RATING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Right partners</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partnership agreement</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joint steering committee</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steering committee authority</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respect for partners’ values</td>
<td>Poor</td>
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<tr>
<td>Trust and collaboration</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protocols for shared power</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared objectives and shared outcomes</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role clarity and early planning</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sustained operation and membership</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared responsibility for expenditure</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full access to information</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The table of ratings of the key characteristics illustrates a complete failure to achieve a government-community partnership for the conduct of the Queensland trial. The evaluation found:

While there have been a number of positive achievements related to the Trial, it cannot be said that the Cape York Trial has at this stage resulted in significant change in the ways that communities experience their dealings with government agencies. As community representatives describe them, such dealings remain complex, and confusing, and often frustrating, fragmented and unduly legalistic (p. ii).
Part C. Quality of social and economic improvements

The evaluation report states that one of the objectives of the Trials Project was to “negotiate agreed outcomes, benchmarks for measuring progress and management of responsibilities for achieving those outcomes” (Urbis Keys Young 2006c, p. 9). The evaluation does not explicitly state that these monitoring processes were not implemented for the Queensland trial but it may be implied from the absence of evidence. It may have been valuable learning had the evaluation investigated the reasons why a set of agreed outcomes and benchmarks did not eventuate for the Queensland trial when it was such an imperative of the COAG Trials Project.

The evaluation does not report any measured improvements in the socio-economic conditions of the Indigenous population of the trial site over the approximately four-year duration of the Queensland trial. It simply states that “a more comprehensive assessment of trial outcomes and achievements” will be conducted in the second-stage evaluation scheduled for 2007-08 (Urbis Keys Young 2006c, p. 2). However, despite this assertion, it presents what government may regard as some positive outcomes from the trial:

Since the start of the Trial there have been over 300 STEP employment placements on Cape York, nine Indigenous Small Business Fund contracts signed, and around 20 Indigenous Community Volunteer projects supported (p. 23).

Conclusion – Queensland

In relation to the achievement of whole-of-government coordination, there is a satisfactory rating for one key characteristic and a poor rating for the remaining eleven. In relation to the achievement of a government-community partnership, there are poor ratings for all twelve key characteristics. There is no evidence of socioeconomic improvements attributed to the trial.
The evaluation stated:

While there have been a number of positive achievements related to the Trial, it cannot be said that the Cape York Trial has at this stage resulted in significant change in the ways that communities experience their dealings with government agencies. As community representatives describe them, such dealings remain complex, and confusing, and often frustrating, fragmented and unduly legalistic (p. ii).

The evaluation report concludes by describing the following three “lessons for the future”, which in effect, reiterated the original aims of the COAG trial:

- A trial or pilot approach requires a clearly defined hypothesis and methodology;
- Effective Commonwealth/State liaison requires clearly defined and shared priorities;
- Central agencies need to play a significant role in the identification of these shared priorities and the development and maintenance of collaborative arrangements (Urbis Keys Young 2006c, p. 29).
Northern Territory

Part A. Quality of whole-of-government coordination

This Part appraises how the aim for whole-of-government coordination was pursued in the Northern Territory COAG trial. The appraisal considers what occurred in the trial against twelve key characteristics of such an approach, which were drawn up earlier in this chapter.

Lead agencies

The lead agencies for the NT trial were the Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services (FaCS) and the Northern Territory Office of Indigenous Policy in the Department of the Chief Minister (DCM). The Secretary of FaCS, Mark Sullivan was appointed the ‘sponsor’ for the NT trial (Gray 2006, p. 5) and in November 2004, Jeff Harmer was appointed Secretary of FaCS and assumed responsibility as ‘sponsor’ for the NT trial (Shergold 2005, p. 6).

The first major milestone for the lead agencies was the successful negotiation of a framework agreement for the trial signed by all parties, which occurred within four months of the NT trial first being publicly announced. As will be demonstrated shortly, it was a good agreement, however, evidence in the evaluation indicates that there was a rapid deterioration in the quality of the lead agencies’ leadership thereafter and it never recovered.

Remarkably, the evaluation does not employ the term ‘lead agency’ to describe the role of FaCS and DCM. It does not explicitly acknowledge that there was a widely understood expectation under the COAG Trials Project settings for the role of the lead agencies. The government-commissioned Synopsis Review of all eight trial site evaluations described the role of the lead agencies as including “working together to negotiate with communities on
the agreed priorities and the structures for each of the Trials” (p. 12) and that it involved “facilitative leadership” (p. 22). Essentially, the role of the lead agencies was to act as a central point in the trial for the:

- Whole-of-government coordination of all the other relevant government departments of their respective jurisdictions; and

The evaluation’s lack of recognition of the classification and responsibilities of the lead agency status is possibly a reflection of minimal attention being paid to it during the implementation. The evaluation found:

One of the more common questions asked by all the partners was “who is in charge?” (Gray 2006, p. 10)

There was a need for leadership as no one could identify who was in charge (Gray 2006, p. 15).

I argue that the inadequacy of the leadership for the trial translated into other significant problems. Perhaps the worst of which occurred in May 2006, when there was an eruption of “gang violence” and “rioting” involving up to 400 people in Wadeye. About 400 Wadeye residents were reportedly evacuated to Darwin for their safety and more than one hundred residents were arrested (Kerin 2006; Murdoch 2006; Zimmer 2006; Graham and Johnstone 2006).

Significant management problems also surfaced during the trial. FaCSIA Secretary, Dr Jeff Harmer told a Senate Estimates Committee that he had concerns about the effectiveness of the trial during his first visit to Wadeye as Secretary of the trial’s Commonwealth lead agency on 19 May 2005:
Dr Harmer—I visited twice, and I can tell you that on my very earliest visit I was quite concerned that it was not going to be nearly as effective as I was hoping it would be (Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee 2006c, Hansard Supplementary Estimates Hearings, 2 November 2006, p. 34).

The trial’s steering committee developed a new set of priorities in July 2005, which was referred to as “Phase 2” for the NT trial (Gray 2006, p. 6). It was reported to be “an attempt to breathe new life into a project which had been in the doldrums for a considerable period” (Thamarrurr Regional Council 2006 as quoted by Gray 2006, p. 6). While this evidence itself is indicative of the quality of leadership in the first two years of the trial, the evaluation also found that few stakeholders were aware that the NT trial had transitioned to a “Phase 2” (Gray 2006, p. 6). The evaluator too seemed surprised when he learned about the new phase. He wrote:

...the Thamarrurr Regional Council Indigenous representatives placed considerable emphasis on the fact that the original three priorities as set out in the SRA had not changed as far their community was concerned. No one interviewed at Thamarrurr made mention of the new priorities. Indeed, it was not until the consultant was given access to documents by FaCSIA late in the exercise that he became aware that a second phase of the trial had been put in place (Gray 2006, p. 6).

Therefore, while the lead agencies fulfilled their role in successfully negotiating a framework agreement between the partners, the overall conclusion of the evaluation was that its implementation was poor. Seemingly unaware of the official trial ‘sponsor’ role of the FaCS Secretary, the evaluation reported:

There is no one person to whom the partnership can turn to take such action as may be necessary to keep the trial on track. This is seen as a contributing factor to the way in which the processes envisaged by the SRA have progressively deteriorated over the life of the trial (Gray 2006, p. 10).
This finding was surprising because the performance of each lead-agency Secretary was part of the assessment for their annual performance bonus for 2004-05, which could have been 0, 10 or 15 per cent following the decision of the Prime Minister (Gray and Sanders 2006, p. 16). Despite several attempts for this research, the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet was not prepared to release information regarding the awarding of Secretary performance-based bonuses for 2004-05.

**FUNCTIONALITY – POOR**

**Framework agreement**

A framework agreement for the NT trial was signed on 21 March 2003 in Wadeye, four months after it was first announced. There were three partners to the agreement, the Commonwealth and Northern Territory Governments, and the Thamarrurr Community Government Council (Vanstone et al 2003). At the public launch, Senator Amanda Vanstone, Commonwealth Minister for Family and Community Services, the Chief Minister of the Northern Territory Claire Martin and seventy-two local Aboriginal people on behalf of the Thamarrurr Community Government Council, signed the agreement. At the signing, Minister Vanstone said:

> Signing this agreement is a big step forward in providing better services to remote communities... It will vastly improve the way that the Commonwealth, Territory and Thamarrurr work together in the Wadeye community. Clearly, this is a new way of working together to provide services (as quoted in *National Indigenous Times, Issue 77, 2005*).

The framework agreement outlined a set of principles, the trial objectives and identified “three key regional priorities” for the conduct of the trial. It established a joint steering committee with membership from representatives of all the partners and a clear statement of its roles and responsibilities. It also established three Priority Working Groups comprised
of Government representatives with responsibility to develop action plans for each of the three agreed priorities. It also contained commitments to:

- Sharing information;
- Establishing a dispute resolution process; and
- Producing a set of baseline data as part of a performance measurement and monitoring system (Vanstone et al 2003).

A rating of satisfactory rating is awarded because the agreement was negotiated in timely fashion and contained most of the important necessary features to drive whole-of-government coordination for the trial. It established structures with some broad operational protocol, notably the multi-government working groups to develop action plans for the three agreed priorities but it did not explicitly acknowledge the aim for a whole-of-government approach.

FUNCTIONALITY – SATISFACTORY

**Joint steering committee**

The framework agreement established two committee mechanisms “by which agreed actions would be developed and monitored” for the NT trial (Gray 2006, p. 4). They were the “Tri-partite Steering Committee” (TSC), which had overall responsibility for the trial, and three “Priority Working Groups” (PWGs), which had respective responsibility for the three agreed priorities: 1) Women and Families; 2) Youth; and 3) Housing and Construction (Gray 2006, p. 4). The operation of both is considered.

**Tri-partite Steering Committee (TSC)**

The framework agreement stipulated there would be twelve members of the “Tri-partite Steering Committee” (TSC) with equal representation from the three partners (Gray 2006, p. 5). The NT Manager of FaCS was the most senior Commonwealth Government
representative and the Executive Director of the Office of Indigenous Policy, Chief Minister’s Department was the NT Government’s most senior representative. The non-Indigenous Chief Executive Officer of the Thamarrurr Regional Council assumed the senior representative role on behalf of the communities. The responsibility of the TSC was to “oversight and manage” the trial and develop an evaluation strategy (ATSI SJC 2004, p. 239).

In the first twelve months, the evaluation reports that the TSC met regularly and “began operating in a way consistent with the intent of the SRA” but then “the operation of the TSC became less effective as a result of a number of factors” (Gray 2006, p. 5). The evaluation found that the TSC did not meet for a period of eight months during 2004-2005 and “as a consequence the trial lacked direction and leadership” (Gray 2006, p. 5). When the TSC was reconvened, the number of people attending the TSC meetings had grown to “as many as 30 people attending, some of whom appeared to be observers only” (Gray 2006, p. 5). The evaluation also found that the Thamarrurr people stopped attending the meetings and gave the example of a meeting held on the 9 December 2005 where there were 27 attendees and none were from the Thamarrurr region (p. 5). The implication is that the TSC became unworkable. The evaluation concluded; “the TSC had lost focus and become largely an information sharing forum” (p. 15).

The evaluation reported complaints by Thamarrurr Council that proposals submitted to the TSC “were often ignored or left unaddressed from one meeting to the next” (p. 6). The Government partners response to these concerns was that the “status” of many of the proposals “was unclear, or outside of the framework of the agreed action plans” (p. 6). No examples were provided to support this response.

The evaluation found that the TSC “became the victim of conflicts of personality resulting in the disengagement of key personnel and agencies, including Aboriginal representatives” (p. 5). The evaluation does not explore how personality conflicts were allowed to derail such a
significant project. The timing suggests that the deterioration of the TSC appears to have commenced around the stage where commitments of funding were required to implement the action plans developed by the Priority Working Groups.

The evaluation also reported that Thamarrurr complained about a high turnover of Commonwealth Government representatives on the TSC, and to a lesser extent by the Northern Territory Government. It found that this interrupted continuity of progress, was the cause of “considerable frustration and irritation…” and “…resulted in further distancing of the Indigenous partners from the process” (p. 6).

**Priority Working Groups (PWGs)**

The framework agreement provided for the establishment of a Priority Working Group (PWG) for each of the trial’s three agreed priorities namely, Women and Families; Youth; and Housing and Construction. The PWGs comprised of representatives from each of the three partners and were established within six months of the signing of the framework agreement (Gray 2006, p. 8).

The PWGs were assigned responsibility to develop an action plan for each priority including “agreed performance indicators, benchmarks and baseline data” (Vanstone et al 2003, p. 56). The action plans were to be submitted to the Tri-Partite Steering Committee for endorsement and then attached as a schedule to become part of the Agreement (Gray 2006, p. 5).

The evaluation found that two action plans had been developed and submitted to the TSC within four months of signing the framework agreement. They were for the priorities of ‘Women and Families’ and the ‘Housing and Construction’. However, the evaluation found that an action plan for the ‘Youth’ priority was never developed (p. 8). The evaluation found that the Youth PWG “had not functioned since 2003”. The evaluation concluded that it “had been allowed to fall between the cracks” and provided the following reason (p. 8):
...it is clear agreement was never reached within the partnership, either within the TSC or the PWG, as to what activities should be developed (pp. 7-8).

The evaluation also found that the Women and Families PWG had not functioned since “approximately 2004” (Gray 2006, p. 7). It also noted that no action plans endorsed by the TSC had been formally attached as a schedule to the framework agreement as originally agreed (p. 8).

There is no evidence in the evaluation that formal delegations of power were granted to the government officials represented on the TSC to develop a suite of specifically designed projects to meet the prioritised local needs. The evaluation made a number of other findings that illustrate the failure of the trial’s joint steering committee to drive a whole-of-government approach including:

- That there was an absence of flexible funding;
- Departmentalism and programme silos continued to dominate;
- Funding applications and Government responses were often ad hoc and outside the framework of the COAG trial;
- The burden of administration for Thamarrurr was now greater than before the trial began with 90+ funding agreements; and
- There was a need for leadership as no one could identify who was in charge (Gray 2006, pp. 15-16).

Two action plans were developed but there is no evidence that they were formally endorsed, funded and implemented by the joint steering committee. Nevertheless, a satisfactory rating has been deemed. Detailed attention was paid to establishing joint steering committee processes with shared decision-making responsibilities that were focused on the three agreed key regional priorities. There also appears to be a body of work
that emanated from these processes but barriers were met when final endorsement and joint-government funding were required.

**FUNCTIONALITY – SATISFACTORY**

*Implementation plan*

There is no evidence in the evaluation report that an overall implementation plan was developed by the TSC for the NT trial. However, the evaluation found that action plans were developed for the priorities of Women and Families, and Housing and Construction, but an action plan was not developed for the Youth priority (Gray 2006, p. 7). Relevant to the quality of the two action plans that were developed, the evaluation found:

- That there was confusion as to the current priorities and different interpretations of the key actions needed to address priorities;
- That there was an absence of flexible funding;
- Departmentalism and programme silos continued to dominate;
- Funding applications and Government responses were often ad hoc and outside the framework of the COAG trial; and
- There was a lack of focus on achievable deliverables (Gray 2006, p. 15).

**FUNCTIONALITY – POOR**

*Mapping and developing whole-of-government funding arrangements*

There is no evidence in the evaluation report that there was an attempt by the lead agencies to determine the whole-of-government expenditure (Commonwealth and Northern Territory Government) in the NT trial region over the duration of the trial. The evaluation makes no finding as to the absence of this data or its necessity as a basis for implementing a whole-of-government approach for the trial.
However, there was a study commissioned by the partners of the NT trial “to estimate the cost to the Australian community of the socioeconomic conditions prevailing at Thamarrurr” (Taylor and Stanley 2005, p. 63). Surprisingly, the evaluation does not refer to this study. John Taylor and Owen Stanley from the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research at the Australian National University undertook the research. They argue that the research method they applied was consistent with supporting a whole-of-government approach:

The opportunity cost method puts emphasis on the need to create improvements in the socioeconomic status of the community rather than on actions by particular departments or actions under specific programs.

... This approach requires policy makers to examine the fundamental issues rather than the more narrow confines of departmental responsibility. In this way, greater improvements in the communities may ensue. This approach is also consistent with COAG’s aims (Taylor and Stanley 2005, p. 11).

They found the government expenditure pattern in the trial region may perpetuate Indigenous disadvantage:

What emerges is a structural imbalance in funding at Thamarrurr, with lower than average expenditure on positive aspects of public policy designed to build capacity and increase output, such as education and employment creation, and higher than average spending on negative areas such criminal justice and unemployment benefit. This begs a very important question as to whether this situation serves to perpetuate the very socioeconomic conditions observed at Thamarrurr in the first place (Taylor and Stanley 2005, p. vii).

Their economic analysis highlighted the policy challenge:

The policy challenge here is to reverse the current pattern of overspending on negative areas of expenditure and underspending on positive areas to create a situation of investment in human and physical capital substantially beyond existing levels (Taylor and Stanley 2005, p. 64).
There is no evidence that the content of this analysis was employed to form the basis of a strategy for the trial. Notably, it was published in July 2005 when the NT trial was already well-underway.

Finally, it is noteworthy that there was significant government expenditure in the trial region over the duration of the trial that could have attempted the policy challenge issued by Taylor and Stanley. For example, in October 2006, the Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs reported total Australian Government expenditure in the trial region over the three financial years from 2003-2006 was $50.44 million (Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee 2006a, Additional Information Received Vol. 1 - Wadeye Facts and Figures tabled in October 2006, p. 26). Note the $50.44 million does not include expenditure by the Northern Territory Government but the amount serves to indicate substantial expenditure in the trial region that could have been the subject of a comprehensive strategic plan. The commissioning of the Taylor and Stanley economic analysis was a good start however the evaluation provides no evidence of any attempt by the lead agencies to apply the knowledge to a holistic expenditure arrangement.

FUNCTIONALITY – POOR

Protocols and dispute resolution

The framework agreement provides a set of guiding principles for the development of specific protocols, which would enable the Tri-partite Steering Committee to fulfil the aims of the COAG Trials Project. The framework agreement also provides for a specific protocol. Essentially, three Priority Working Groups (PWGs) were to be established, one for each of the three agreed priority areas, with responsibility to develop an action plan including “agreed performance indicators, benchmarks and baseline data” (Vanstone et al 2003, p. 56). The action plans were to be submitted to the Tri-Partite Steering Committee for endorsement and then attached as a schedule to become part of the Agreement (Gray
The evaluation indicates that the PWGs were established and there was some implementation according to the protocol described by the framework agreement.

The framework agreement provided for a commitment to develop a dispute resolution process for the trial (Vanstone et al. 2003, p. 3). It stated:

**DISPUTE SETTLING ARRANGEMENTS**

As part of this agreement the Governments will agree on a simple process for settling any disagreements/disputes or misunderstandings that may arise. The agreed dispute settling mechanism once developed and agreed on will be attached at a later date (Vanstone et al. 2003, p. 3).

There is no indication in the evaluation that a dispute resolution process was specifically designed for the governance of the NT trial. The evaluation found there were significant problems that may have benefited from a dispute resolution process. For example, it stated:

Lines of authority and allocation of responsibilities within the Commonwealth lead Department, FaCSIA, have caused confusion and uncertainty between its national office, the NT office and the ICC field officers. It also caused uncertainty both within Commonwealth and NT agencies as to where the trial was being coordinated or run from within the Department. These are matters which have been acknowledged by FaCSIA and were addressed at the roundtable held in Darwin on 19 April, 2006 (Gray 2006, p. 10).

A rating of poor is deemed because while a specific protocol was developed for the trial, the evidence in the evaluation suggests there was minimal functionality and it was insufficient for the purposes of the trial. The evidence is:

1. The protocol for the PWGs resulted in the development of only two out of three draft action plans, and none were attached as a schedule to the framework agreement;
2. There were no protocols for how the Tri-partite Steering Committee was to develop a whole-of-government approach to funding and implementing the action plans; and
3. A dispute resolution process was not established.

FUNCTIONALITY – POOR

**Realistic timeframes**

The evaluation makes no reference to the setting of timeframes by the lead agencies. The evaluation noted the Action Plans developed by the PWGs were to contain “specific activities, timelines and allocated responsibilities of the partners” (p. 7). It reported that “comprehensive Action Plans” had been developed for two of the three nominated priority areas (p. 8). However, there is no further detail in the evaluation about the content of these Action Plans or how they were implemented. The evaluation further notes that no Action Plans had been attached as a schedule to the framework agreement as had been agreed, which seems to imply that they were not available for scrutiny (p. 8).

FUNCTIONALITY – POOR

**Risk assessment**

The evaluation makes no reference to any risk assessment being undertaken by the lead agencies in relation to the implementation of the NT trial. It is evident that the production and funding of the three Action Plans may have benefited from such an assessment, particularly for the Youth priority, which was never developed (p. 8).

FUNCTIONALITY – POOR

**Trust and collaboration between the agencies**

This discussion appraises whether a climate of trust and collaboration of a kind necessary to support a whole-of-government approach was systematically promoted as a key characteristic of all trial’s interactions. The signing of a formal agreement between the two Government jurisdictions (and the Indigenous people of the trial region) is a strong indication of an early intention for a collaborative whole-of-government approach to
implementing the NT trial. The establishment of the Tri-partite Steering Committee with equal representation of each partner reinforces this view, as well as the multi-partner representation on the Priority Working Groups. Much of the language and stated principles in the formal agreement also illustrate the early intent for strategic collaboration between the Governments. The evaluation found the early intent was not sustained for the duration of the trial:

As the trial has developed, however, there has been a reduction in effective communication across jurisdictional boundaries and in some cases within Departments. The causes may be many and varied but suffice to say that as communications began to break down so did the ability of the partners to maintain their combined focus on agreed priorities and to engage proactively and productively across jurisdictional lines on the many issues that flowed from the broad priority areas (Gray 2006, p. 10).

However, other than this there is no evidence in the evaluation of how the lead agencies sought to nurture and sustain a climate of trust and collaboration within the partnership. The word ‘trust’ does not appear in the evaluation report, which is indicative of a lack of attention to sustaining trustful relationships in the trial’s implementation. The evaluation found the poor communication between and within the two Governments impacted on productivity.

FUNCTIONALITY – POOR

Skills training

There is no evidence in the evaluation report that any government officials involved with the NT trial underwent training on how to implement a whole-of-government approach.

FUNCTIONALITY – POOR
**Performance monitoring**

There is no evidence in the evaluation that a performance monitoring system was established to gauge the progress of implementation of the NT trial.

FUNCTIONALITY – POOR

**Baseline data**

The trial partners commissioned John Taylor from the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, Australian National University to develop a baseline profile of the economic and social conditions of the Thamarrurr regional population. Taylor presented the study to the trial partners in June 2004.

There is no evidence in the evaluation that the baseline data from the Taylor report was employed as a basis for performance monitoring and evaluation of the trial. The evaluation states that data “was not regularly collated or presented on an ongoing basis by those departments and agencies” (Gray 2006, p. 17). Further, the evaluation recommended that the baseline data from the Taylor be employed as “a valid basis for comparison” as part of the proposed second stage evaluation of the trial scheduled to occur in 2008 (Gray 2006, p. 17).

Therefore, it is acknowledged that a set of baseline data was sought and produced for the NT trial, albeit in the fourth year of the trial, but there is no evidence that it was employed for monitoring progress or evaluation.

FUNCTIONALITY – POOR
Summary of analysis of whole-of-government coordination

The Northern Territory trial’s progress towards whole-of-government coordination is given a satisfactory rating for two key characteristics and poor ratings for the remaining ten (see Table 11).

Table 11: Ratings for the key characteristics of whole-of-government coordination, Northern Territory COAG trial

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>KEY CHARACTERISTIC</th>
<th>RATING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lead agencies</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Framework agreement</td>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joint steering committee</td>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implementation plan</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mapping whole-of-government expenditure</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protocols and dispute resolution process</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Realistic timeframes</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Risk assessment</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust and collaboration</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skills Training</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance Monitoring</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baseline data</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There is corroboration for the conclusions of this analysis in the government-commissioned evaluation. Generally, the evaluation found the trial’s framework agreement had provided the foundation for a whole-of-government approach, which was to some extent effective for the first year of the trial but then there was significant deterioration. More specifically, the evaluation report dedicated a section to discussing the “whole-of-government approach” (Gray 2006, pp. 9-11). The section has five subheadings, which appear to
represent five key features that the evaluator associated with a whole-of-government approach namely;

- Streamlining,
- Flexible funding,
- Cooperation and Coordination,
- Communication, and
- Leadership.

For each of the five features, Table 12 below reproduces relevant extracts from the evaluation report to reflect the evaluation’s findings. Table 12 illustrates that the evaluation found significant failures in each of the five key features he analysed. The evaluation was subtle in its conclusion about the trial’s failure to implement a whole-of-government coordination approach. It states:

The new arrangements in Indigenous affairs have been described by Dr Peter Shergold, the Secretary of the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet as “a bold experiment in implementing a whole-of-government approach to policy development and delivery” and as “the biggest test of whether the rhetoric of connectivity can be marshalled into effective action.” The Wadeye trial has already provided some insight as to the challenges faced by those ‘on the ground’ who seek to translate the rhetoric of connectivity into practical action (Gray 2006, p. 9).

It corroborates the conclusion of this analysis that a ‘whole-of-government approach’ was not achieved in the NT trial.
### Table 12: Gray's findings against the five features of whole-of-government, Northern Territory COAG trial

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gray’s features of whole-of-government</th>
<th>Gray’s Findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Streamlining</td>
<td>“there has been an increase in complexity for Thamarrurr, with a greater administrative burden than before” (p. 9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Thamarrurr was administering around 60+ government funding agreements prior to the trial commencing, it now administers more than 90” (p. 9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexible funding</td>
<td>“One of the issues that arose in discussion with all partners was the inability to obtain access to flexible funding” (p. 9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooperation and Coordination</td>
<td>“Lines of authority and allocation of responsibilities within the Commonwealth lead Department, FaCSIA, have caused confusion and uncertainty between its national office, the NT office and the ICC field officers. It also caused uncertainty both within Commonwealth and NT agencies as to where the trial was being coordinated or run from within the Department.” (p. 10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“There are indications that the … Governments have moved to develop a more coordinated and cooperative approach in developing their responses to identified needs” (p. 9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>“...the most consistent and direct communications were experienced at the beginning of the trial. As the trial has developed, however, there has been a reduction in effective communication across jurisdictional boundaries and in some cases within Departments” (p. 10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“as communications began to break down so did the ability of the partners to maintain their combined focus on agreed priorities and to engage pro-actively and productively across jurisdictional lines” (p. 10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>“One of the more common questions asked by all the partners was ‘who is in charge?’” (p. 10)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Part B. Quality of the government-community partnership

This Part appraises how the aim for a government-community partnership was approached in the Northern Territory COAG trial. The appraisal considers what occurred in the trial against twelve key characteristics of such an approach, which were drawn-up earlier in this chapter.

*The right partners*

This research concludes that the right partners were involved in the conduct of the NT trial. The lead Commonwealth agency FaCS was well-placed within the national leadership framework of the overall COAG Trials Project. The Northern Territory Chief Minister’s Office was centrally-placed to coordinate the actions of the NT Government agencies.

The Thamarrurr Regional Council was the appointed representative institution for the Indigenous people of the region. It appeared to exemplify the “cultural match” principle for good governance, whereby the institution is structured and operates in accordance with cultural dimensions of the population it represents (Cornell and Kalt 2003, p. 201). The broad role of the Thamarrurr Council was to facilitate discussions between the various clans and between the clans and the wider Australian society. *Thamarrurr* was a traditional governance concept. The Thamarrurr Councillors described it in this way:

> Thamarrurr is the cornerstone of our society. It is our way of working together, cooperating with each other, and it is also the basis of our governance system. In the early days we looked after our families, our clans and our people through Thamarrurr. We arranged ceremonies, marriages, sorted out tribal disputes and many other things. We were people living as a nation. People living our own life (Thamarrurr Regional Councillors 2004 as quoted in Taylor 2004, p. v).

Only two days before signing the NT trial’s framework agreement, the Thamarrurr Council was gazetted as the Thamarrurr Community Government Council under the Local Government Act 1978 (NT). The transformation from a ancient culturally-based system of
inter-clan governance for the 2,500 people of the region into a NT local government council became effective on the 21 March 2003, the same day the framework agreement for the NT trial was signed. Then Minister for Community Development, Sport and Cultural Affairs, Mr John Ah Kit appointed the forty-member council on the 7 August 2003 (Ivory 2005a, p. 4). The transformation into a gazetted local government council and simultaneously propelled into the complexities of the COAG Trials Project was a baptism of fire and was a further complicating factor in the successful implementation of the Agreement. The evaluation found:

Thamarrurr is of the view that it seriously underestimated the amount of work and the ongoing commitment involved in having the trial at Wadeye (Gray 2006, p. 11).

In 2005, Bill Ivory, a researcher and then PhD candidate, prepared a paper for an interagency research project on Indigenous governance, which describe the balances for the communities’ decision to participate in the trial:

The pressure on the Thamarrurr structure to perform has been enormous. If the COAG agreement was not in place, there might be a more natural evolution of governance arrangements. However, on the other hand the goals that people desire may have occurred much more slowly (Ivory 2005a, p. 6).

It is suggested that it may have been beneficial to the trial had the ATSIC Jabiru Regional Council been a formal partner. Its broader experiences, resources, corporate knowledge and national presence may have been of assistance and an intervening accountability mechanism for the people of the region, and the Australian taxpayers.

FUNCTIONALITY – SATISFACTORY
**Partnership agreement**

A formal partnership agreement was successfully negotiated between the Governments and Indigenous representatives for the conduct of the NT COAG trial. The successful negotiation of the agreement occurred relatively quickly leaving more time for implementation. Its form and content reflect many of the best practice features of type of partnership COAG originally intended. It is clear from its description of the key principles, objectives, regional priorities and broad protocols that it was aimed at setting up a partnership of shared power between the partners for the conduct of the trial, therefore it was deemed a good rating.

**FUNCTIONALITY – GOOD**

**Joint steering committee**

The framework agreement provided for the establishment of a joint steering committee comprised of senior representatives of the Indigenous and Government partners with overall responsibility for the conduct of the NT trial, known as the Tri-partite Steering Committee (Vanstone et al 2003, p.2). However, the following list of findings presented in the evaluation report is indicative of the poor functioning of the TSC and the three PWG’s as the responsible mechanisms for a partnership of shared responsibility:

- That the SRA mechanisms and processes were not being implemented effectively;
- That the TSC had lost focus and become largely an information sharing forum;
- That the PWGs were not operating as intended under the SRA;
- That there was confusion as to the current priorities and different interpretations of the key actions needed to address priorities;
- There was a loss of confidence at Wadeye in the COAG process;
There was a lack of communication both vertically and horizontally within and across government jurisdictions;

There was some confusion within the partnership as to the roles and responsibilities of some FaCSIA participants in the trial; and

There was a need for leadership as no one could identify who was in charge (Gray 2006, pp. 15-16).

**FUNCTIONALITY – POOR**

**Steering committee authority, vertically and horizontally**

The essential issue under consideration is whether the members of the joint steering committee, individually and collectively, had the authority to negotiate, and design and implement the products of its negotiations. The required authority has vertical and horizontal dimensions.

The framework agreement does not stipulate the authority of the Tri-partite Steering Committee. It simply states the members of the Tri-partite Steering Committee involved representatives from each of the three partners (Vanstone et al 2003, p.2). However, the evaluation reports that the Tri-partite Steering Committee was comprised of four members from each of the three partners and indicates a complete list of the members is presented in Attachment B (Gray 2006, p. 5). Unfortunately, Attachment B is not presented with the publicly available version of the evaluation report. The evaluation also reports that:

- The most senior designate for the Commonwealth lead agency was the NT Manager of FaCS;
- The most senior designate for the Northern Territory Government was the Executive Director of the Office of Indigenous Policy in the NT Department of the Chief Minister; and
The most senior designate of the Thamarrurr Regional Council was “the non-indigenous CEO of Thamarrurr was regarded as its senior representative on the TSC” because the Chair of Thamarrurr Regional Council was rotated at each meeting (Gray 2006, p. 5).

The seniority of this leadership suggests the Tri-partite Steering Committee may have had sufficient vertical authority in each jurisdiction but there is no evidence in the evaluation that the two government leaders had specifically-delegated powers to negotiate and agree to implement the community-identified priorities. These delegated powers would require sufficient vertical authority within their own department and sufficient horizontal authority from the other departments in their respective jurisdiction to negotiate with, and allocate, the necessary resources. The lack of delegated authority to the Steering Committee may in part explain the evaluation’s findings that some of the Indigenous partners were seeking to negotiate with agencies beyond the realm of the Tri-partite Steering Committee, which was perceived by some as undermining the framework agreement. The evaluation states:

Thamarrurr personnel began to initiate contact directly with funding agencies at a senior level with a series of initiatives and proposals which were perceived by others in the partnership to change agreed agendas (p. 8).

**FUNCTIONALITY – POOR**

**Respect for the partners’ value frameworks**

The framework agreement outlined a set of principles for the conduct of the trial including:

- Each partner is equal and understands and accepts the role of others;
- The central role of the Thamarrurr Regional Council is recognised and partners understand and accept the differences of cultures; and
- The development of Thamarrurr and the well-being of its people will underpin all actions (Gray 2006, p. 4) (my emphasis).
At the signing of the NT trial framework agreement, Minister Vanstone said:

Wadeye has been chosen because of the great work undertaken by the community to establish Thamarrurr as the legitimate governance body for the region (as quoted in the National Indigenous Times, 3 March 2005).

The Northern Territory Chief Minister Clare Martin also expressed demonstrated an appreciation of the cultural importance of the establishment of Thamarrurr:

...it will blend customary decision making and governance with the principles that guide the western democratic system (Martin 2003 as quoted in Harris 2003).

The evaluation did not make any specific findings in respect of this key characteristic.

FUNCTIONALITY – SATISFACTORY

Trust and collaboration between governments and community

The signing of the framework agreement and its contents illustrates that the NT trial commenced with a foundation to build trust and collaboration but it is evident that by the time the evaluation was being conducted, the foundation has dissipated. For example, respected local elder and TSC member Mrs Theodora Narndu was quoted in a national newspaper article:

"It's time to walk away," Mrs Narndu said. "What did it get us? Nothing."

(Narndu as quoted in Murdoch, The Age, 23 May 2006).

The evaluation does not make any specific findings regarding the quality of trust between the government and community partners in the trial though some findings indicate it was not a genuine partnership. For example, the evaluation found poor communication between the Governments and the Indigenous partners during the trial (p. 10):

...communication and understanding of the COAG trial and its activities to the Indigenous reps (sic) and community members has always been extremely poor. This was identified by the partners at various times and
remains an issue that has not been addressed in any real way (Darwin Urban Indigenous Coordination Centre 2006 as quoted by Gray 2006, p. 7).

It also reported that “personality conflicts within the TSC” had resulted in the breakdown of its functioning for a period of eight months in 2004-05 (Gray 2006, p. 5). There is no evidence in the evaluation that particular attention was paid to nurturing the trust within the partnership.

A rating of satisfactory is awarded because the foundation for trust and collaboration was established and was present in the very early stages of the trial, hence some functioning of the key characteristic.

**FUNCTIONALITY – SATISFACTORY**

**Protocols for shared decision-making power and dispute resolution**

The framework agreement provided for the establishment of the TSC and the three PWG’s, both of which comprised of government and community representatives. It described in broad terms their respective roles and responsibilities but it does not provide for how decisions would be made by each, such as for example, whether decisions would be made by vote or consensus. The framework agreement also provided a commitment to develop a dispute resolution process but this was not implemented. It is evident that sufficient protocols were not developed and implemented.

**FUNCTIONALITY – POOR**

**Shared objectives and shared outcomes**

The framework agreement clearly stated the aims of the trial (Gray 2006. 4) and the three agreed priorities for the trial, which translated into the establishment of three respective PWGs (Gray 2006, p. 4). However, the evaluation found these clear statements in the framework agreement did not result in a ‘meeting of the minds’. It stated:
In hindsight, it is apparent that there were differing expectations held by Thamarrurr and the Commonwealth and NT Government partners (Gray 2006, p. 11).

For example, from the Indigenous perspective, it found that Thamarrurr Regional Council:

...participated believing that the combined and coordinated resources of both governments would result in early and visible improvements in the wellbeing of the people and the infrastructure of the town and surrounding region. These expectations were reinforced by visits by the Prime Minister, The Chief Minister of the NT and other Ministers over the past three years. Their expectations have not been realised and there is frustration and disappointment regarding the lack of visible and tangible outcomes on the ground (Gray 2006, p. 11).

For example, from the Governments’ perspective, it stated:

The Commonwealth and NT Governments, on the other hand, foresaw that considerable preliminary and planning work would be necessary before any major improvements would be seen on the ground. They were also aware of the considerable lead times associated with the budget processes of government. This ‘mismatch’ of expectations goes some way to explain why the perceptions of the partners as to whether ‘progress’ is being made, can differ. What might be regarded as an ‘achievement’ by government personnel living outside the community may not be seen as a tangible improvement by people living at Wadeye (Gray 2006, p. 11).

Despite the overall lack of shared objectives, it is concluded that the framework agreement’s stipulation of three priority areas and the establishment of respective PWGs to develop Action Plans illustrates that there was some functioning of the original commitments to the shared objectives. A key issue appears to be the lack of agreement on what outcomes would be indicative of achievement of the terms of the framework agreement.

FUNCTIONALITY – SATISFACTORY
Role clarity and early detailed planning

The framework agreement made clear statements of the role of the TSC and the PWGs. However, the implementation may have benefited from further detail regarding the specific role of the representatives participating on the TSC and the PWG. For example, it is argued that part of the lead agency role was to negotiate delegated powers from the other agencies in their jurisdiction about the amount of funding and other resources that could be committed to the trial. This should have been stipulated in the framework agreement. It is also argued that there should have been more detail about the role of Thamarrurr Council in informing and involving its constituency in the progress and decisions of the trial.

FUNCTIONALITY – SATISFACTORY

Sustained operation and membership of steering committee

It has been demonstrated earlier that the operation and membership of the TSC, and its PWGs, was sporadic and wavered significantly. It was not sustained over the duration of the trial.

FUNCTIONALITY – POOR

Shared responsibility for whole-of-government expenditure in the trial region

There is no evidence that the TSC had responsibility for whole-of-government expenditure in the trial region.

FUNCTIONALITY – POOR

Full access to information

Refer to earlier evidence about communication between the partners and the confusion regarding the so-called Phase 2 of the trial.

FUNCTIONALITY – POOR
Summary of findings of government-community partnerships

The Northern Territory trial’s progress towards a government-community partnership is given a good rating for one key characteristic, satisfactory ratings for five key characteristics and poor ratings for the remaining six (see Table 13).

Table 13: Ratings for the key characteristics of government-community partnership, Northern Territory COAG trial

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>KEY CHARACTERISTIC</th>
<th>RATING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Right partners</td>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partnership agreement</td>
<td>Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joint steering committee</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steering committee authority</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respect for partners’ values</td>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust and collaboration</td>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protocols for shared power</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared objectives and shared outcomes</td>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role clarity and early planning</td>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sustained operation and membership</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared responsibility for expenditure</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full access to information</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The evaluation report demonstrates that the framework agreement had provided a foundation for an effective government-community partnership however, it started to deteriorate shortly after commencement. For example, the framework agreement was signed in March 2003 but the evaluation reports that the Youth PWG “had not functioned since 2003” (Gray 2006, p. 7). There were serious consequences to the breakdown of this element of the partnership. The evaluation drew a link between the failure to develop a
youth strategy and the eruption of “gang violence” and “rioting” involving up to 400 people in Wadeye in May 2006:

Given the present situation of Wadeye in relation to youth violence and all that flows from it, it has to be a matter of some concern that one of the most critical of the agreed priorities within the SRA was unable to be effectively addressed by the partnership and was allowed to fall by the wayside so early in the process (p. 8).

The evaluation pointed to issues related to the funding of action plans as a source of the deterioration:

Government agencies and personnel initiated or responded to funding proposals that were often ad hoc or motivated by a desire to expend programme funds by the end of a financial year rather than in accord with identified activities within the Action Plans (p. 8).

The evaluation report did not delve into other key features of partnerships such as ‘trust’ and ‘shared decision-making’. Overall, the evidence leads to the conclusion that a partnership-in-form had been established early in the trial through the framework agreement but a partnership-in-substance was not cultivated from the early foundation.
Part C. Quality of social and economic improvements

The evaluation report states that it “concentrated more on process than outcomes” (Gray 2006, p. 17). It also noted the Commonwealth Government’s intention for a second, more comprehensive, evaluation would be conducted in 2007/08 to “analyse in detail the outcomes of the Wadeye trial” (Gray 2006, p. 17). This was in line with the OIPC’s terms for the evaluation. The second evaluation did not eventuate. Despite the evaluation’s qualification that it was not analysing the outcomes or the lack of, from the trial, it does present some. For example:

With regard to housing, the community has seen 4 houses for Indigenous occupants built over a period of three years. During that same period some 15 houses were made uninhabitable for periods of up to three months through gang violence and an additional 200 babies were born into the community. In these circumstances, there is little prospect of the chronic overcrowding being reduced in the foreseeable future despite the efforts being made under the COAG trial (Gray 2006, p. 12).

The evaluation found that while expectations were high early in the trial, they gave way to “frustration and disappointment regarding the lack of visible and tangible outcomes on the ground” (Gray 2006, p. 11).

It [Thamarrurr Regional Council] also participated believing that the combined and coordinated resources of both governments would result in early and visible improvements in the wellbeing of the people and the infrastructure of the town and surrounding region. These expectations were reinforced by visits by the Prime Minister, The Chief Minister of the NT and other Ministers over the past three years (Gray 2006, p. 11).

Gray suggested that perhaps the community expectations were too high. He stated:

The Commonwealth and NT Governments, on the other hand, foresaw that considerable preliminary and planning work would be necessary before any major improvements would be seen on the ground. They were also aware
of the considerable lead times associated with the budget processes of government (Gray 2006, p. 11).

However, he concluded:

There are, however, areas about which the Thamarrurr Regional Council have very real expectations for early improvement but which they feel have yet to be appropriately addressed by the partnership (Gray 2006, p. 11).

**Conclusion – Northern Territory**

In relation to the achievement of a whole-of-government coordination, there is a satisfactory rating for one key characteristic and a poor rating for the remaining eleven. In relation to the achievement of a government-community partnership, this appraisal deemed a poor rating for all twelve key characteristics. There is no evidence of socioeconomic improvements attributed to the trial.

Indicatively, in October 2006, the lead agency FaCSIA reported total Australian Government expenditure in the trial region over the three financial years from 2003-2006 was $50.44 million (Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee 2006a, p. 26).

The trial’s successfully negotiated framework agreement provided the foundation for both aims to be realised but issues of funding appear to have interrupted the progression from form to substance. This may be indicative of the rigidity of traditional budgeting norms and the silos of departmentalism. The relatively high score for government-community partnership may be a reflection of the early negotiating power of the community.
South Australia

Part A. Quality of whole-of-government coordination

This Part appraises how the aim for whole-of-government coordination was pursued in the South Australian COAG trial. The appraisal considers what occurred in the trial against twelve key characteristics of such an approach, which were drawn-up earlier in this chapter.

Lead agencies

The Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing (DoHA) and the South Australian Department for Aboriginal Affairs and Reconciliation (DAARe) were appointed as the lead agencies for the South Australian trial. DoHA established an internal COAG team with the appointment of a Project Officer in Adelaide in March 2003 (Urbis Keys Young 2006a, p. 4) with “support” in Canberra (Bulis and Stehlik 2006, p. 3). There is no evidence in the evaluation report that DAARe had assigned new resources to fulfil its role in the trial.

Approximately one year later, these arrangements were changed. The South Australian Department of Premier and Cabinet (DPC-SA) replaced DAARe in March 2004. Further, on 1 July 2004, the newly established Commonwealth Office of Indigenous Policy Coordination (OIPC) assumed legislative responsibilities for whole-of-government coordination in Indigenous affairs (1 July 2004). DoHA retained its lead agency status for the South Australian trial but there was some duplication of responsibilities with the new OIPC. The evaluation report does not present the reasons for the change in South Australian lead agency status. However, it reports that government officials interviewed for the evaluation believed the changes had resulted in a closer working relationship between the Commonwealth and State Governments:

It is reported that since DPC’s becoming responsible for improved coordination of services in the Lands and the establishment of OIPC, these two agencies have worked closely together on developing whole of
government approaches to issues affecting the APY Lands in particular (Urbis Keys Young 2006d, p. 12).

There is no evidence in the evaluation report demonstrating that the changes translated into better social and economic outcomes for the Indigenous population. Rather, the evaluation found there was confusion about the duplicated roles of DoHA and OIPC and it was affecting the trial’s whole-of-government approach and its partnership approach:

Issues around the relationship between the OIPC and the lead Australian Government agencies for the COAG Trials are of course not unique to the APY Lands. Over coming months there will possibly need to be a wider review of OIPC/lead agency relationships, to clarify roles and responsibilities and to ensure the most effective possible Australian Government contribution to improved services and more effective partnerships (Urbis Keys Young 2006d, p. 12).

In turn, DoHA turned its focus to progressing two significant projects for the AP Lands. It concentrated on securing funding and implementing the pre-existing Mai Wiru Regional Stores Policy and assisting with the development of rural transactions centres in several communities in the AP Lands. Both projects required multi-agency involvement but neither was so comprehensive in nature that they could be classed as a ‘whole-of-government coordination’ approach for the AP Lands. The overall effect was the South Australian trial strayed away from COAG’s aim for a whole-of-government approach to the AP Lands, and instead focused on progressing two specific projects. Perhaps, driving a whole-of-government approach for the trial region was just too hard for DoHA, even within the authority of the COAG Trials Project.

Regional Services Coordinator
Towards the latter part of the South Australian trial, in July 2005, the South Australian Government engaged consultants John Thurtell and Bob Smilie to “undertake a preliminary assessment of what was required to improve program and service delivery in the (APY)
Lands” (Urbis Keys Young 2006d, p. 7). Amongst other things, they recommended “the recruitment of a suitably qualified person to act as a Regional Service Coordinator for the APY Lands” (Urbis Keys Young 2006d, p. 7).

Shortly after, one of the consultants, John Thurtell, was recruited to the position of Regional Services Coordinator for the AP Lands. The South Australian Government and OIPC funded this position (Urbis Keys Young 2006d, p. 12). Perhaps surprisingly, the Commonwealth lead agency for the South Australian trial, DoHA, was not involved. According to the evaluation, this position reported “to DPC, OIPC and the TKP” (Urbis Keys Young 2006d, p. i). The Coordinator’s responsibilities included:

- Improve the design, implementation and monitoring of programs and services in the APY Lands;
- Ensure collaboration and partnership between Government and non-Government agencies;
- Identify gaps and duplications in programs and services;
- Broker increased and more effective communication between Anangu and Government (Work Plan 2005-2006 as quoted in Urbis Keys Young 2006d, p. 12).

The responsibilities of the Regional Services Coordinator for the AP Lands were strikingly similar in intent to the original objectives of the COAG Trials Project, and therefore may be regarded as a substitute mechanism for the failures of the lead agency-driven model of government coordination for the AP Lands.

While lead agencies were appointed, there is little evidence that they functioned according to the expectations of the role.

FUNCTIONALITY – POOR
**Framework agreement**

A framework agreement for the South Australian trial was not successfully negotiated (Urbis Keys Young 2006d, p. ii). According to the DOHA *Annual Report 2004-05*, there were significant attempts. The negotiations had started several months prior to the joint media announcement of the South Australian trial (which occurred in May 2003) and were continuing throughout 2005 (DoHA 2005, p. 177).

The evaluation found a draft agreement for the trial, described as a “tripartite Shared Responsibility Agreement (SRA)” was prepared by the lead agency DoHA shortly after the first steering committee meeting held in February 2003 (Urbis Keys Young 2006d, p. 14). The draft SRA set out a framework for the conduct of the South Australian trial and identified five key areas for action: improved health and well-being; education and training; provision of government and financial services; improved infrastructure; and improved governance (Urbis Keys Young 2006d, pp. 4-5). The draft Agreement was “circulated in April 2003” (Urbis Keys Young 2006d, pp. 4-5).

DoHA signed the draft Agreement in December 2003 (Urbis Keys Young 2006d, p. 5) and the South Australian Government signed it in March 2004 (Urbis Keys Young 2006d, p. 6). The Indigenous communities never signed the draft SRA (Urbis Keys Young 2006d, p. 6). The evaluation report does not explore why the Indigenous representatives did not sign the draft Agreement, or why there was a four-month delay between the signing by the South Australian and Commonwealth Governments. The DoHA *Annual Report 2004-05* claimed the reason why the Indigenous people had not signed the draft Agreement for the two previous years was because there was no body to sign it:

> The SRA for the APY Lands neared completion in 2004-05 following delays over the last two years. There have been significant changes in the governance arrangements on the APY Lands during 2004-05, resulting in the
lack of a representative community body with whom to sign the Agreement (DoHA 2005, p. 177).

DoHA senior official Helen Bulis, who was based in Adelaide and appears to have had project responsibility for the South Australian trial, later claimed that the changes to the wider Indigenous affairs system also contributed to the failure to win the AP Lands signature. Bulis explained that an agreement was not signed “due mainly to many changes in Indigenous affairs in both the federal and state government and political changes on the APY Lands” (Bulis and Stehlik 2006, p. 4). Bulis’ explanation adds to the reasoning in the DoHA annual report by suggesting the Commonwealth Government’s overhaul of Indigenous affairs was a contributing factor. Both explanations are very brief for such a significant failure. For example, neither reflects on the quality of the negotiations that the lead agencies directed. A sticking point may also have been the nature of the content of the draft SRA but despite an evaluation been conducted, the detailed reasons for the failure to win support of the executive of the AP Lands Council are unknown.

It is suggested that the lack of a framework agreement for the South Australian trial had several consequences including insufficient early commitment for a whole-of-government approach and a partnership-style approach, both of which were the key aims of the COAG Project. It is likely that this also affected the capacity of the South Australian trial to realise social and economic improvements for the Indigenous population.

FUNCTIONALITY – POOR

**Joint steering committee**

The joint steering committee arrangements for the South Australian trial were unsettled. The evaluation finds that there were two different joint steering committees for the trial. The APY Lands COAG Steering Committee was established in early 2003 but it stopped
functioning in early 2004. Twelve months later, in February 2005, a new steering committee for the South Australian trial was appointed.

**APY Lands COAG Steering Committee (Early 2003-June 2004)**

In early 2003, DoHA established a steering committee to be directly responsible for the progress of the South Australian trial (ATSI SJC 2003, p. 245). It was known as the “AP Lands COAG Steering Committee” and was comprised of Commonwealth representatives from DoHA, ATSIS and ATSIC and South Australian representation by DAARe (Urbis Keys Young 2006d, p. 5). The AP Land Council’s executive represented the Indigenous people of the trial region. The steering committee’s terms of reference included, “matters concerning collaboration and co-operation; guiding the development of a shared responsibility agreement (SRA) and community priorities” (Bulis and Stehlik 2006, p. 3).

The steering committee met only four times; in Adelaide in February 2003, in Canberra in July 2003, in Alice Springs in September 2003 and finally, as it eventuated, in February 2004 in Alice Springs (Urbis Keys Young 2006d, p. 5). Notably, none of the meetings were held on the AP Lands. About six months after the final steering committee meeting, Jane Halton, Secretary of the trial’s lead agency DoHA met with officials from the South Australian DPC to discuss reconvening the COAG Trial Steering Committee but this was unsuccessful (Urbis Keys Young 2006d, p. 6).

There is limited evidence in the evaluation report about the performance of this steering committee other than the development of the unsigned, draft tripartite Shared Responsibility Agreement. The evaluation does not state why this steering committee ceased or discuss the impact this had on the progress of the South Australian trial, although, it is clear that DoHA had attempted to draw the South Australian Government and the AP Lands representatives back to the table, which suggests a lack of will on their behalf to

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3 A “federal inter-government group in Adelaide” was also established to ensure the Australian government was collaborating and planning together (Bulis and Stehlik 2006, p. 3).
participate. The evaluation reports that Jane Halton, Secretary of DoHA attended all four Steering Committee meetings. It is unfortunate that the evaluation did not explore the reasons why the Secretary failed to bring the other stakeholders back to the table because such knowledge could have been useful for future work of a similar nature.

**Tjungungku Kuranyukuta Palyantjaku Regional Council (TKP) (Feb 2005-Nov 2005)**

The evaluation reports that the AP Lands COAG Steering Committee was later replaced by a combined government/community forum known as the Tjungungku Kuranyukuta Palyantjaku forum (TKP). The TKP was formed following a workshop held in Alice Springs in February 2005 (Urbis Keys Young 2006a, p. 6), one year after the last meeting of the former steering committee. Several, primarily Alice Springs-based community organisations whose responsibility included the Anangu region, initiated the establishment of TKP (Urbis Keys Young 2006a, p. 17).

The community organisations formed what was called the “Anangu Taskforce”, which comprised of AP Services (who were the appointed administrators) of the AP Lands Council, the PY Media Corporation, Nganampa Health Council, NPY Women’s Council, PY Education Committee and Ku Arts (Urbis Keys Young 2006a, p. 6). The Anangu Taskforce was assigned the task of reviewing and signing the tripartite Shared Responsibility Agreement (DoHA 2005, p. 177). Clearly, the signing did not eventuate. The membership of the TKP included Commonwealth and State Government representatives from DoHA, OIPC and DPC.

The evaluation report of the South Australian trial found that the formation of the TKP “inaugurated a period of more effective government/community/service provider relationships”, though these were preliminary observations because it also noted “the TKP’s role and mode of operation are still evolving” (p. 7). It stated that draft terms of reference had been drawn up for the TKP but there was no mention of “the role of the TKP in relation
to the COAG trial” (p. 7). This suggests that it was loosely linked to the COAG trial. DoHA was assigned the responsibility of identifying funding sources for secretariat support, payment of a meeting facilitator, and expenses including travel and accommodation (Urbis Keys Young 2006d, p. 7). The evaluation reports that the TKP met five times in 2005 and that Jane Halton, Secretary of DoHA attended all five meetings (Urbis Keys Young 2006d, p. 16).

A rating (at the lower end) of satisfactory is deemed because there were significant attempts by the lead agency DoHA to bring numerous government agencies together for the COAG trial. Based on the evidence in the evaluation report, neither could be regarded as a whole-of-government approach but they tried.

FUNCTIONALITY – SATISFACTORY

Implementation plan

There is no evidence in the evaluation that demonstrates an implementation plan was developed for the conduct of the overall South Australian COAG trial. There is however, evidence that suggests the trial may have benefited from the development of an implementation plan. It states:

Among the people consulted in the course of this study there was a common perception that progress on COAG Trial initiatives in the APY Lands had been slower than they would have wished. It was acknowledged, however, that implementation of the trial has faced significant barriers, including the size and remoteness and the Lands and the number of separate communities and homelands involved, the extent of social and economic problems and disadvantage in the Lands, problems arising from a recent period of instability and controversy affecting the AP Land Council, significant changes in the management of Indigenous affairs at both State and Commonwealth level (e.g. the abolition of ATSIC and ATSIS), and problems and uncertainties relating to the funding of COAG projects (Urbis Keys Young 2006d, p. 18).
While an implementation plan had not been developed for the South Australian COAG trial, the evaluation reports that the South Australian Government’s AP Lands Taskforce, which assumed responsibility from APLIIC and on which there was limited Commonwealth representation, had developed a strategic plan and had provided $25 million over four years for its implementation (Urbis Keys Young 2006d, p. 6). Clearly, this was not under the rubric of the South Australian COAG trial. The evaluation also reports that a “Strategic Implementation Plan” had been developed for the Mai Wiru Regional Stores Policy in January 2005 but this cannot be regarded as a substitute for a detailed implementation plan for the overall South Australian trial.

FUNCTIONALITY – POOR

**Mapping and developing whole-of-government funding arrangements**

There is no evidence in the evaluation that the lead agencies had drawn up an overall picture of whole-of-government expenditure in the AP Lands for the duration of the trial. Interestingly, evidence from another source reveals that another Commonwealth agency, the Department of Family and Community Services (FaCS), had undertaken an expenditure analysis in the AP Lands just prior to the COAG trial commencing (Department of Family and Community Services 2002 as cited in Select Committee on the Pitjantjatjara Land Rights 2004, p. 62). The FaCS analysis showed that the total annual government expenditure in the region was substantial and, it is suggested, was ripe for some strategic whole-of-government coordination.

Published in March 2002, the FaCS research estimated total Commonwealth and State Government expenditure in the AP Lands to be $59.4 million for the financial year 2001-2002 (Department of Family and Community Services 2002 as cited in Select Committee on

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the Pitjantjatjara Land Rights 2004, p. 62). ATSIC officials told a South Australian Select Committee inquiry that Anangu Pitjantjatjara controlled less than $1 million of that allocation. The Select Committee noted:

Indeed, Anangu witnesses expressed dismay and surprise at the possibility that such a substantial amount of money was allocated to the AP Lands (Select Committee on the Pitjantjatjara Land Rights 2004, p. 62).

This evidence reiterates the COAG trial imperative for a whole-of-government approach and a government-community partnership in the planning and implementation of such expenditure. There is no evidence that DoHA was even aware of the expenditure analysis for the AP Lands undertaken by FaCS. Indeed, it is a wonder why the Department of Family and Community Services was not selected as the lead agency for the South Australian trial in light of their prior strategic attention to the AP Lands evidenced by the expenditure analysis.

This research was only able to identify limited information about actual government expenditure in the AP Lands directly related to the South Australian COAG trial. The identified funding over the period of the trial totalled $17.71 million and is reflected in the following five items.

1. In July 2003, the South Australian Government allocated $12 million over four years as part of its response to the findings of the coronial inquest into the deaths of three young Anangu men (Senate Legal and Constitutional References Committee 2003, Reconciliation: Off track, Parliament of Australia, p. 65).

2. In June 2004, the Commonwealth DoHA reported that it had allocated as $1.239 million in June 2004 for the implementation of the Mai Wiru Regional Stores Policy (DoHA 2004, p. 204). The Regional Stores Policy was found by the evaluation of the South Australian trial to be one of three “main aspects of the COAG trial” (Urbis Keys Young 2006d, p. i).
3. In August 2004, the Commonwealth Department of Transport and Regional Services (DoTaRS) announced funding of $2.23 million for a project to establish several rural transaction centres on the AP Lands (known as the PY Ku project) and a further $1.82 million was approved in September 2005 (Urbis Keys Young 2006d, p. 10). The evaluation of the South Australian trial found the PY Ku project was to be one of three “main aspects of the COAG trial” (Urbis Keys Young 2006d, p. i).

4. The secretariat of COAG Trials Project the ICCT provided two funding instalments to DoHA from the Project’s overall Flexible Funding Pool of $178,206 in 2003-04 and a further $122,206 in 2004-05 towards the establishment of several rural transactions centres in the AP Lands under the PY Ku project (DoHA 2004, p. 204).

5. DoHA awarded a $120,967 consultancy contract to Peggie Jane Nicholls for “management consulting services in respect of Council of Australian Governments AP Lands Trial site” (DoHA 2004, p. 463) because the “specialist technical and local knowledge” was not available within Department (DoHA 2004, p. 476).

There is no evidence that this $17.1 million of government expenditure was subject to an overall strategically coordinated plan for the AP Lands.

FUNCTIONALITY – POOR

Protocols and dispute resolution

There is no evidence in the evaluation that the original steering committee or the subsequent TKP had developed operational decision-making protocols or a dispute resolution process.

FUNCTIONALITY – POOR
Realistic timeframes

There is no evidence in the evaluation that timeframes were developed for the progress of the overall South Australian trial. However, the evaluation reports that timelines were established for the two projects that DOHA subsequently pursued in its role as lead agency for the South Australian trial. It was intended the proposed final evaluation would review these timelines but the final evaluation did not eventuate (Urbis Keys Young 2006d, p. ii).

FUNCTIONALITY – POOR

Risk assessment

The evaluation does not refer to any risk assessment being undertaken by the lead agencies in relation to the implementation of the South Australian trial.

FUNCTIONALITY – POOR

Trust and collaboration between the agencies

This discussion appraises whether a climate of trust and collaboration of a kind necessary to support a whole-of-government approach was systematically promoted as a key characteristic of all trial’s interactions. There is no evidence in the evaluation regarding the degree of trust between the Commonwealth and South Australian Governments or between the various agencies within each of the jurisdictions. An electronic search through the evaluation report for the word “trust” produced nil findings. In relation to collaboration, the evaluation found there were:

...important developments in South Australia in mechanisms to promote inter-government and interagency collaboration, in Indigenous services generally and for the APY Lands in particular (Urbis Keys Young 2006d, p. i).

The evaluation lists five examples to demonstrate this collaboration but not one is directly related to the COAG trial (Urbis Keys Young 2006d, p. i). They are mechanisms pursued by the South Australian Government or were driven by the OIPC, which was not a lead agency.
for the COAG trial. The list, as presented in the executive summary of the evaluation report, states:

- The TKP, which serves among other things as a forum for discussion of issues relating to the COAG Trial;
- An Aboriginal Lands Taskforce (with both South Australian and Australian Government representation), which has a strong focus on the Lands and has produced an APY Lands Strategic Plan supported by an additional $25 million in funding from the State Government;
- Regular (4-6 weekly) meeting of the South Australian heads of Australian Government agencies (chaired by OIPC);
- Appointment of a Regional Services Coordinator for the Lands, reporting to DPC, OIPC and the TKP; and
- A strong working relationship between DPC and OIPC, both with a whole government agenda (Urbis Keys Young 2006d, p. i).

It is argued that the presentation of this list of indirectly related examples of collaboration demonstrates that the evaluation found very little collaboration that was a direct result of the South Australian COAG trial. The sentence immediately following the presentation of the list reinforces this argument:

These represent significant ‘new ways of doing business’, though not all are necessarily related to the conduct of the COAG Trial (Urbis Keys Young 2006d, p. i).

FUNCTIONALITY – POOR

Skills training

The only training for COAG stakeholders described in the evaluation report is a two-day workshop that was conducted in Alice Springs in September 2003. The workshop was called “Working together – shared responsibilities agreement” (p. 5) and there is no further detail regarding the content of this training. The name of the workshop suggests that it was
focused on implementing the concept of shared responsibility agreements, which at the
time were almost exclusively focused on ‘single issue’ services or programs. It cannot be
regarded as training in whole-of-government coordination. Therefore, it appears that no
government officials involved with the South Australian trial underwent training on how to
implement a whole-of-government approach.

FUNCTIONALITY – POOR

*Performance monitoring*

There is no evidence in the evaluation that a performance monitoring system was
established to gauge the progress of implementation of the South Australian trial. In this
respect, the evaluation made the following recommendation for the proposed second stage
evaluation:

It would be useful over the next two years, however, if those responsible
for the COAG Trial made specific efforts to identify and document
significant community impacts, whether positive or negative, related to
these two key initiatives. It would also be desirable, in preparation for a
2007-2008 evaluation, for those involved in the Trial to identify and
document specific changes in ‘ways of doing business’ in the Lands – in
particular, examples of improved consultation and co-ordination, the
outcomes that have resulted from these, and the ways in which the COAG
Trial has influenced or contributed to them. *Written records* will become
increasingly important for evaluation purposes as time goes on, because
the passage of time will mean there will be fewer individuals able to recall
and speak accurately about the history and experience of the trial (Urbis
Keys Young 2006d, p. 18).

FUNCTIONALITY – POOR
Baseline data

There is no evidence in the evaluation that a set of baseline data was developed to measure the social and economic outcomes from the South Australian trial. In this respect, the evaluation stated:

The study team understands that there is some pressure for the nomination of specific statistical measures of success – presumably measures such as improvements in school attendance or retention, numbers of people in non-CDEP employment, or a decrease in the incidence of particular diseases. However, given that no overall targets of this kind were originally set in relation to the COAG Trial, it would seem arbitrary to adopt them at this stage (Urbis Keys Young 2006d, p. 18) (my emphasis).

FUNCTIONALITY – POOR
Summary of analysis of whole-of-government coordination

The South Australian trial’s progress towards whole-of-government coordination is given a poor rating for all twelve key characteristics (see Table 14).

Table 14: Ratings for the key characteristics of whole-of-government coordination, South Australian COAG trial

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>KEY CHARACTERISTIC</th>
<th>RATING</th>
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<tr>
<td>Lead agencies</td>
<td>Poor</td>
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<td>Framework agreement</td>
<td>Poor</td>
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<td>Joint steering committee</td>
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<td>Implementation plan</td>
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<td>Mapping whole-of-government expenditure</td>
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<td>Protocols and dispute resolution process</td>
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<td>Realistic timeframes</td>
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<td>Risk assessment</td>
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<td>Trust and collaboration</td>
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<td>Skills Training</td>
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<td>Performance Monitoring</td>
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<td>Baseline data</td>
<td>Poor</td>
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Overall, statements in the evaluation report strongly indicate that a whole-of-government approach was not achieved in the South Australian trial. For example, the report states:

On the evidence of this study it seems that people tend to associate the APY Lands COAG Trial more closely with the Australian than with the South Australian Government, and that the Trial is closely identified with DoHA in particular. While the South Australian Government has been active in the Lands, especially over the past two years, its agencies have tended to work outside the COAG Trial framework. South Australian agencies have been
supportive of Mai Wiru and PY Ku in a number of ways, but these still tend to be seen as DoHA projects (Urbis Keys Young 2006d, pp. 13-14).

The evaluation reported that “some observers” believed the establishment of the OIPC in July 2004 “strengthened” a whole-of-government approach in the trial (Urbis Keys Young 2006d, p. 13). The evaluation also found:

...the SA Government had “strongly emphasised a whole-of-government approach [for its own agencies] but it has not presented this as an aspect of the COAG Trial” (p. 14).

In the context of Indigenous affairs, it is only whole-of-government when all the relevant Commonwealth, State and Local Governments are involved. This analysis points to a complete failure to achieve whole-of-government coordination in the South Australian trial.
Part B. Quality of the government-community partnership

This Part appraises how the aim for a government-community partnership was approached in the South Australian COAG trial. The appraisal considers what occurred in the trial against twelve key characteristics of such an approach, which were drawn-up earlier in this chapter.

The right partners

There was no formal partnership agreement signed for the conduct of the South Australian trial, which prevents a straightforward assessment of this characteristic. This suggests there was inadequate consideration given to the choice of partners for the conduct of the South Australian trial.

Similar to the reasons for the choice of all the lead agencies, it is not stated anywhere why DoHA was selected. An earlier discussion suggests FaCS may have been better informed to fulfil the role. It would appear appropriate that the South Australian DAARe was selected for its experience and capacity in this context. However, the following extracts from the final report of the Select Committee on Pitjantjatjara Land Rights demonstrate the track record of governments in the region was generally poor:

Ms Maggie Kavanagh, then Coordinator, Ngaanyatjara Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Women’s Council (NPYWC), described the “absolute nightmare” NPYWC faces in having to run 16 program areas with 59 separate grants from nine funding sources, most of which come in the form of annual funding.

...

One witness called for an inquiry to be held into the administration of finances coming on to the AP Lands, with a particular focus on the administration of some of the agencies distributing those funds.

...

Other evidence called for the way in which services are delivered to be completely re-envisioned. For example, a report submitted by the South...
Australia Police commented: “What is required is a whole of government response to the problem which restructures education, employment, welfare, housing, health and to a degree, law enforcement.” (Select Committee on Pitjantjatjara Land Rights 2004, pp. 63-64)

This may prompt a deeper question about the suitability of bestowing the government agencies with the responsibility in light of their history of failure to coordinate their services for this region. The Commonwealth and State Governments made the original decision sometime during “2002” to choose the APY Lands as the region for the South Australian COAG trial site. There is no evidence that the Indigenous people of the region were involved in this preliminary decision (Urbis Keys Young 2006d, p. 4).

In relation to the choice of the Aboriginal partners, the first meeting of the APY Lands COAG Steering Committee was convened in February 2003 involving DoHA, DAARe and “leaders of the AP Lands Council” (Urbis Keys Young 2006d, p. 4). The following month, DoHA appointed a Project Officer to be based in Adelaide to undertake consultations in the AP Lands regarding the formal establishment of the South Australian COAG trial. There is no further detail in the evaluation about these consultations such as who they involved, what was discussed or what was agreed. These consultations were crucial in deciding who the Aboriginal partners should be and it is not stated if the AP Lands Council was involved in steering these consultations, or even supported these consultations.

Two months later, on 22 May 2003, the South Australian trial was formally announced by joint media statement. The media statement advised that the Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing and the South Australian Department of Aboriginal Affairs “will take lead roles in coordinating across government agencies and working with the AP Lands communities” (Ruddock et al 2003). It is unclear from the text of the media release specifically who the Aboriginal partners to the trial were. It simply states “the AP Lands communities” and it also states “ATSIC will also be closely involved” (Ruddock et al 2003),
although Gary Lewis, Chair of the Anangu-Pitjantjatjara Land Council Executive was present and the Council’s logo was pasted in the top of the media release (see Figure 12a). Therefore, in the preliminary stages of the South Australian trial, the early potential Aboriginal partners were the AP Lands Council, ATSIC and the AP Lands communities more generally, and it seems a more formal agreement would be forthcoming with the specific Aboriginal partners.

**Figure 12a: The letterhead of the joint media release for the South Australian COAG trial, dated 22 May 2003**

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**Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) Lands Council**

The Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) Lands Council had been in operation since 1981. It had long been recognised as an important representative body for the Anangu people. The *Pitjantjatjara Land Rights Act 1981 (SA)* established the APY executive as the governing board for the region and all Anangu people are members of the APY Lands Council. The APY executive has responsibility for carrying out the functions and the day-to-day business in relation to the management, use and control of the lands (Urbis Keys Young 2006d, p. 3).
The evaluation reports that during 2003 and 2004 there was “controversy and instability with the APY Lands Council and Executive” and this had “affected” government/community relationships (Urbis Keys Young 2006d, p. i). The evaluation provides no further elaboration about these alleged problems and how they affected the relationships with government. The lack of detail about the precise concerns raises questions about the credibility of this assertion by the government officials. There is evidence given by three different witnesses to a South Australian Select Committee inquiry that DAARE and ATSIC had been bullying the AP Lands:

It was alleged that that those agencies had acted in a heavy-handed manner, threatening to cut off funding if the Executive Board refused to endorse specific changes; most particularly, the appointment of a financial administrator and the restructuring of the Body Corporate. Witnesses claimed that representatives from ATSIC told the Executive Board:

“If you don’t agree to all this there will be no money.”

“You will have this man or we will stop your funds.” (Select Committee on Pitjantjatjara Land Rights 2004, pp. 63-64)

If the situation was so dysfunctional that the government agencies believed they had to side-step the entire organisation, it raises questions about the degree of prior consideration to involve the APY executive at all. There were other options. For example, a local Community Council, which governed the larger communities in the AP Lands (such as Pukatja with a population of 650), could have been a partner, and this may have presented as a more manageable trial. Seemingly, the consequence of the initial choice to partner with the AP Lands, and then the APY executive, was that the Indigenous partners were not effectively involved for the first two years of the South Australian trial.
Anangu Taskforce

In February 2005, almost three years after the trial was established, the Anangu partners formed the Wiru Palyantjaku Taskforce (the Anangu Taskforce) to represent their local and regional interests in the South Australian trial (DoHA 2005, p. 177). The Anangu Taskforce was “made up of representatives of APY communities and organisations” (Urbis Keys Young 2006d, p. 7). The first meeting was held on 27 April 2005 (Paper Tracker 2007) and a secretary for the Taskforce commenced in January 2006 (Urbis Keys Young 2006d, p. 14). The evaluation stated:

There was a hope that establishment of a separate secretariat for the Anangu Taskforce would help to give APY organisations more effective influence in the work of the TKP (Urbis Keys Young 2006d, p. 14).

The evaluation was conducted between October and December 2005 and therefore it makes no comment about the effectiveness of the Anangu Taskforce.

The Allocation Committee

Another Indigenous-specific committee for the AP Lands was established during the South Australian trial known as the ‘Allocation Committee’ (ATSI SJC 2003, p. 246). Its fifteen members were drawn from Community Councils, Homelands Groups, Nganampa Health and the APY Women’s Council. The role of the Allocation Committee was to assist in the disbursement of new South Australian Government funding totalling $12 million over four years for AP Lands as part of its response to the South Australian Coroner’s recommendations (Roberts 2003). The aim was to ensure all stakeholders had a clear understanding of funding available from the South Australian Government for the AP Lands and are involved in its distribution (ATSI SJC 2003, p. 246). The Allocation Committee was clearly established by the South Australian Government. It is not referred to in the evaluation report but was a potential partner for the COAG trial.
In summary, it appears there was a poor relationship between the AP Land Council executive and the key government agencies, which may have prevented the development of a trustful and collaborative climate to facilitate the desired partnership arrangements. If the AP Lands had to be the location for the South Australian trial, and there is no evidence to suggest this is the case, there were many other options as potential partners. It would seem insufficient consideration was given to this fundamental preliminary question. Finally, the evaluation report, which was designed to focus on process, paid no attention to these important preliminary developments for the South Australian trial and how they impacted its implementation.

The final report of a Senate Committee Inquiry into Reconciliation (2003) noted the “concerns raised about the processes for selecting communities for the trials”, which were described by Jason Glanville of Reconciliation Australia:

...there is ... a lot of concern that the communities that have been chosen might not necessarily be the best ones or the most deserving of this kind of attention. There is an equally serious concern about the level of engagement with those communities in the lead-up to them being selected or announced as part of the trial. I think there have been, certainly in the communications put out by the 10 communities (sic) task force, statements about communities being seen as equal partners in the process, but there is real concern that that has not been the case to date (Glanville 2002 as quoted in Senate Legal and Constitutional References Committee 2003, Reconciliation: Off track, Parliament of Australia, p. 27).

FUNCTIONALITY – POOR

**Partnership agreement**

A formal partnership agreement was not successfully negotiated between the Governments and Indigenous representatives for the conduct of the South Australian COAG trial.

FUNCTIONALITY – POOR
Joint steering committee

The earlier appraisal of the South Australian trial’s two different joint steering committees to drive a whole-of-government approach is relevant though this discussion turns to consider whether the settings for these committees were sufficient to drive COAG’s aim for a government-community partnership.

The AP Lands COAG Steering Committee was comprised of Commonwealth representatives from DoHA, ATSIS and ATSIC and South Australian representation by DAARer, and the AP Land Council’s executive represented the Indigenous people of the trial region (Urbis Keys Young 2006d, p. 5). Putting aside the questions about the capacity of these partners, the membership composition of the initial joint committee represents a sound basis to govern a government-community partnership.

The evaluation does not reproduce the AP Lands COAG Steering Committee’s terms of reference but it should have because its focus was intended to be on process rather than outcomes. Helen Bulis, a former DoHA project officer who had responsibility to progress the South Australian COAG trial, later described the terms of reference as including:

…matters concerning collaboration and co-operation; guiding the development of a shared responsibility agreement (SRA); and community priorities (Bulis and Stehlik 2006, p. 3).

Given COAG’s imperative for a partnership approach, it is notable that the term ‘partnership’ does not appear in this description of the committee’s terms of reference. The lack of reference to the partnership principle, and its implications for Indigenous empowerment, signifies a departure from COAG’s original intent for the trials. It demonstrates that the partnership principle as described at the policy level got lost in translation at the implementation level.
The second incarnation of the steering committee was the establishment of the TKP in early 2005. The TKP comprised of representatives from government and community-based organisations, which again, is a sound basis for a partnership. The evaluation describes the role of the TKP (Urbis Keys Young 2006d, p. 6). There is no indication that the role of the TKP included an intention to operate as partnership between government and community. The evaluation notes that the description of the role does not even include specific reference to the South Australian COAG trial (Urbis Keys Young 2006d, pp. 6-7). The evaluation reported that there were community concerns about the mode of operation of the TKP (Urbis Keys Young 2006d, p. 14). The concern illustrates that the TKP was not functioning, as it was understood at the time, as a partnership between government and community. The evaluation states:

At the time of this study there was some concern among community organisations represented on TKP that ‘It’s still coming from the Government down’ – that is, that Government members were dominating the TKP agenda and proceedings (Urbis Keys Young 2006d, p. 14).

This demonstrates the operation of the trial structures continued departure from COAG’s original intent for a government-community partnership. The evaluation also dedicates a subsection to describing the “community involvement in COAG Trial planning and decision-making” (Urbis Keys Young 2006d, p. 7). But it states simply that the community involvement “has taken three main forms” and then, in three one-sentence dot points, points to the initial DoHA consultations undertaken in 2003; the role of the AP Land Council/AP executive on the steering committee; and the involvement of the Directors of community-based APY Lands organisations, together with the APY Land Council, as members of the TKP Regional Forum (Urbis Keys Young 2006d, p. 7).

The evaluation does not present evidence of the degree of influence that the Indigenous people through these processes on the overall design, planning and delivery of services for
the trial. Membership of a steering committee is not sufficient to demonstrate a government-community partnership. More detail demonstrating genuine involvement by Indigenous people in the decision-making processes would be required.

Although the two joint steering committees were established with composite memberships, there is no indication that either was designed to operate as a government-community partnership, in the sense articulated at the time by the literature and relevant policy statements.

FUNCTIONALITY – POOR

**Steering committee authority, vertically and horizontally**

The essential issue under consideration is whether the members of the joint steering committee, individually and collectively, had the authority to negotiate, design and implement the products of its negotiations. The required authority has vertical and horizontal dimensions. From the lead agencies perspective, did they have the delegated authority to negotiate with the resources of other agencies, and from the AP Lands Council’s perspective, did it have the authority to negotiate the participation of the Indigenous communities? Negotiation theory and practice recommends that the scope and limits of these authorities need to be clear at the outset (Fells 2016).

There is no evidence in the evaluation that these delegated authorities were clearly defined for the AP Lands COAG Steering Committee’s or its replacement, the TKP.

FUNCTIONALITY – POOR

**Respect for the partners’ value frameworks**

In some of the other COAG trials, there were express commitments of respect for each partner’s value framework in the formal partnership agreement, but a framework agreement was not successfully negotiated for the South Australian trial. The evaluation
reports that a draft agreement was produced but it was not attached to the evaluation and therefore it is not known if such commitments were articulated in the draft agreement.

There is no evidence in the evaluation that government officials undertook cross-cultural training as part of their role to participate in the trial. The evaluation reports that some people reported that the TKP meetings were difficult to understand for people for whom English was a second or third language (Urbis Keys Young 2006d, p. 13).

There is nothing in the evaluation that demonstrates that particular attention was paid to expressly acknowledging and accommodating the respective value frameworks of each stakeholder as part of the overall conduct of the South Australian trial, thus the rating is poor.

FUNCTIONALITY – POOR

Trust and collaboration between governments and community

There is no evidence in the evaluation that particular attention was paid by the lead agencies to nurturing a climate of trust and collaboration for the overall conduct of the South Australian trial. For example, this characteristic may have been satisfied if a training workshop was conducted for all the members of the joint steering committee on partnership theory and how it was envisaged a partnership approach in the trial would translate to better social and economic outcomes.

The failures to successfully negotiate a formal agreement and the cessation of the original steering committee after only four meetings are strong indicators that the trust and collaboration for the overall conduct of the trial was wanting. The evaluation also described some community concerns about the trial, which may be interpreted as indicators of the degree of trust and collaboration. For example, in relation to whether the stakeholders fulfilled their commitments, the evaluation found:
Given that the Shared Responsibility Agreement prepared in 2003 was not signed by all parties, there is no formal statement of government or community commitments relating to the COAG Trial. The only comments on this issue that were made in the course of the study related to some community dissatisfaction with funding arrangements for COAG projects. In particular, as noted earlier, concerns were expressed about funding uncertainties affecting PY Ku (Urbis Keys Young 2006d, p. 15).

FUNCTIONALITY – POOR

Protocols for shared decision-making power and dispute resolution

There is no evidence in the evaluation that protocols were established for the shared decision-making power between the members of the original APY COAG Steering Committee over its four meetings. There is no evidence that such protocols had been established for the latter TKP forum either. There is no evidence that dispute resolution procedures had been agreed to either.

The evaluation found that “community involvement in COAG Trial planning and decision-making has taken three main forms” (p. 7). Firstly, it cites the “on-the-ground community consultations undertaken at the outset of the trial and various other dates” (p. 7). This is an example of the traditional public administration model (of consultation rather than partnership) that the COAG Project was trying to reform and is not exemplary of shared decision-making power. Secondly, it cites the role of the AP Land Council executive on the original steering committee but, as demonstrated earlier, no agreement emanated from this participation and the committee stopped functioning after only four meetings. Thirdly, it cites the TKP forum but, as demonstrated earlier, it was still in the preliminary stages of formation as the evaluation was being conducted.

FUNCTIONALITY – POOR
**Shared objectives and shared outcomes**

The evaluation was unable to find the specific objectives set for the SA COAG trial. It stated:

> Longer-term evaluation of the APY Lands COAG Trial will naturally raise the issue of just what its objectives have been. At this point it is difficult to identify objectives beyond *the broad goals of the COAG Trials* in general (improved delivery of services, improved collaboration among government agencies and new ways of doing business) and the particular objectives of the Mai Wiru and PY Ku projects (Urbis Keys Young 2006d, p. 18) (*my emphasis*).

It is evident the Commonwealth and State Governments had reached an agreement on shared objectives and perhaps, shared outcomes for the trial as both signed the draft framework agreement however, the Indigenous representatives did not sign the draft agreement and therefore this characteristic was not fulfilled.

**FUNCTIONALITY – POOR**

**Role clarity and early detailed planning**

There is no evidence in the evaluation that the original APY Steering Committee had developed a terms of reference and implementation plan. However, the evaluation reports that draft terms of reference for the subsequent TKP forum had been discussed in the latter stages of the trial but none of the potential partners had formally signed.

**FUNCTIONALITY – POOR**

**Sustained operation and membership of steering committee**

The AP Lands COAG Steering Committee met four times in the first eighteen months of the trial and then was abandoned. The evaluation’s description of the minutes of the final meeting of the steering committee held in February 2004 provides a clue to why further meetings did not eventuate:
The minutes record discussion of issues relating to the steering committee’s roles and responsibilities, and also of some legal and procedural concerns relating to membership of the AP Executive (the South Australian Government agreed to recognise the current Executive as interim Executive until the end of March 2004) (Urbis Keys Young 2006d, p. 5).

**FUNCTIONALITY – POOR**

*Shared responsibility for whole-of-government expenditure in the trial region*

There is no evidence that the original steering committee had assumed responsibility for whole-of-government expenditure in the trial region. It was demonstrated earlier that a FaCS analysis conducted just prior to the commencement of the South Australian trial found total Commonwealth and State Government expenditure of $59.4 million for the financial year 2001-2002 (Department of Family and Community Services 2002 as cited in Select Committee on the Pitjantjatjara Land Rights 2004, p. 62). This suggests the potential was there for the trial steering committee to negotiate delegated responsibility for this expenditure.

**FUNCTIONALITY – POOR**

*Full access to information*

There is no evidence in the evaluation on the degree of information sharing between the members of the original steering committee prior to its early demise.

**FUNCTIONALITY – POOR**
Summary of findings of government-community partnerships

The South Australian trial’s progress towards a government-community partnership is given a poor rating for all twelve key characteristics (see Table 15).

Table 15: Ratings for the key characteristics of government-community partnership, South Australian COAG trial

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>KEY CHARACTERISTIC</th>
<th>RATING</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Right partners</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partnership agreement</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joint steering committee</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steering committee authority</td>
<td>Poor</td>
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<tr>
<td>Respect for partners’ values</td>
<td>Poor</td>
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<tr>
<td>Trust and collaboration</td>
<td>Poor</td>
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<tr>
<td>Protocols for shared power</td>
<td>Poor</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shared objectives and shared outcomes</td>
<td>Poor</td>
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<tr>
<td>Role clarity and early planning</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sustained operation and membership</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared responsibility for expenditure</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full access to information</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There is some corroboration for the results in the evaluation report of the South Australian trial. It presents a brief discussion under the sub-heading “3.4 Government/community relationships”, which considers the quality of the relationship between the partners during the trial. It is only one paragraph long. The evaluation finds “government/community relationships were adversely affected by controversy and instability affecting the AP Lands Council and Executive” (Urbis Keys Young 2006d, p. 14). There is no further elaboration in this section about the actions the lead agencies took to develop a partnership-style
relationship for the trial and how the circumstances at the AP Lands Council specifically undermined the potential relationship between the partners.

Another documentary source reported that the Shadow Attorney-General of South Australia expressed concerns about selective consultation by governments with Indigenous people and communities on the Anangu Pitjantjatjara COAG trial site (Lawson, R. 2004 as cited in ATSI SJC 2005, p. 93). This suggests a poor partnership.
Part C. Quality of social and economic improvements

The evaluation acknowledges that improved outcomes was the goal of the COAG trials (Urbis Keys Young 2006d, p. 1) but it does not present any findings of socio-economic improvements for the Indigenous population of the AP Lands attributed to the COAG trial. The evaluation simply states that such outcomes would be presented in the proposed second stage evaluation, which was scheduled to occur in 2007-08 (Urbis Keys Young 2006d, p. 1). Despite this qualification, it noted:

There appear to be practical benefits flowing to the Lands from the South Australian Government’s increased funding provision and improved coordination of State service-provision since 2004; a number of stakeholders referred to improvements in policing in particular. It is not clear, however, that these can be regarded as directly related to the COAG Trial Urbis Keys Young 2006d, p. 16).

While not reporting any measured improvements in social and economic conditions for the population of the AP Lands, the evaluation reported that the South Australian trial had made some progress in relation to two specific projects that may in the future realise such outcomes. The projects were the Mai Wiru Regional Stores Policy and the PY Ku Rural Transaction Centres Project.

A brief description of each is presented here as they were highlighted by the evaluation as the two main “positive aspects of the trial from a community perspective” (Urbis Keys Young 2006d, p. ii). The evaluation qualified the degree of progress by stating; “the main reservation in this regard is uncertainty regarding ongoing project funding” (Urbis Keys Young 2006d, p. 16). The descriptions reveal the machinations of how two significant projects unfolded over the duration of the trial. The descriptions demonstrate that the reported progress was more akin to government outputs rather than improved community outcomes. It also demonstrates there are questions whether one of the projects could be credibly attributed to the COAG trial.
Mai Wiru Regional Stores Policy

There were eleven community stores operating throughout the AP Lands at the time to varying degrees. The stores are the lifeblood of remote communities. It is estimated that Aboriginal people in remote communities purchase 90–95 per cent of their energy intake from the community store. At least 70 per cent of the total Aboriginal income goes into stores on the AP Lands. Stores are also the source of variety goods for Aboriginal people in remote areas, including items essential for healthy living like shampoo, soap, bath plugs, blankets, brooms and cooking utensils (Nganampa Health Council et al 2002, p. 37). Simply, community stores are an integral aspect of ensuring food security for the approximately 2,600 people living on the AP Lands.

The Mai Wiru Regional Stores Policy was developed prior to the establishment of the South Australian COAG trial with funding and support from the Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services (FaCS). It took two years to develop the Policy, which included extensive consultations with community and government stakeholders. The AP Lands Council ratified the Mai Wiru Regional Stores Policy by a General Meeting in July 2001. By December 2001, all Community Councils and Aboriginal-controlled service providers in the region had ratified it (Urbis Keys Young 2006d, p. 8). The objective of the policy is:

…a comprehensive plan to address the issues of food security, food access (including affordability) and food availability (including range and quality) which form barriers to Anangu health and wellbeing (Urbis Keys Young 2006d, p. 8).

In October 2003, almost two years after the policy was fully ratified, a funding application was made to DoHA to implement the Mai Wiru Regional Stores Policy. Eight months later, in June 2004, DoHA “made funding available” over the three-year period 2005-2007 (Urbis Keys Young 2006d, p. 9). Surprisingly, the evaluation report does not state the amount of
funding. However, the DoHA Annual Report 2003-2004 reports the amount as $1.239 million (DoHA 2004, p. 204). It is evident that FaCS had funded and undertook a comprehensive policy development process but it was another eighteen months before some funding was found for its implementation.

Following receipt of the $1.239 million funding in June 2004, DoHA undertook a further series of community consultations in September-October 2004, which led to the development of a Strategic Implementation Plan. The Mai Wiru Steering Committee ratified the Strategic Implementation Plan in February 2005. The evaluation provides no detail regarding how the $1.239 million was expended however it found that the policy had not yet translated into significant outcomes in late 2005, more than four years after the extensive community ratification of the policy. The evaluation states:

Mai Wiru had not yet had an obvious impact on the range of food stocked by the community stores; for example, it was still difficult to find a good range of sugar-free items such as low-joule cordials. Other people emphasised the scale of the challenge involved in implementing the Policy, particularly given the separate ownership of the stores by each community and uneven quality in present management of the various stores: ‘They’ve got a big job ahead of them’. There also remain some significant funding issues to be resolved (Urbis Keys Young 2006d, p. 9).

The evaluation also reports that ATSIC had provided funding to build new stores in four of the communities prior to its demise but no further detail is provided (Urbis Keys Young 2006d, p. 9). This is itself was a significant outcome and it seems unusual that the evaluation did not elaborate further. Perhaps, it would have represented a contradiction to the Commonwealth Government’s earlier decision to abolish ATSIC.
PY Ku Rural Transaction Centres Project

The intention of the PY Ku Rural Transaction Centres Project was to establish seven customer service centres across the AP Lands for better delivery of Australian Government and State government services such as income support payments, banking, postal account and fines payment facilities and videoconferencing facilities in the AP Lands (DoHA 2004, p. 204). Another Commonwealth agency, the Department of Transport and Regional Services (DoTaRS) was responsible for managing the rural transaction centres program.

The evaluation reports that in 2003, DoHA provided funds – through the AP Lands Council - for the development of a business case for the PY Ku Network. Following a Steering Committee meeting held in September 2003, DoHA sought funding from DoTaRS for ‘infrastructure’ and from FaCS for ‘staffing’ of the rural transaction centres (Urbis Keys Young 2006d, p. 5).

Almost twelve months later, in August 2004, DoTaRS announced funding of $2.23 million. DoTaRS “approved” a further $1.82 million in September 2005 (Urbis Keys Young 2006d, p. 7). The evaluation does not state whether FaCS provided the requested funding for ‘staffing’ of the proposed rural transaction centres. DoHA also reported that funding of $178,206 in 2003-04 and a further $122,206 in 2004-05 was committed from the COAG Trial Project’s national Flexible Funding Pool for the PY Ku Project (DoHA 2004, p. 204).

The PY Ku Network Planning Committee held its first meeting in Alice Springs in March 2005. Membership of this Committee included PY Media, the PY Education Committee and the AP Land Council; DoHA, FaCS, DoTaRS, DCITA, Centrelink and other relevant Australian Government bodies; South Australian Government bodies including DPC and Service SA; and Indigenous Community Volunteers. As well as the Planning Committee, a PY Media Network Group had been formed to ensure ‘open lines of communication with Anangu communities’.

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Community chairpersons and Municipal Service Officers from the relevant communities were also members of this group (Urbis Keys Young 2006d, p. 11).

There is a question about whether the PY Ku project was an official project of the South Australian COAG trial. The evaluation reports, “PY Ku was adopted as a COAG Trial initiative” by the COAG Steering Committee at its meeting in September 2003 (Urbis Keys Young 2006d, p. 10). However, in a footnote to this finding it states:

Reported in the DoHA Chronology, although the minutes of the meeting do not make this explicit (Urbis Keys Young 2006d, p. 5).

Essentially, the evaluation examined the official minutes of the Steering Committee meeting and found they contradicted the claim in the DoHA Chronology that the PY Ku was formally endorsed as a COAG trial initiative. The evaluation later explains in another section of the report that the DoHA Chronology was a “Progress Report on PY Ku” that DoHA had issued in November 2005 (Urbis Keys Young 2006d, p. 9). Therefore, the DoHA Chronology was prepared after the evaluation had commenced.

It appears that the claim in the DoHA Chronology that it issued in November 2005 is a misinterpretation of what actually occurred in the Steering Committee meeting in September 2003. The official minutes of the Steering Committee meeting should be regarded as more reliable evidence than a report that was prepared more than two years later by a Department whose performance was under evaluation and after the evaluation had already commenced. The claim in the DoHA Chronology may constitute a breach of the ‘honesty’ provisions of the Public Service Act 1999 (Cth). While the evaluation report highlighted the anomaly, it did not explore the reasons for it.

The contradictory evidence suggests that DoHA pursued the rural transactions centre program despite the APY COAG Steering Committee not giving its formal endorsement. It raises the broader and important evaluative question of whether there was officially a South
Australian COAG trial. There was no formal agreement between the Commonwealth and State Governments, and the Indigenous representatives. It appears DoHA continued independently to progress certain activities related to the AP Lands despite the lack of a framework agreement for the South Australian trial. Not unexpectedly, DoHA was keen to present these activities to the evaluators as demonstrative of its performance as the Commonwealth Government’s lead agency to the South Australian trial. The evaluation explains why it presented this activity, and that of the Mai Wiru Regional Stores, as outcomes of the South Australian COAG trial:

Apart from the fact that both of these were seen as valuable projects for the Lands, they were also seen as well aligned with the spirit of the COAG Trial in that, in various ways, they involved delivery of improved services, impacts across a range of policy areas (including, for example, training and employment), shared responsibilities and a need for co-operation among a range of government and community partners (Urbis Keys Young 2006d, p. 8) (my emphasis).

This research argues that being “well aligned with the spirit of the COAG trial” is insufficient for the PY Ku rural transactions centre project to be credibly attributed as evidence the aims of the COAG Project were partially implemented in the South Australian trial. The implication is the evidence presented in the evaluation report about both the Mai Wiru Regional Stores Policy and the PY Ku Project are not evidence of partial success but rather demonstrate a fundamental failure to implement the COAG Project’s two aims.

**Conclusion – South Australia**

In relation to the achievement of whole-of-government coordination, there are poor ratings for all twelve characteristics. In relation to the achievement of a government-community partnership, there are poor ratings for all twelve characteristics. There is no evidence of socioeconomic improvements due to the conduct of the trial.
The poor result is largely a consequence of the lack of success in negotiating a framework agreement for the South Australian trial that provided for a whole-of-government approach between the government jurisdictions and a partnership approach between the Governments and the Indigenous people of the trial region. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner Bill Jonas conducted a case study of the AP Lands in the early stages of the South Australian COAG trial and reported:

While government departments and agencies present the APLIICC Tier One/COAG process as a means of self-determination, the perception of community-controlled organisations with a longstanding history of involvement in the AP Lands (such as Nganampa Health Council and NPY Women’s Council) is that this process has shifted the focus away from Anangu and how they do business.

These organisations suggest that in marrying the APLIICC Tier One process to the COAG Trial, the intergovernmental approach to addressing problems on the AP Lands has become increasingly bureaucratic, impeding the possibility of responding effectively to substance misuse and other issues. There are also continuing complaints about the distance of bureaucrats from the AP Lands, their level of experience and corporate knowledge in dealing with AP issues, especially those of volatile substance misuse (ATSI SJC 2003, p. 128).

In key respects, this appraisal corroborates the concerns outlined in Commissioner Jonas’ report.
Western Australia

Part A. Quality of whole-of-government coordination

This Part appraises how the aim for whole-of-government coordination was pursued in the Western Australian COAG trial. The appraisal considers what occurred in the trial against twelve key characteristics of such an approach, which were drawn-up earlier in this chapter.

Lead agencies

The Commonwealth and State Governments each appointed a lead agency for the WA COAG trial - the Commonwealth Department of Transport and Regional Services (DoTaRS) and the Western Australian Department of Indigenous Affairs (DIA). The Halls Creek Shire Council was also nominated as a partner agency to the trial.

FUNCTIONALITY – SATISFACTORY

Framework agreement

There is no evidence in the evaluation report that a framework agreement was successfully negotiated and signed by the Governments and Indigenous representatives. However, the evaluation reports that there were significant attempts in this regard.

The evaluation reports that a big meeting between senior government and community representatives was held in one of the targeted communities, Billiluna, on 14 April 2003, three months before the formal announcement of the WA COAG trial site. It involved approximately 90 traditional owners as it was a pre-scheduled meeting of the Tjurabalan native title holders organised by the Kimberley Land Council. The Secretary of the Department of Transport and Regional Services, Ken Matthews and Richard Curry, Director General, Department of Indigenous Affairs were invited to attend. They were accompanied by government officials from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission and the
The meeting jointly agreed to the establishment of the WA COAG trial site. It was agreed the communities in the region would participate in the COAG trial, “subject to five conditions” (p. 11). The five preconditions were:

1. A basis of agreement between government and the communities would be developed;
2. Government would fund a scoping study to develop a picture of the social and economic needs for the region;
3. A Regional Reference Group would be established to jointly govern the trial consisting of the heads of the lead agencies, two representatives from each of the five communities (one male, one female) and representation from the Traditional Owners;
4. FaCS would fund two Community Consulting Agents for each of the five communities to act as a conduit between governments and the communities, and FaCS would continue to fund a Community Capacity Building position located in the Kimberley Land Council; and
5. A temporary office for the trial administration would be established at Billiluna (Quantum and Nyaarla 2006, p. 11).

The first precondition, which is directly related to the key characteristic under consideration here, was not fulfilled. A draft agreement was prepared by the two lead agencies, the Department of Transport and Regional Services and the WA Department of Indigenous Affairs. It was presented at the second meeting of the trial’s interim steering committee (the Interim Munjurla Reference Group) in December 2003 but it was never signed.
The evaluation reports that this was “due to differing opinions by various government agencies on the appropriateness of a regional SRA” (Quantum and Nyaarla 2006, p. 11). Evidently, the lead agencies were unsuccessful in driving a formal joint agreement. Perhaps emphasising the criticalness of this failure, later in the report, the evaluation concludes with a recommendation that the parties develop “a partnership agreement for the region to facilitate planning at a regional level” (Quantum and Nyaarla 2006, p. 4).

It will be demonstrated through the following appraisal that only one of the five preconditions agreed to at the original big meeting in Billiluna was completely fulfilled in a timely manner. It was the completion of the scoping study, which was funded and tendered prior to the establishment of the WA trial by the defunct Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Services (Quantum and Nyaarla 2006, p. 11). This illustrates that the agreement reached at the big meeting did not involve binding commitments.

FUNCTIONALITY – POOR

**Joint steering committee**

Another of the five preconditions agreed to at the original big meeting in Billiluna between government and Indigenous representatives provided for the establishment of a Regional Reference Group to jointly govern the trial. It was agreed that membership of the Regional Reference Group would consist of the Secretary of DoTaRS, the Director General of DIA, two representatives from each of the five communities (one male, one female) and representation from the traditional owners (Quantum and Nyaarla 2006, p. 11).

DoTaRS later stated the role of the Regional Reference Group was “to help with community governance and overall decision making during the project” (DoTaRS 2005, p. 110). DIA later described it as a “joint project management structure … with the aim of contributing to the development of effective relationships and joint decision-making between government and community stakeholders” (Department of Indigenous Affairs 2004, p. 14).
The evaluation found the Regional Reference Group “provides a forum for joint decision making in the East Kimberley COAG trial site” (p. 17) and “represents a key step towards partnership building between government and the communities” (p. 20). It is evident from the membership composition, the public statements by the lead agencies and the findings of the evaluation, that the Regional Reference Group was established to serve both the whole-of-government coordination function and the government-community partnership function for the overall trial. In terms of the need for a joint process to drive whole-of-government coordination and the partnership with the Aboriginal community, in theory, this was a sound footing.

However, according to the evidence in the evaluation, the Regional Reference Group met for the first time on 30 June 2005 (Quantum and Nyaarla 2006, Appendix C - East Kimberley COAG trial detailed timeline). This was two years after the WA trial was first announced. The evaluation reports that an “Interim Regional Reference Group” meeting occurred in October 2005 but this only involved Aboriginal people, reportedly on the request of the Aboriginal people (Quantum and Nyaarla 2006, p. 12). The second ‘full’ Regional Reference Group meeting was held in February 2006 (Quantum and Nyaarla 2006, p. 14). Therefore, it would appear from the evidence in the evaluation report that the Regional Reference Group with overall responsibility for the WA trial only met twice, on 30 June 2005 and in February 2006. This would be poor implementation of the sound footing.

This evidence reveals a contradiction between the actual role of the Regional Reference Group, which amounted to two full meetings, and the lead agencies’ later reporting of the functioning of the Regional Reference Group and, for that matter, the evaluation’s conclusions. The descriptions by the lead agencies and the evaluation gives a misleading impression that a joint steering committee of Aboriginal and government representatives with responsibility for the overall trial had been meeting frequently during the trial.
The contradiction may be explained in part by further evidence in the evaluation that another reference group had been established early in the trial known as the “Interim Munjurla Reference Group”. The Interim Munjurla Reference Group only had responsibility to progress the scoping study and not for the conduct of the overall WA trial (Quantum and Nyaarla 2006, Appendix F). Following the completion of the scoping study, the evaluation reports that the Interim Munjurla Reference Group “evolved into the Regional Reference Group” (Quantum and Nyaarla 2006, p. 11). It is possible that the lead agencies’ had confused the role and functioning of the Interim Munjurla Reference Group with the Regional Reference Group. The confusion should not have occurred as they had distinctly different roles. Further, there is no evidence in the evaluation that Ken Matthews, ‘trial sponsor’ and Secretary of the lead agency DoTaRS, nor Richard Curry, Director General of the State lead agency DIA, attended either of the two Regional Reference Group meetings, despite agreeing to be a member as one of the five conditions committed to at the original big meeting held in Billiluna.

The evaluation reports that another ‘government officials only’ steering committee had been established for the trial. In August 2003, a “management group (consisting of ATSIS, DoTaRS and DIA joint secretariat) was formed and the group met to progress agenda items for the Reference Group” (Quantum and Nyaarla 2006, p. 11). Evidence from another source, DoTaRS’ Local Government National Report 2002-03, states that fortnightly meetings of Australian Government, Western Australian Government and Halls Creek Local Government officials were held to discuss and progress issues (DoTaRS 2003, p. 85). According to another source, this government-only management group was comprised of a Community Initiatives Coordinator, an ATSIS-funded COAG officer and a WA State Government official, and was described as a “working group secretariat” for the Interim Munjurla Reference Group (ATSI SJC 2004, p. 247).
At first glance, it appears that this government-only management group was the real interagency decision-making body for the trial. After all, according to the evaluation, the Regional Reference Group only met twice over the entire period of the trial. If this interpretation of the evidence is correct, these arrangements conflict with the recognised policy-settings for best practice partnerships at the time, which required Indigenous people to have “full and effective participation in decisions affecting funding distribution and service delivery”; and be “genuinely involved” in making the necessary judgements (Commonwealth Grants Commission 2001, pp. xviii-xix).

The issue sought to be highlighted by this account is where did the decision-making power for the WA trial lie? Was it with the Regional Reference Group, which only met twice, or the government-only management group, which met frequently? Either way, the evaluation report highlighted some inadequacies of the trial governance arrangements to support whole-of-government coordination. It stated:

> While the Regional Reference Group includes the WA Government and Australian Government lead agencies and the Shire of Halls Creek, the consultant notes the absence of an inter-agency forum across all three tiers of government extending beyond the trial partner agencies and OIPC (Quantum and Nyaarla 2006, p. 18).

The evaluation report also highlighted that there were other relevant higher-level government interagency committees in Western Australia at the time but they operated primarily as information sharing processes. It stated:

> Currently, government agencies at both Australian Government and state levels each have an inter-agency forum (the ‘Commonwealth Heads Group’ meeting of all Australian Government agency state managers, and the Human Services Director Generals Group for WA Government agencies). There are also cross government committees such as the Kimberley Interagency Working Group. However, the primary outcome at these forums has been for agencies to update other agencies on recent
developments, rather than as a comprehensive joint-decision mechanism (Quantum and Nyaarla 2006, p. 18).

This evidence suggests the real decisions for the WA trial were being made by government officials located outside of the trial region and outside of the two major interagency forums for Western Australia. The evaluation made the following finding, which may explain the inadequacy of the implementation of this key characteristic for a whole-of-government approach:

A lesson learnt during the development of the East Kimberley COAG trial is that managing the trial with Canberra and Perth based staff was not sufficiently effective in building a relationship with the communities, a task which was subsequently facilitated by establishing staff presence based in the region (Quantum and Nyaarla 2006, p. 34).

This evidence suggests that the decisions were being made in Canberra and Perth. It also illustrates that this prevented relationship building with the communities. Field-level officers focused on the COAG trial were then planted in the relatively nearby town of Halls Creek but it is demonstrated later that they did not have the delegated authority to make timely program and funding decisions as part of nurturing the burgeoning new relationship.

In summary, the evidence indicates that there was no joint steering committee comprised of government and Indigenous representatives with clear and transparent responsibility for the WA trial, which met regularly to monitor and steer the progress of the trial’s aims. Further, the government-only ‘management group’ was not suitably positioned to drive a whole-of-government approach due to its limited membership and insufficient seniority.

FUNCTIONALITY – POOR
Implementation plan

There is no evidence in the evaluation report that the lead agencies developed an implementation plan early in the trial. It appears the lead agencies were awaiting the completion of the Munjurla pilot scoping study for direction to proceed:

The aim of the Munjurla study was to establish a physical, social, cultural, environmental, economic and governance profile of the trial region and the communities within that region. Its intent is to provide a series of recommendations and options that will provide a framework for developing a comprehensive agreement between the people within the region and all spheres of government (Department of Transport and Regional Services 2005, p. 110).

The Munjurla scoping study was completed in 30 April 2004 and according to the evaluation, it provided a “strategic framework” for the implementation of the trial (Quantum and Nyaarla 2006, p. 2). However, the evaluation found that the government officials were not able to translate the strategic framework outlined in the scoping study into an implementation strategy (Quantum and Nyaarla 2006, p. 13). But they attempted to.

It took the lead agencies ten months to develop a “draft Joint Action Plan” to implement the Munjurla Study and outline a way forward for the trial (Quantum and Nyaarla 2006, p. 2).

A draft of the Joint Action Plan was completed in February 2005 and “circulated to government agencies” in May 2005 (Quantum and Nyaarla 2006, Appendix C). This occurred more than two years after the WA trial site was announced and more than three years after the COAG Trials Project was announced. This was a significant delay in developing a draft implementation plan. Part of the reason for the delay may have been the original terms of reference for the pilot scoping study were not aligned with the objectives of the COAG trial.

The evaluation found that the lead agencies were unable to ‘operationalize’ both the Munjurla Scoping Study and the draft Joint Action Plan because they were:
...essentially high level strategic frameworks providing a long term (5-10 year) vision, and the means to translate this into activities is not always readily recognisable (Quantum and Nyaarla 2006, p. 2).

The evaluation also found:

The significant resource implications, long term nature and absence of agreed target completion dates and performance indicators in the Joint Action Plan make it difficult for the implementation of the plan to gain momentum (Quantum and Nyaarla 2006, p. 16).

In August 2005 (one month before the evaluation commenced), the lead agencies commenced development of a “100 Day Plan” (Quantum and Nyaarla 2006, p. 12) to “supplement the Joint Action Plan” (Quantum and Nyaarla 2006, p. 16). It was described by the evaluation:

The 100 Day Plan outlines the respective responsibilities by DoTaRS, other Australian Government agencies and Western Australian Government agencies in progressing a number of priority areas identified by the Regional Reference Group (Quantum and Nyaarla 2006, Appendix F Glossary of terms).

The evaluation reports the 100 Day Plan was later “extended to link with the Joint Action Plan at a more operational level” (Quantum and Nyaarla 2006, p. 12). It does not explain how this was done or how it helped. The 100 Day Plan was then presented to the Regional Reference Group in February 2006 (Quantum and Nyaarla 2006, p. 14). The evaluation reports that it was “well received by the community representatives according to Regional Reference Group meeting minutes” (Quantum and Nyaarla 2006, p. 14). The evaluation does not state who the community representatives were or what they liked about it.

FUNCTIONALITY – POOR

While the evaluation reports that it was “conducted in the period October to December 2005” (Quantum and Nyaarla 2006, p. 1), it is clear that some trial activity that occurred after this evaluation period has been incorporated into the final report.
Mapping and developing whole-of-government funding arrangements

The evaluation emphasised that the original intention of the COAG Trials Project was not to involve new funding but rather reorganise the administration of existing funding levels. It stated:

It is important to note that the aim of the COAG trial concept is to improve outcomes in each trial site through better and more flexible coordination of government resources, rather than through increased levels of resources injected into the trial site areas (Quantum & Nyaarla 2006, p. 16).

The evaluation reported there was significant expenditure in the trial region but found that there was “no ‘umbrella’ agreement on resource allocation arrangements in relation to the trial site” (Quantum and Nyaarla 2006, p. 16). The significant expenditure was not part of an overall coordinated plan. For example, the evaluation reported some expenditure by the Commonwealth and State Governments for different projects during the WA trial. This included:

- The engagement of Community Initiatives Coordinators for some of the trial period with Commonwealth funding and a Place Manager with State Government funding for some of the trial period;
- A Community Consultation Fund was established with joint contributions from DoTaRS, DIA and the Shire of Halls Creek; and
- Joint contributions for the one-day Grog and Justice Summit (Quantum and Nyaarla 2006, p. 16).

The evaluation also attributed expenditure by the Western Australian Government in the region in response to the earlier Gordon Inquiry as part of the WA COAG trial. The attribution of this expenditure to the trial is not credible. This expenditure involved the construction of a police station in Balgo with a permanent police presence and the appointment of a child protection worker (Quantum and Nyaarla 2006, p. 16). It is reported
in another documentary source that the Western Australian Government had “invested more than $4 million in new services to law and order, health, community and economic development, and early childhood development in those communities” (Department of Indigenous Affairs 2004, p. 14).

The Commonwealth Secretaries’ Group on Indigenous Affairs reported Commonwealth expenditure in the final two years of the WA COAG trial totalling $2,320,540:

- 2005-06 was $1,343,262 (Secretaries’ Group on Indigenous Affairs 2006, p. 55)
- 2006-07 was $977,278 (Secretaries’ Group on Indigenous Affairs 2007, p. 57)

The Shire of Halls Creek also reported some expenditure for the WA trial. For example, the Shire expended $76,516 in 2004-05 from the Community Consultation Fund though the Fund still had a balance of $224,701 as at 30 June 2005 (Shire of Halls Creek 2005, p. 36).

The Shire’s annual report 2004-05 also listed expenditure for the following line items:

- $32,158 for COAG Tjurabalan;
- $20,431 for DoTaRS STEP; and
- $19,517 (from previous year’s budget) for Youth Suicide Program (Shire of Halls Creek 2005, p. 19).

The Shire also listed the following unspent items:

- $13,812 unspent from $30,000 grant received this year for Youth Suicide Program; and
- $200,000 unspent for Department of Health’s Healthy Stores Program (Shire of Halls Creek 2005, p. 19).

The OIPC also reported significant expenditure in trial region during the trial:

Senator CHRI S EVANS—So what are you putting in to Balgo through that program?
Mr Gibbons—Under the CIC [Communities in Crisis] program, over the last three years, in 2003-04, we put in $361,000, in 2004-05, we put in $313,000 and in 2005-06, we put in $326,000 from that particular program. That was to provide the key team that are driving the environmental and community development activities (Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee 2006b, Budget Estimates, 30 May 2006, p. 131).

It is highly unlikely that this account represents a comprehensive picture of all government expenditure in the trial region during the WA COAG trial but even these amounts, in total, represent significant expenditure by all three levels of Governments that was not coordinated by a whole-of-government approach, as originally intended by COAG. This is a particularly important key characteristic to enable a whole-of-government approach and the failure to implement is a significant barrier to achieving the aim.

FUNCTIONALITY – POOR

Protocols and dispute resolution

There is no evidence in the evaluation report that the lead agencies developed protocols to enable the government officials responsible for the trial to overcome rigid program guidelines to fund community-identified priority needs. There is no evidence that a dispute resolution process had been established for the trial either.

The evaluation found the various interagency forums around the WA trial were primarily information-sharing forums rather than decisive coordination forums, and recommended protocols be established for the WA trial. It stated:

Given existing forums are not intended to be joint-decision mechanisms, there is benefit in using inter-agency forums to facilitate improved coordination and possibly joint decision making:

- at the programs/processes level – each agency identifies if there are impediments to the effective implementation of their respective
programs delivered to the trial site, and identifies strategies to overcome, if possible, the impediments.

- at a joint planning level – facilitate forums across all three tiers of government focusing on how agencies can be better coordinated in the delivery of services. These may be portfolio-specific, e.g. one forum for health, another for housing and employment, etc. (Quantum and Nyaarla 2006, p. 18).

FUNCTIONALITY – POOR

Realistic timeframes

There was no implementation plan developed at the outset of the WA trial and therefore it appears that no timeframes were set in the preliminary stages of the trial. For example, there is no evidence in the evaluation report that timeframes were set in relation to the five preconditions for the trial to proceed that arose out of the big meeting between the various government agencies, native title holders and the Kimberley Land Council held in Billiluna on 14 April 2003.

In another source, it is reported that the Munjurla Scoping Study was scheduled ten months to report (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs 2003, 15 September 2003, p. 1155). This timeframe was set by ATSIS prior to the commencement of the WA trial and it was delivered on time.

The evaluation reports that a draft Joint Action Plan was developed in the latter half of the trial in February 2005 “to provide a blueprint for the trial” (p. 12). The evaluation reports that the draft Joint Action Plan included “target (start) dates” (p. 13) however it also stated on three occasions that there was an “absence of identified and agreed target completion dates” in the Joint Action Plan (pp. 13, 16 and 21). It had start dates but no timeframes.

FUNCTIONALITY – POOR
Risk assessment

There is no evidence of the lead agencies developing a risk management plan for the challenges associated with implementing a whole-of-government approach for the WA trial.

FUNCTIONALITY – POOR

Trust and collaboration between the agencies

This discussion appraises whether a climate of trust and collaboration of a kind necessary to support a whole-of-government approach was systematically promoted to be a feature of all trial’s interactions. Early in the trial, Ms Joan Armitage, Assistant Secretary, Regional Policy, Policy and Research Group, Department of Transport and Regional Services (the Commonwealth lead agency) told a House of Representatives Standing Committee that this is what the lead agency were trying to do:

As I said, what we are attempting to manage with the communities, with the local government and with the state government is to always move forward collaboratively on this. This is resource intensive. It is people intensive because it is actually about relationships and building relationships. We are going to have a discussion with our secretary about this, and he is aware of it. Not only are you working with Indigenous people and Indigenous cultures, so we have a cultural issue for a lot of white public servants, to put it that way. You also have the cultural issues between the Commonwealth, the state and the local government. So we are moving in that environment. You keep your aspirations and you keep your goals and your principles. The principles are partnership, cooperation, coordination and making things happen. You keep them in front of you as you go forward (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs 2003, p. 1160 per Armitage).

Apart from the preliminary big meeting in which the Secretaries of the two lead agencies attended and agreed on the five preconditions for the trial, there is little evidence in the evaluation that indicates feelings of trust and a collaborative culture between the government officials were nurtured to become a key characteristic of the WA trial. For
example, the evaluation found that the Western Australian Government’s commitment and priority to the trial was generally less than that of the Commonwealth Government (Quantum & Nyaarla 2006, p. 19). This was a common finding across the trial sites. The evaluation did not explore how it impacted on achieving the trial’s aims. The evaluation also found there was a high turnover of key staff within government, communities’ administration and communities’ leadership, which “adversely impacted on the continuation of momentum and the retention of experience and ‘corporate memory’” (Quantum & Nyaarla 2006, p. 23). High staff turnover also negatively impacts on relationship building.

The evaluation report did not present any evidence about specific activities by the lead agencies to promote and nurture a climate of trust between all the relevant agencies nor did it investigate or make any judgement about the degree of trust that had developed between the various government agencies. The lack of a framework agreement for this trial and the scarcity of full Regional Reference Group meetings are also strong indicators of poor implementation of this key characteristic.

FUNCTIONALITY – POOR

**Skills training**

There is no evidence in the evaluation report that any government officials were given any training in implementing whole-of-government coordination.

FUNCTIONALITY – POOR

**Performance monitoring**

The evaluation reported that the Government agencies presented a draft Joint Action Plan ten months after they received the recommendations of the Munjurla Scoping Study. The evaluation found the draft Joint Action Plan outlined strategies aimed to address each of six
key result areas identified in the Munjurla Scoping Study, with key actions identified under each strategy. Lead agencies, other agency partners and target start dates were also identified for the key actions (my emphasis). However, the evaluation found the draft Joint Action Plan was incomplete.

The absence of identified and agreed target completion dates and performance indicators in the Joint Action Plan represents a weakness in assessing progress. It is acknowledged however that the Joint Action Plan has a long term planning horizon (10 years), and that the need to address day to day crisis issues as they arise has made it difficult to establish dates and performance indicators (Quantum and Nyaarla 2006, p. 13).

This indicates that a performance monitoring system was not established for the WA trial.

FUNCTIONALITY – POOR

Baseline data

The second precondition of the original big meeting in Billiluna between government and Indigenous representatives was that the Governments would fund a scoping study to develop a baseline picture of the social and economic needs for the region. ATSIS had already funded the scoping study before this meeting occurred (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs 2003, p. 1154) and the study was completed in April 2004. The evaluation noted that the Munjurla Scoping Study had “collected data that contributes to the baseline data set” (p. 43).

But, the evaluation did not find that this data was employed by the lead agencies as a baseline to measure performance of the WA trial. Rather, it stated that it “understood DIA is currently in the process of compiling a socio-economic profile of the communities using this and other data sets” (Quantum and Nyaarla 2006, p. 43). There is no explanation why the data produced by the scoping study was not applied.
The evaluation also stated that the national Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage Framework (OID framework) “will be used to measure outcomes” (Quantum and Nyaarla 2006, p. 24). The future tense of this finding illustrates that the trial was yet to apply the OID framework. The OID Framework is a set of national-level socio-economic indicators, which the evaluation report commented would be unlikely to be a useful measure of the performance of the WA trial:

The consultant notes that the headline indicators are unlikely to reflect outcomes from the COAG trial at this point; as a longer horizon is likely to be required before changes in these areas can be readily observable. The consultant therefore supports the use of a combination of process indicators and intermediate term outcome indicators in addition to the headline indicators, to measure the changes that the trial has made on the coordination between governments and the level of partnership between governments and the communities (Quantum and Nyaarla 2006, p. 43).

This illustrates that a baseline data set for the purposes of monitoring and evaluation had not been developed and applied for the conduct of the WA trial.

FUNCTIONALITY – POOR
Summary of analysis of whole-of-government coordination

The Western Australian trial’s progress towards whole-of-government coordination is given a satisfactory rating for one key characteristic and poor ratings for the other eleven (see Table 17).

Table 17: Ratings for the key characteristics of whole-of-government coordination, Western Australian COAG trial

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>KEY CHARACTERISTIC</th>
<th>RATING</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lead agencies</td>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Framework agreement</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joint steering committee</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implementation plan</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mapping whole-of-government expenditure</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protocols and dispute resolution process</td>
<td>Poor</td>
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<tr>
<td>Realistic timeframes</td>
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<td>Risk assessment</td>
<td>Poor</td>
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<tr>
<td>Trust and collaboration</td>
<td>Poor</td>
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<tr>
<td>Skills Training</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance Monitoring</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baseline data</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The evaluation findings provide some corroboration for these conclusions. It states:

The general view of a number of community as well as WA and Australian government stakeholders is that for a period of time there was not a clear understanding of how the concept of a ‘whole of government’ approach was to be operationalised within the trial site (Quantum and Nyaarla 2006, p. 41).
Overall, the evaluation found, “...some progress has been made in enhancing coordination between government agencies during the trial” (Quantum & Nyaarla 2006, p. 2), however it did not reflect on the effectiveness of these government coordination mechanisms against the expected functionality that would arise from the application of WOGC mechanisms.

Finally, under the characteristic of ‘joint decision-making’ the evaluation reported there were several pre-existing interagency committees within and across Commonwealth and State Governments with responsibility for the issues of the trial region but found these were information-sharing forums and were “not intended to be joint-decision mechanisms” (Quantum & Nyaarla 2006, p. 18).
Part B. Quality of the government-community partnership

This Part appraises how the aim for a government-community partnership was approached in the Western Australian COAG trial. The appraisal considers what occurred in the trial against twelve key characteristics of such an approach, which were drawn-up earlier in this chapter.

The right partners

The evaluation reports that the “government partners to the trial” are the:

- Australian Government (through the Department of Transport and Regional Services) (DoTaRS),
- Western Australian Government (through the Department of Indigenous Affairs) (DIA), and
- Halls Creek Shire Council (p. 1).

The consideration here is whether the lead agencies DoTaRS and DIA were the right agencies to enter into a partnership with Indigenous representatives to achieve the aims of the COAG Trials Project. In regards to the suitability of DoTaRS and DIA as the lead agency partners for the WA trial, refer to earlier discussions in the sections Pre-existing government coordination processes and Lead agencies. Essentially, it is concluded they were well-placed as partners within the settings of the COAG Trials Project despite the two agencies’ poor track record in facilitating substantive and sustained community development in Indigenous communities.

The evaluation reported that the “Indigenous community partners” are the:

- Nine hundred and fifty Tjurabalan Native Title holders, represented on the Regional Reference Group by the Tjurabalan Native Title Land Corporation, and
Eight hundred and eighty eight residents of the five trial communities (Balgo, Billiluna, Mulan, Ringer Soak and Yagga Yagga), “who are represented at key decision making forums by community chairpersons or community nominated representatives” (Quantum & Nyaarla 2006, p. 1).

Absent from the evaluation findings is the fact that ATSIC Wunan Regional Council was also an early participant of the trial, though the evaluation implicitly acknowledges this through its finding that the abolition of ATSIC during the trial affected “momentum of planning activities and continuity of relationships” (Quantum & Nyaarla 2006, p. 10).

All three of these Indigenous groups were represented at the initial big meeting that endorsed the commencement of the WA trial and therefore it is concluded that these were the right partners for the trial. It is notable that the Munjurla scoping study included recommendations for a process of negotiation tables to enable other potential Aboriginal partners to be involved (Quantum & Nyaarla 2006, p. 13).

The challenge of a government-community partnership for the trial was to enable representatives of the three groups to collectively work-in-partnership with the government partners for the conduct of the WA trial, as well as refer back to their constituencies for authority to make decisions. This is discussed later in the key characteristic of protocols for shared decision-making. A rating of satisfactory is deemed because the early understanding of the lead agencies was to formally involve; the native title holders, a female and male representative from each of the five communities, and the ATSIC Wunan Regional Council.

FUNCTIONALITY – SATISFACTORY

**Partnership agreement**

A formal partnership agreement was not successfully negotiated between the Governments and Indigenous representatives for the conduct of the WA COAG trial despite it being one of the five preconditions for the communities’ participation in the trial. The lead agencies had
jointly developed a draft regional agreement for the trial and it was considered by the trial steering committee but it was not signed by any of the trial partners (Quantum and Nyaarla 2006, p. 11).

**FUNCTIONALITY – POOR**

*Joint steering committee*

As discussed earlier, a precondition of the original big meeting in Billiluna between government and Indigenous representatives required the establishment of a Regional Reference Group to jointly govern the trial. It was agreed that membership of the Regional Reference Group would consist of the heads of the lead agencies, two representatives from each of the five communities (one male, one female) and representation from the Traditional Owners (Quantum and Nyaarla 2006, p. 11). It is evident that the Regional Reference Group was established to serve both the whole-of-government coordination function and the government-community partnership function for the overall trial. In Part A of this appraisal, it was concluded that this was a sound footing for a whole-of-government approach, and in theory, this was also a sound footing for a joint steering committee to drive the government-community partnership.

However, according to the evidence in the evaluation, the Regional Reference Group only met twice, on 30 June 2005 and in February 2006. This implies an anomaly between the reported claims of the lead agencies as to the partnership role of the Regional Reference Group and the evidence from the evaluation. The anomaly may be explained by a subtle but important distinction that the evaluation report did not make clear. There were two different Reference Groups established in the trial.

Prior to the reported first meeting of the Regional Reference Group on 30 June 2005, another group called the “Interim Munjurla Reference Group” had been established and had held four meetings (4-5 September 2003; 2-3 December 2003; 20-21 April 2004; and 20-
21 July 2004). This Interim Munjurla Reference Group only had responsibility to progress the scoping study and not for the conduct of the overall WA trial (Quantum and Nyaarla 2006, Appendix F). Following the completion of the scoping study, the evaluation reports that the Interim Munjurla Reference Group “evolved into the Regional Reference Group” (Quantum and Nyaarla 2006, p. 11). The distinction is subtle but important. It demonstrates that for the first two years of the trial, the role of the community in the partnership was limited to concerns about the scoping study only. The community was not positioned to be involved in the governance decisions of the overall trial.

Another consequence of not establishing the Regional Reference Group as originally agreed at big meeting in Billiluna was the five communities of the trial region were not systematically positioned to participate in the governance of the trial. The big meeting agreed that a male and female ‘Community Consulting Agent’ from each of the five communities would be appointed as members of the Regional Reference Group. The Community Consulting Agents were never appointed.

The intent of this key characteristic is to ensure the trial was governed by a partnership involving Government and community stakeholders. It reveals how much influence the Aboriginal people had in the overall decisions for the trial. As highlighted earlier, the real decision-making power was spread between the Regional Reference Group (two meetings over the duration of the trial); the more frequent meetings of the government-only management group; the Broome-based Kimberley Interagency Working Group (KIWG); the two Perth-based Commonwealth and State Government interagency committees (which had state-wide responsibility); and an unknown number of senior government officials based in Canberra.

In terms of shared decision-making power within a partnership, this is an erroneous arrangement. The arrangements conflicted with the knowledge and stated policy settings
for best practice partnerships at the time, which required Indigenous people to have “full and effective participation in decisions affecting funding distribution and service delivery”; and be “genuinely involved” in making the necessary judgements (Commonwealth Grants Commission 2001, pp. xviii-xix; see also Newman and Herron 2000).

With the unclear involvement of numerous government officials from Halls Creek, Kununurra, Broome, Perth and Canberra, and practically no involvement of local Aboriginal people, it may be surprising that these arrangements prevailed within a formal COAG-run national project that was directly focused on reforming these precise circumstances. It may also explain in part the lack of socioeconomic improvements ultimately arising from the trial.

In summary, the evidence indicates that there was no clear overriding joint steering committee for the WA trial, which was comprised of government and Indigenous representatives, and met regularly to monitor and had the responsibility to steer the progress of the trial’s aims. The evidence points to an insufficiently clear understanding of the joint steering committee’s role in enabling a partnership relationship between the Governments and Indigenous representatives for the overall governance of the WA trial.

**FUNCTIONALITY – POOR**

*Steering committee authority, vertically and horizontally*

The evaluation illustrates the vertical and horizontal authority of the government representatives and the Indigenous representatives involved in the steering committee processes were problematic.

From the governments’ perspective, vertically, there is no description of the seniority and delegated power of the officials who were directly involved in the Regional Reference Group or the government-only management group. The evaluation simply states they were “senior
government (Australian, state and local) personnel” (Quantum & Nyaarla 2006, p. 3). One of the agreed preconditions from the early big meeting in Billiluna was that the “heads” of DoTaRS and DIA would be members of the Regional Reference Group however there is no evidence that either attended any of the meetings. Therefore, it appears this precondition was not fulfilled and consequentially, weakened the potential vertical authority of the Regional Reference Group. Further, the findings of the evaluation indicate that much of the decision-making for the WA trial occurred in Perth and Canberra, therefore illustrating inadequate delegated vertical authority of the joint steering committee (Quantum & Nyaarla 2006, p. 34).

Horizontally, there is no evidence that the senior government personnel from each lead agency had been delegated the power to negotiate and agree to resource funding arrangements on behalf of the other relevant government agencies from their respective jurisdictions. Rather, the evaluation expressed concern that only the lead agencies were involved in the Regional Reference Group thus limiting its capacity to drive a whole-of-government approach (Quantum and Nyaarla 2006, p. 18).

From the Aboriginal perspective, one preconditions of the original big meeting had agreed to a set of protocols to enable the horizontal authority of the Aboriginal representatives. It required FaCS to fund two Community Consulting Agents for each of the five communities and a Community Capacity Building position located in the Kimberley Land Council. However, this precondition was not fulfilled. The failure to fulfil this commitment would have severely limited members of the five communities’ and the native title holders’ informed participation in the WA trial.

FUNCTIONALITY – POOR
Respect for the partners’ value frameworks

There is no evidence in the evaluation that demonstrates the implementation of a formal process that enabled the partners to acknowledge respect for each other’s value frameworks for the conduct of the WA COAG trial. It is possible that there were expressions of this nature in the draft agreement but it was not signed.

FUNCTIONALITY – POOR

Trust and collaboration between governments and community

The evaluation does not specifically investigate the quality of the trust and collaboration between the Aboriginal and Government partners during the trial. But an indication may be deduced from the evidence in the evaluation on whether the five preconditions, which were agreed to at the big meeting in Billiiluna between the lead agency Secretaries and approximately 100 Aboriginal people, were implemented.

It is evident that only one of the five preconditions were implemented fully and on-time. This was the conduct of the Munjurla scoping study, which pre-existed the WA COAG trial in any event. There is no detail about the Aboriginal community members who attended the four Interim Munjurla Reference Group meetings, which oversaw the conduct of the study, or the agenda and decisions that were made. The evaluation reported that there were community concerns about the preparation of the Study:

A number of community and NGO stakeholders in the region have expressed concern that effective community consultation was limited during the preparation of the Munjurla Scoping Study, and that little or insufficient feedback has been provided to the communities and agencies within those communities ... In such an environment, it is difficult to assess whether the needs of all communities are clearly understood (Quantum & Nyaarla 2006, p. 14).
The precondition for a formal agreement was not implemented. Another precondition required the establishment of a temporary office in Billiluna for the administration of the trial. After much delay, funding was provided through an SRA signed in March 2005, two years after the commitment was made. The precondition to fund the Community Consulting Agents and the Community Capacity Building positions were not implemented. The Regional Reference Group did not function as envisaged in another precondition. These circumstances are likely to have undermined the trust of the members of the five communities and the native title holders in the trial.

Apart from the preliminary big meeting in which the Secretaries of the lead agencies attended, there is little evidence in the evaluation that indicates feelings of trust and collaboration between the government officials were a nurtured, key characteristic of the WA trial. An early striking indication is the failure of the lead agencies to win the support of the potential Aboriginal partners for the draft framework agreement that they had prepared and submitted for consideration.

Further, a senior DoTaRS official advised a House of Representatives Standing Committee in late 2003 that there was no internal training available for staff in Aboriginal cross-cultural awareness (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs 2003, p. 1164).

FUNCTIONALITY – POOR

Protocols for shared decision-making power and dispute resolution

The challenge of a government-community partnership for the trial was to enable representatives of the three groups to collectively work-in-partnership with the government partners for the conduct of the WA trial, as well as refer back to their constituencies for authority to make decisions. This issue was directly addressed at the original big meeting in Billiluna through one of the preconditions, which stated that FaCS would fund two
Community Consulting Agents for each of the five communities to act as a conduit between governments and the communities, and FaCS would continue to fund a Community Capacity Building position located in the Kimberley Land Council (p. 11).

The evaluation reports simply states that this initiative “did not achieve sustainability” (p. 36), which is interpreted to mean that FaCS did not provide funding or provided only very short-term interim funding for the Community Consulting Agents and the Community Capacity Building position. There is no further detail about these positions in the evaluation therefore it is assumed that the commitment was not implemented.\(^6\) The lack of implementation would have severely hampered members of the five communities’ capacity to participate in the trial as a partner with shared responsibility.

The evaluation reports that a substitute mechanism was devised to ensure participation by members of each of the five communities. It reports that the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of each community council held community meetings to feed decisions into the Regional Reference Group meetings. It is difficult to see how this mechanism worked for the largest community Balgo because it was under appointed-administration for most of the trial and therefore there was no CEO or community council (Quantum & Nyaarla 2006, p. 22). Further, it has been demonstrated earlier that the Regional Reference Group only met twice.

The establishment of the “Interim Munjurla Reference Group” in relation to the conduct of the study is also indicative of a new protocol to enable shared decision-making. The evaluation reports that there were four meetings. There is no detail about the Indigenous representatives who attended these meetings or the content of these meetings. Therefore, it cannot be assumed that the five communities and the Tjurabalan native title holders were

\(^6\) However, in a separate source, DoTaRS reported that the Community Consulting Agents were funded by the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations and the former Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Services (Department of Transport and Regional Services 2003, p. 160) but the reason for the conflicting evidence between the two reports is not apparent.
effectively involved in this exercise. Further, the evaluation reported that there was some
criticism about the degree of community participation in the Munjurla scoping study. It states:

A number of community and NGO stakeholders in the region have expressed
concern that effective community consultation was limited during the
preparation of the Munjurla Scoping Study, and that little or insufficient
feedback has been provided to the communities and agencies within those
communities. In the case of some NGOs, this has resulted in a sense of
‘disengagement’ with the framework proposed in the Munjurla Scoping
Study. In such an environment, it is difficult to assess whether the needs of
all communities are clearly understood (Quantum and Nyaarla 2006, p. 14).

Substantial protocols for shared decision-making power were recommended by the
Munjurla Scoping Study, which reported on 30 April 2004. It recommended a framework for
a partnership relationship between government and community, which involved the
establishment of “a ‘main table’ as a forum for a partnership, engagement and negotiation,
and ‘side tables’, which are working parties to discuss and plan actions addressing a number
of issues (Quantum and Nyaarla 2006, p. 4).

The evaluation found the Munjurla study’s recommended protocols were not adopted
(Quantum and Nyaarla 2006, p. 15). It reported that Aboriginal involvement through the main
table and side tables was considered too resource intensive to implement and was
substituted instead by two government working groups comprised only of senior officials.
The evaluation stated:

Stakeholder consultation indicates the Munjurla Scoping Study’s
recommendation of a framework of ‘side tables’ is difficult to fully
operationalise as it is resource intensive, in terms of both community
members’ capacity and willingness to participate and operational resources.
A progressive approach to addressing ‘side table’ issues has therefore been
adopted, rather than addressing all issues at once. Links with existing groups
operating in the region, such as the Kimberley Interagency Working Group
and the WA Human Services Regional Managers’ Forum, could be explored further to enhance the effectiveness of the ‘side table’ framework (Quantum and Nyaarla 2006, p. 15).

This substitute mechanism completely undermined the principle of Aboriginal participation in the WA COAG trial site. Further, the COAG trial was only one issue in a very large pool of issues under the responsibility of the Kimberley Interagency Working Group and the WA Human Services Regional Managers’ Forums. Therefore, the opportunity for Aboriginal involvement in a partnership with government for the conduct of the WA trial was effectively dissolved.

Finally, there was a standard protocol for negotiating an SRA but it appears it was not followed for a controversial SRA for the Mulan community, which basically stated a fuel bowser would be provided if the community washes their children’s faces twice a day. The SRA protocol required the lead agency, in cooperation with the Regional ICC Manager, to ensure the proposed SRA “is jointly drafted with the community and other stakeholders” (Auditor-General 2007b, p. 103). Some evidence suggests it was not followed:

_The Age_ coverage of the issue was quite different. Its headlines said: ‘Hopes for race accord dashed’ and ‘Rules unfair, say proud Mulan people’. The journalist quoted in this article was reporting from Mulan, and had spoken to elders in the community who were not supportive of the agreement, saying they felt it was unfair. They said: ‘We are a proud people, everyone is well looked after. … Look around, this is a clean place, a proud place.’ (Stundi 2004 as cited in McClausland 2005, p. 16)

It is evident that some protocols were agreed to at the initial big meeting in Billiluna, which would have enabled the Aboriginal partners to share power in the governance of the trial. But the poor implementation of the commitments undermined the purposes they were intended to fulfil. There is no evidence that a dispute resolution process was established.

FUNCTIONALITY – POOR
Shared objectives and shared outcomes

It is apparent that the Munjurla scoping study and the draft Joint Action Plan had described objectives and shared outcomes for the trial but there was no partnership agreement to commit to, and implement them. Further, the evaluation found the lead agencies were unable to translate them into action:

Operationalising the Munjurla Scoping Study and the Joint Action Plan derived from the study has been a challenge as they are essentially a high level strategic framework, and the means to translate this into activities is not always readily recognisable.

Nevertheless, the evaluation found there was some congruence of the objectives between the government stakeholders. It stated:

The majority of government stakeholders consulted are of the opinion that the framework of objectives, priorities and commitments for the East Kimberley COAG trial are sound, and expressed in-principle support for the approach taken.

But it also found the Indigenous partners did not share the same congruence. It stated:

Given that a number of community and NGO stakeholders have expressed limited understanding or confusion about the COAG framework, it is important that resources be devoted to clarify for them the objectives, priorities and parties involved in COAG (Quantum and Nyaarla 2006, p. 4).

The third SRA for the Mulan community committed to the installation of fuel bowsers conditional upon some perverse measures of behavioural change. It is suggested a description of the ‘fuel-bowser’ SRA by Tom Calma, the ATSIC Social Justice Commissioner illustrates the type of outcomes the Commonwealth Government was seeking:

It required that the community ensure that children shower every day, and wash their face twice a day; ensure petrol sold through the store is not used for petrol sniffing; ensure children get to school, crèche and the clinic when they should; that the CDEP program ensure that rubbish bins are at every
house and emptied twice a week; that household pest control happens four times a year; that the rubbish tip is managed properly; and ensure that all household rents are paid so that the community council can afford pest control, repairs and cost of rubbish removal. In return, the Australian Government will ‘contribute $172,260 for the provision and installation of fuel bowsers’ (Australian Government undated as cited in ATSI SJC 2005, p. 118).

It is not known if a mechanism was established to monitor community compliance though the evaluation reported that “many families are washing their children’s faces daily” (Quantum & Nyaarla 2006, p. 26).

FUNCTIONALITY – POOR

**Role clarity and early detailed planning**

There is practically no evidence in the evaluation that either role clarity or detailed planning occurred early in the trial. However, the evaluation found the roles of the agencies were becoming clearer towards the concluding stages of the trial. It stated:

> The level of understanding of the roles and responsibilities of agencies involved in the trial site has increased significantly in recent times. This has been assisted by the development of the 100 Day Plan (Quantum and Nyaarla 2006, p. 17).

FUNCTIONALITY – POOR

**Sustained operation and membership of steering committee**

Several earlier discussions have highlighted that the ‘full’ Regional Reference Group only met twice during the trial. This is not sustained operation. The evaluation does not identify the participants of the two meetings were so it is unknown if there was a consistent membership. The evaluation does not identify the participants of the four meetings of the Interim Munjurla Reference Group either.
The evaluation found that there was significant turnover of key staff within governments, communities’ administration and communities’ leadership during the trial, which has adversely impacted on momentum and the retention of experience and ‘corporate memory’ (p. 3). The Halls Creek Shire reported:

This year saw a number of changes to staff that were representing various lead Government Agencies in this project. Peter Jebb left the project, for family reasons, and was replaced by Carrie Hannington and Mark Sewell. Mary Cowley moved from Broome to Perth, and a replacement, representing the Department of Indigenous Affairs, has yet to be found. DIA will be putting a “Place Manager” in Halls Creek to coordinate the State Government’s role in the project. Everyone is very committed to this project’ and staff changes tend to slow the process down until new staff pick up the pieces (Halls Creek Shire 2005, p. 11).

Other sources demonstrate turnover at the highest levels of the COAG Project. The trial ‘sponsor’ Ken Matthews, Secretary of DoTaRS was replaced in 2004 by incoming Secretary of DoTaRS Mike Taylor. There were three different responsible Commonwealth Ministers Transport and Regional Services for the WA trial:

- John Anderson (21 October 1998 – 6 July 2005);
- Warren Truss (6 July 2005 – 10 August 2006);

There were three different State Ministers for Indigenous Affairs responsible for the WA trial:

- Alan Carpenter (16 February 2001 - 27 June 2003);
- John Kobelke (27 June 2003-3 February 2006);
- Sheila McHale (3 February 2006- 2 March 2007).
**Shared responsibility for whole-of-government expenditure in the trial region**

There is no evidence that a partnership steering committee had been established with ongoing responsibility for whole-of-government expenditure in the trial region. This was despite significant expenditure by both Commonwealth and State Governments in the trial region as demonstrated earlier.

FUNCTIONALITY – POOR

**Full access to information**

There is no evidence in the evaluation that a partnership steering committee had full access to relevant information for the governance of the WA trial.

FUNCTIONALITY – POOR
Summary of findings of government-community partnerships

The Western Australian trial’s progress towards a government-community partnership is given a satisfactory rating for one key characteristic and poor ratings for the other eleven (see Table 18).

Table 18: Ratings for the key characteristics of government-community partnership, Western Australian COAG trial

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>KEY CHARACTERISTIC</th>
<th>RATING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Right partners</td>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partnership agreement</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joint steering committee</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steering committee authority</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respect for partners’ values</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust and collaboration</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protocols for shared power</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared objectives and shared outcomes</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role clarity and early planning</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sustained operation and membership</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared responsibility for expenditure</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full access to information</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The evaluation report of the WA trial acknowledges that a key aim of the COAG Project was for government and communities to work-in-partnership and that it would assess the:

[E]xtent of partnership between the government and community partners (p. 1).

However, the evaluation report does not make any findings that directly address whether such a partnership was achieved (Quantum and Nyaarla 2006). Rather, the evaluation found
that “a number of efforts have been made during the trial to improve partnerships between
governments and the trial communities” (Quantum and Nyaarla 2006, p. 2). The evaluation
cited three efforts.

Firstly, the evaluation reported the establishment of a Regional Reference Group
represented “a key step towards partnership building” (Quantum and Nyaarla 2006, p. 3). It
is demonstrated that there were only two full meetings of the Regional Reference Group
over the duration of the trial. The Regional Reference Group “evolved” from the “Interim
Munjurla Reference Group” after the scoping study was completed (Quantum and Nyaarla
2006, Appendix C).

Secondly, DoTaRS engaged Peter Jebb as a Community Initiatives Coordinator based in Halls
Creek (25 June 2003 – October 2004) who was then replaced with the engagement of Mark
Sewell and Carrie Hannington in January 2005. It was reported that these officers provided
an important linkage between government agencies and the four communities. While not
exemplary of a partnership, their appointment may be regarded as a step in the right
direction.

Thirdly, eleven Shared Responsibility Agreements (SRAs) were successfully negotiated as at
December 2005. The evaluation found the SRA’s “assisted in building momentum and
support for the shared responsibility partnership approach” (Quantum and Nyaarla 2006, p.
3). These SRA’s were described as “single issue”, meaning they focused on one issue.
Therefore, they were relatively small scale and they are not partnerships in the sense
originally intended by COAG. For example, see the earlier description of the third SRA signed
for the Mulan community regarding a fuel bowser on condition the children’s faces are
washed twice a day.

Weighing against these three efforts to “improve partnerships”, the evaluation “observed
limited understanding by a number of community members as to what the COAG trial is”
It then listed a number of challenges to government working in partnership with the communities:

- Limited understanding by a number of community members as to what the COAG trial is.
- Limited capacity of communities to effectively engage with governments.
- Turnover of key staff within governments, communities’ administration and communities’ leadership, which has adversely impacted on momentum and the retention of experience and ‘corporate memory’.
- Differing opinions held in government agencies as to the type and extent of consultation required with communities in the formulation and delivery of responses to priority areas (Quantum and Nyaarla 2006, p. 3).

The findings of these challenges are not surprising given the lack of, and poor implementation of the preconditions from the big meeting, which largely foresaw the issues. Finally, it is notable the evaluators recommended that the next steps for the trial should include “a partnership agreement for the region to facilitate planning at a regional level” (Quantum and Nyaarla 2006, p. 4). The evaluation findings largely corroborate the conclusions of this analysis.
Part C. Quality of social and economic improvements

This Part describes the findings of social and economic improvements in the lives of the people of the trial region that occurred as a result of the WA COAG trial. The evaluation report of the WA trial highlighted that the aim of the trial was to improve outcomes:

The aim of applying the COAG trial concept in the East Kimberley is to improve outcomes through better and more flexible coordination of government resources, rather than through the provision of increased levels of resources into the trial site region (Quantum & Nyaarla 2006, p. 6) (my emphasis).

There is no evidence in the evaluation report that the lead agencies were monitoring and measuring the progress of the trial on socioeconomic status against a baseline set of data. However, the evaluation cautioned that it was a first stage evaluation and therefore was not focused on making a judgement about the outcomes from the trial. It stated:

It is important to note that the review, the subject of this report, is a formative evaluation. It does not attempt to undertake a detailed analysis of outcomes. However, while the focus is not on identifying outcomes, interim evidence of outcomes identified is included below (Quantum and Nyaarla 2006, p. 24).

Nevertheless, despite the caution that it was not required to detail the social and economic outcomes from trial, the evaluation presented a number of findings that it classified as “Interim Indigenous Outcomes” (Quantum and Nyaarla 2006, p. 1). For example, under this classification, the evaluation reported that eleven Shared Responsibility Agreements (SRAs) had been successfully negotiated during the trial (Quantum and Nyaarla 2006, p. 12). It stated; “...the benefit of the initial SRA’s was that they provided tangible outcomes at the community level” (Quantum and Nyaarla 2006, p. 12), and were “instrumental in facilitating readily observable changes” in the communities (Quantum and Nyaarla 2006, p. 3) (my emphasis).
The evaluation report provides a table summarising the eleven SRAs (Quantum & Nyaarla 2006, pp. 26-30). An analysis of the eleven SRAs as described in the table reveals that the reported ‘interim Indigenous outcomes’ are largely descriptions of government outputs rather than measured social and economic improvements. For example, the first SRA that was signed provided $3,000 towards the purchase of equipment for after-school activities for youth in the Mulan community and the second SRA provided $6,000 towards an upgrade of the existing Women’s Centre located in Mulan. Perhaps, the minimal nature of the funding prevented a credible measure of socio-economic improvement.

The combined total financial value of all eleven SRA’s signed during the WA trial amounted to $587,233 of which $495,260 (84.3%) were for fuel bowsers, temporary accommodation for visiting government officials and airstrip lighting. This highlights a lack of focus on social and economic community development. The largest SRA for social development was $60,000 for an upgrade to a basketball court and the source of these funds was the now defunct ATSIC. Another six SRAs focused on social benefits and were relatively small scale with a combined value of $31,973. The lead agency DoTaRS’ contributed a total of $12,973 to the eleven SRAs.

All the funding for the eleven SRA’s was new funding. This was contrary to an early principle of the COAG Project that there would be no new funding and benefits are expected as a result of “better and more flexible coordination of government resources” (Quantum and Nyaarla 2006, p. 16). The vast majority (85.9%) of the funding was sourced from the COAG Trial Project’s national Flexible Funding Pool. The evaluation also noted that each SRA was a “discrete” arrangement rather than a collective example of better coordination of government resources (Quantum and Nyaarla 2006, p. 31).

The evaluation highlights that the Western Australian Government was not a signatory to any of the SRAs to illustrate that they were part of a Commonwealth initiative rather than a
whole-of-government approach (p. 31). However, the evaluation also reported that “activities that fell within the core responsibilities of state agencies were identified in some SRAs and were implemented”, though no examples are provided to support this claim (p. 20). The evaluation also reported several other government outputs under the heading “Interim Evidence of Outcomes” including:

- The engagement of Community Initiatives Coordinators from DoTaRS and a Place Manager from DIA at Halls Creek (Quantum and Nyaarla 2006, p. 31);
- A one-day “Grog and Justice Summit” was held in Mulan on 30 September 2004;
- DoTaRS sponsored an unknown number of women from East Kimberley communities to attend two COAG Women’s gatherings in Alice Springs (May 2004) and Canberra (November 2005); and a Women’s leadership forum in Sydney (June 2005); and a schools visit to Canberra (in October 2005) (Quantum and Nyaarla 2006, p. 32).

In conclusion, the evaluation made a number of findings of government outputs but did not report any findings of social and economic improvements in the lives of the people of the trial region that occurred as a result of the WA COAG trial.

**Conclusion – Western Australia**

In relation to the achievement of whole-of-government coordination, there is a satisfactory rating for one key characteristic and poor ratings for the remaining eleven. In relation to the achievement of a government-community partnership, there is a satisfactory rating for one key characteristic and the remaining eleven received poor ratings. There is no evidence of measured socioeconomic improvements for the trial population as a result of the conduct of the trial.

In April 2004, ten months after the WA trial was announced, the Western Australian Coroner Alastair Hope expressed concerns about the lack of government coordination in the
East Kimberley Trial Site and inaction in addressing the petrol-sniffing problems in Balgo.

The Coroner stated:

...while the Munjurla Scoping Study [for the east Kimberley COAG site] would make clear the stark conditions currently experienced in the region ... conditions will continue to deteriorate as long as the current disjointed state of government activities in the region are allowed to continue. He further criticised the lack of on-the-ground knowledge by agencies involved in the trial (Hope 2004 as cited in ATSI SJC 2005, p. 93).

In 2007, shortly after the conclusion of the WA COAG trial, Coroner Hope conducted an inquest into the deaths of twenty two Aboriginal people in the wider Kimberley region. The Coroner wrote:

Evidence at the inquest revealed that there is no real leadership or coordination in the response to the disaster of Aboriginal living conditions in the Kimberley on the part of either the State or Commonwealth governments. The evidence also revealed a lack of accountability in the response.

In addition to Commonwealth funding, the State is providing $1.2 billion each year for services and programs targeted to indigenous people in Western Australia which is allocated to 22 government agencies under 16 Ministers. In spite of this allocation of funding conditions are getting even worse for Aboriginal people in the Kimberley and the gap between the well-being of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people is now a “vast gulf”.

The system, which has applied $1.2 billion or thereabouts each year for Aboriginal people and has achieved the results described in these reasons, is clearly seriously flawed. In spite of the lack of results, it appears that no individual or organisation in government has been monitoring the performance of the various government agencies and that no identified individual or organisation has been held responsible for achieving improved outcomes for Aboriginal people.
The Department of Indigenous Affairs is not, and never has been, capable of providing leadership in addressing the major problems facing Aboriginal people in the Kimberley (Hope 2008, p. 23).

Dr Bruce Walker, Project Director of remoteFOCUS, a small collaboration of leaders focused on improving the governance of governments in remote Australia, said the Coroner’s findings illustrated there was:

...an appalling lack of governance, little or no coordination between the Federal and Western Australian Governments, and a lack of a system of government accountability to measure outcomes from significant public investment aimed to alleviate Indigenous disadvantage (Walker 2012, p. 9).
Tasmania

Part A. Quality of whole-of-government coordination

This Part appraises how the aim for whole-of-government coordination was pursued in the Tasmanian COAG trial. It appraises what occurred in the trial against twelve key characteristics of such an approach, which were drawn-up earlier this chapter.

Lead agencies

The Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs (DIMIA) was appointed the lead Commonwealth Government agency and the Tasmanian Department of Premier and Cabinet (DPC-Tas) was the lead agency for the State Government.

Bill Farmer, Secretary of DIMIA, was the Commonwealth’s trial ‘sponsor’. Mr Farmer was reported to have “participated in the initial planning for the Tasmanian Trial which included visits to some Trial site locations” and he “attended Inter-Governmental Co-ordinating Committee meetings and convened Project Team meetings on at least six occasions” during the trial (Senate Legal and Constitutional Legislation Committee 2006a, Supplementary Budget Estimates Hearings, 1 November 2005: Answers to Question Taken on Notice No. 282, subsection 17(b), tabled in March 2006).

FUNCTIONALITY – SATISFACTORY

Framework agreement

There is no evidence that a framework agreement was negotiated and developed between all the relevant agencies to guide the elaboration of a whole-of-government approach to addressing family violence issues in the trial region.

FUNCTIONALITY – POOR
**Joint steering committee**

The issue here is whether a joint steering committee with suitable membership and a clear strategy was established for the Tasmanian trial. There were two intergovernmental committees established for the Tasmanian trial; the Lead Agency Forum (LAF) and the Inter-Governmental Coordinating Committee (IGCC).

The LAF was a small working group of senior State and Commonwealth Officers: two from the Policy Division of DPC-Tas; one from OIPC; one from ICC; and the two project workers from the Hobart ICC and the OAA-Tas. Premier Bacon stated the role of the LAF included improving coordination between the different levels of government, and to scope existing government-funded services in the trial area to identify resources and areas of need (Secretary, Department of Premier and Cabinet-Tasmania 2003 as quoted in ATSI SJC 2004, p. 249). The evaluation reported the LAF had a coordinating role and provided leadership, direction and problem-solving for the trial (Pugh 2006, p. 16).

The Inter-Governmental Coordinating Committee (IGCC) was comprised of senior officers, or their representatives from eight Australian Government and five State Government agencies. The Local Government Association of Tasmania (LGAT) was also represented (DIMIA 2005). The evaluation reported that the IGCC held four meetings per year, where government officials shared information, strategies and plans, to contribute to and enable the progress of the COAG Trial (Pugh 2006, p. 16). The evaluation found that the seniority of the officers that attended the IGCC meetings declined over time. It stated:

> In the beginning, heads of agencies or managers of divisions attended the meetings. With the progress of time, the personnel who represent the departments have changed and so levels of responsibility been devolved (Pugh 2006, p. 51).

In relation to the performance of these two intergovernmental committees, in April 2005, DIMIA reported to the Secretaries Group on Indigenous Affairs that “significant progress has
been made between the Australian and State Governments toward finding a way to work together on the trial” (DIMIA April 2005 in Senate Legal and Constitutional Legislation Committee 2006a) (my emphasis). DIMIA did not provide any detail to substantiate the claim of “significant progress” and it acknowledged that the central issue of multi-agency resourcing was yet to be resolved. It stated:

There is a genuine commitment from all IGCC member agencies to work with Aboriginal people within the trial site to address issues around the impact of family violence, although there are some resourcing issues to work through (Senate Legal and Constitutional Legislation Committee 2006a, Answers to Question Taken on Notice No. 282, Supplementary Budget Estimates Hearings, 1 November 2005, tabled in March 2006).

The evaluation findings on the degree of progress appear to contradict the DIMIA advice but its findings concurred with the unresolved resourcing issues. It found:

The progress of the COAG Trial has taken longer than originally hoped. The imperative is to speed things up whilst continuing to be sensitive to the concerns of the Aboriginal community. It is also imperative to respond to the Aboriginal community’s ideas and initiatives on programs to address family violence (Pugh 2006, p. 51).

There is no evidence in the evaluation that either the LAF or the IGCC had developed a strategy for a whole-of-government approach for the trial though the evaluation found this was an “essential goal” for the IGCC:

One essential goal of IGCC is to develop a coordinated strategic approach to build upon and continue the achievements of the COAG Trial, particularly because there is growing response by the Aboriginal community to be involved. The impetus is to progress a strategy building process that demonstrates whole of government and whole of community reciprocal effort (Pugh 2006, p. 52).
A rating of poor has been deemed because while two structures for government coordination had been established, there is no evidence in the evaluation that a strategy for a whole-of-government approach specifically for the trial was developed and implemented.

**FUNCTIONALITY – POOR**

**Implementation plan**

The evaluation reports that two project workers were appointed in 2003, one based in DPC-Tas and other in the Hobart ICC (Pugh 2006, p. 21). It found; “the project workers planned a five-phase strategy for implementing the COAG Trial” (Pugh 2006, p. 21). The phases were:

- Phase 1: Communication strategy
- Phase 2: Consolidating working groups
- Phase 3: Trial partners working together to develop strategies to address Aboriginal family violence in each of the Trial site locations
- Phase 4: Review and evaluation
- Phase 5: Signing of Shared Responsibility Agreements (SRAs) (Pugh 2006, p. 21).

The evaluation reports that a sixth phase was added in 2005 called “Implementation of Shared Responsibility Agreements (SRAs)” (Pugh 2006, p. 21). There is no further detail provided about the content of this implementation strategy. It is unknown if a more detailed operational document had been developed in relation to decision-making protocols, assigned responsibilities, budgets or timeframes. It is the skeleton for an implementation plan.

Overall, the evaluation evidence demonstrates that there was little progress in the trial beyond Phase 1, although a working group was established with one community in Launceston (representing a Phase 2 achievement) and two SRAs had been signed with one
small community group, the Cape Barren Island Aboriginal Association (representing a Phase 5 achievement) (Pugh 2006, pp. 22-25). There is no evidence the SRA’s were implemented.

A poor rating has been deemed because the skeleton for an implementation strategy cannot be equated with a detailed implementation plan focused on the Project’s two aims.

**FUNCTIONALITY – POOR**

**Mapping and developing whole-of-government funding arrangements**

The evaluation reports that a mapping exercise of relevant government services had been undertaken for the trial. It states:

> With the view that coordination of service delivery would lead to better outcomes for Aboriginal people, the IGCC mapped services across agencies that are relevant to addressing the issue of Aboriginal family violence (Pugh 2006, p. 52).

The evaluation does not elaborate on the content of this service-mapping or how it was employed to develop a whole-of-government approach to public expenditure for family violence services in the trial region. While a whole-of-government funding approach was not developed, it is evident that there was significant government expenditure for the Tasmanian trial.

DIMIA’s budgeted expenditure for the trial was reported to be $612,102\(^7\) from 1 July 2003 to 30 June 2006 (Senate Legal and Constitutional Legislation Committee 2006a). This amount does not include expenditure for the trial by the Tasmanian Government. It serves to illustrate that there was significant government expenditure for the Tasmanian trial, which could have been the subject of whole-of-government funding arrangements.

In summary, a rating of poor has been deemed because while the evaluation reports that a service-mapping exercise of family violence services was undertaken for the COAG trial, it

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\(^7\) Calculated by adding $327,784 + $34,318 + $140,000 + $10,500 + $199,500 = $612,102.
was not employed to develop a strategic approach to family violence services in the trial region.

FUNCTIONALITY – POOR

Protocols and dispute resolution

Approximately mid-way through the Tasmanian trial, in April 2005, DIMIA reported to the Secretaries Group on Indigenous Affairs that:

...significant progress has been made between the Australian and State Governments toward finding a way to work together on the trial. There is a genuine commitment from all IGCC member agencies to work with Aboriginal people within the trial site (DIMIA April 2005 in Senate Legal and Constitutional Legislation Committee 2006a).

Unfortunately, in its advice, DIMIA does not provide further detail about the “significant progress” that was reportedly made. Earlier discussion highlighted that two inter-governmental forums had been established, the LAF and the IGCC, but there is no evidence in the evaluation that they had established specific decision-making protocols to advance a whole-of-government approach to family violence services. Such protocols would include to multi-agency funding and accountability mechanisms.

The establishment of the Lead Agency Forum and the Inter-Governmental Coordinating Committee demonstrate the well-recognised capacity of government officials to build structures but this is not sufficient for a whole-of-government approach according to Dr Peter Shergold in evidence to a Senate Select Committee:

The point I made in my speech, which I strongly adhere to, is that complex problems, particularly in public policy, are rarely resolved by structures. Public servants are remarkably good at structures. Put public servants together for half an hour and they can rearrange the boxes very easily. They can create new departments, create new agencies and shuffle the divisions around. In my experience, it is never the solution ... we have to link the
whole together, and that is why my view is that the way we need to do it is not by creating new structures or new boxes. That is only a part of the solution. The key is to change the culture of how public servants deliver public policy (Senate Select Committee on the Administration of Indigenous Affairs, Hansard, 8 February 2005, p. 2).

The evaluation of the Tasmanian trial reports that “partnership agreement protocols” had been established during 2004 (Pugh 2006, pp. 9, 26 & 45). However, the evaluation does not describe the protocols. It is unclear what protocols the evaluation is referring to but it appears the reference may have been to the protocols applied to develop the State’s family violence report and the emerging protocols for Shared Responsibility Agreements as part of the so-called New Arrangements for Indigenous Affairs. If this is correct, the protocols for Shared Responsibility Agreements and the family violence report consultations are vastly different to the type of protocols that would support a whole-of-government approach. The SRA’s usually involved a single issue, rarely involved more than one government department and were uniquely for Commonwealth Government funding. In this respect, the evaluator described the circumstances she was presented with during interviews with the Flinders Island Aboriginal Association Inc. (FIAAI) at Lady Barron:

When the project workers and the evaluation consultant arrived for the focus group for this review at the FIAAI, Lady Barron, there was an air of tension amongst the group. There had been difficulties in negotiations for working together in relation to the COAG Trial. How do these difficulties arise? How do communities understand SRAs? The questions that the community members were asking at Lady Barron were:

- What was permissible for an SRA and what was not?
- Was COAG about services that are not currently provided, for instance, even if TAC is funded to provide them?
- Were SRAs meant to include services that should not be provided elsewhere?
- If a service was not being provided by a particular body, could funding be transferred from that body and have it provided with SRAs where partners are bound to stand by it?

- Why has the process with the COAG Trial taken so long (Pugh 2006, p. 44)?

The community member’s questions illustrate the protocols for the development of SRA’s were unclear. Another protocol issue identified early in the Tasmanian trial was the different definitions of Aboriginality, which the Commonwealth and State Government’s applied in determining eligibility for public-funded services (Pugh 2006, p. 7). In its mid-trial advice to the Secretaries Group on Indigenous Affairs, DIMIA pointed to the issue as a barrier to government coordination but it does not provide any examples of how it acted as a barrier during the trial (DIMIA April 2005). The evaluation found the issue had not been resolved by the trial:

The COAG Trial in Tasmania has travelled a difficult journey. It has met barriers that seem not traversable, such as the issue of Aboriginality and loss of trust by Aboriginal people in governments. The advantage the COAG Trial has, is that these barriers are not down to the Trial. They exist in the general state of community and government affairs (Pugh 2006, p. 73).

Finally, there is no evidence that dispute resolution processes had been established for the trial, for either government-government disputes or government-community disputes. The evidence indicates appropriate protocols were not developed for the Tasmanian trial.

FUNCTIONALITY – POOR

**Realistic timeframes**

There is no evidence in the evaluation that the five-phase implementation plan included realistic timeframes. Overall, the evaluation found:

The progress of the COAG Trial has taken longer than originally hoped (Pugh 2006, p. 51).
There are several indicators in the evaluation that the setting of realistic timeframes may have avoided stress and disappointment for some government and community partners. For example, in relation to the trial’s only SRA (signed in July 2005) that involved specific government commitments, that is, the development of a community health and well-being centre, the evaluation reported:

There was delay [and] delay. There is a barge only every four or five weeks to bring building materials and furniture and so on. At the eleventh hour, FaCSIA said, hold it. We said, we couldn’t. It’s too late. The architect had arranged everything ready to go. Purposes agreements were wanted. This was stressful and difficult for the community (Pugh 2006, p. 43).

As another example of problems arising from poor timeframe setting, the evaluation reported that a “two-day taster program” designed to promote personal healing from family violence and train Aboriginal people to support their community to heal was held during 2004 (Pugh 2006, p. 38). The Aboriginal women who attended “expected they would continue to attend the program in 2005 for nine spaced, one-day training sessions for each of four modules” but the “program was delayed” (Pugh 2006, p. 39). One of the participants in the program stated:

[The pilot program] was part of the COAG Trial. We wanted the course to go ahead. We were disappointed. We wanted to do the course and then become accredited trainers ... The program has the potential for community members to work together, strengthening each other (Pugh 2006, p. 39).

The evaluation concluded:

Government support for the program has continued though action has taken place very slowly (Pugh 2006, p. 39).

For these reasons, a rating of poor has been deemed.

FUNCTIONALITY – POOR
Risk assessment

There is no evidence in the evaluation that the lead agencies undertook a risk assessment for the development of a whole-of-government approach to family violence-related services in the trial region.

FUNCTIONALITY – POOR

Trust and collaboration between the agencies

It is arguable that the establishment of the LAF and the IGCC, described earlier, are indications of a collaborative culture between the agencies. However, there is no evidence in the evaluation how either of these intergovernmental committees worked collaboratively for the benefit of achieving the two aims of the COAG Project. The lack of appropriate protocols for the trial supports this contention. It is suggested the committees were an example of Dr Shergold’s assertion that public servants are good at creating structures but “it is never the solution … we have to link the whole together … [T]he key is to change the culture of how public servants deliver public policy” (Senate Select Committee on the Administration of Indigenous Affairs, Hansard, 8 February 2005, p. 2).

The evaluation reports that the Commonwealth and State Government officials were presented with an early litmus test on trust and collaboration. The test was in relation to the scope of the Tasmanian COAG Trial; whether it was to be state-wide or focused on the north-east region. The evaluation stated:

Meetings on the COAG Trial began between Commonwealth and State Governments in Tasmania late in 2002. Each government was approaching the COAG Trial with different emphases. The Commonwealth Government wanted to focus the COAG Trial in the north-east of the state where there was a higher and less scattered number of Aboriginal people living. The State preferred a whole of state approach. As mentioned earlier, this was perhaps because the State Government was proceeding with its response
The State Government conceded and the scope of the trial was declared to be the north-east region of the State. The Commonwealth also insisted that the membership of the Aboriginal partners (the recently appointed family violence committee) be revised for the role as advisory group to the COAG trial. Evidently, the State Government trusted the Commonwealth Government’s judgement on this issue however it prompted a renege of an earlier agreement with Tasmanian Aboriginal representatives on the scope of the trial and the composition of the Aboriginal partners to the trial. At the time, the Aboriginal partner’s “anger was strongly indignant” (Pugh 2006, p. 21) and three years later, in a focus group for the evaluation of the trial, the community were still frustrated with the reneging. The evaluation states:

In the review focus group, they expressed the frustration that very little seems to have been properly achieved so far, with sustainable effect, to draw their community out of disenfranchisement, poverty, dependence or low self-confidence. They seemed weary. They were confused about the purpose of the COAG Trial and why the ya pulingina kani Group, appointed and supported by the State Government, had not been properly recognised and invited, as an active group, in a key advisory role to the Trial processes. They expressed doubt and lack of faith that what governments initiate will be followed through (Pugh 2006, p. 59).

The scenario demonstrates that in the pursuit of a whole-of-government approach in Indigenous affairs, a joint agreement between the two governmental jurisdictions is not sufficient for a collaborative and trustful culture if the Aboriginal representatives do not also agree on the same terms. It can impact on the capacity to achieve outcomes. A rating of poor has been deemed because there was a lack of strategy to implement this key characteristic.

FUNCTIONALITY – POOR
Skills training

There is no evidence in the evaluation that any government officials involved in the trial underwent training in how to develop a whole-of-government approach.

FUNCTIONALITY – POOR

Performance monitoring

In April 2005, DIMIA advised the Secretaries Group on Indigenous Affairs:

...a monitoring and evaluation framework is being refined to support the work being conducted in each location (DIMIA 2005 in Senate Legal and Constitutional Legislation Committee 2006a).

This suggests that a monitoring framework for the Tasmanian trial had been developed and was being experimented in each location. However, in March 2006, DIMIA tabled a written answer to a question taken on notice from a Senate Supplementary Budget Estimates Hearing, 1 November 2005, which clearly stated that performance indicators had not been developed for the trial. The written question and answer is reproduced here:

**Question (10):** Has the Department identified performance indicators for the trial?

**Answer (10):** No. (Senate Legal and Constitutional Legislation Committee 2006a)

In relation to why not, the Senate Committee’s question and DIMIA’s complete answer is reproduced here to demonstrate the reasoning:

**Question (12):** If not, when will these be set? What is the reason for the delay?

**Answer (12):** The COAG Trials are based on a set of general objectives which include better coordination of programs and services, and the tailoring of government programs and services to the needs of communities.
Given the nature of these objectives, a set of specific performance indicators (such as those used to evaluate traditional government programs) is not appropriate for measuring the Trials’ effectiveness. Measurement of progress will need to be largely qualitative, and is best addressed through the evaluation process now in train.

Existing government programs within the Trial site continue to have their own performance indicators which reflect the aims of these programs (Senate Legal and Constitutional Legislation Committee 2006a).

Essentially, DIMIA’s reasoning for not developing a set of performance indicators to measure trial progress is not convincing. DIMIA incorrectly reasoned that the aims of the COAG Trials Project were so general in nature that they could not be measured. It then contradicts itself by acknowledging that qualitative measures could have been employed, and would be employed for the forthcoming evaluation. It then points to internal, singular program procedures as an adequate substitute, which contradicts the aim of a whole-of-government approach to ensure accountability for overall outcomes. It is contended that DIMIA has presented an unconvincing set of reasons for the failure to implement processes that would have monitored its own performance and demonstrated the progress of the trial.

Finally, the evaluation of the Tasmanian trial recommended twelve separate indicators that could be employed or could have been employed to measure the success of the trial (Pugh 2006, pp. 72-73). It is a useful and insightful list. It challenges DIMIA’s reasoning for not monitoring the performance of the Tasmanian trial. If the evaluator was able to produce such a list of performance indicators, it is difficult to understand why DIMIA could not. The evaluator also recommended the Productivity Commission’s Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage Framework could provide guidance to develop indicators for baseline and performance monitoring reports (Pugh 2006, p. 10).
There was no performance monitoring mechanism for the trial and therefore a rating of poor has been deemed.

FUNCTIONALITY – POOR

**Baseline data**

At a Senate Supplementary Estimates Hearing on 1 November 2005, DIMIA was issued the following two-part *Question on Notice No. 282 subsection (5)*:

**Question 282(5):** Has the Department identified a baseline data (e.g. school attendance figures, incidence of disease, etc) for use in measuring the success of the trial? When was this dataset formally agreed on? (Senate Legal and Constitutional Legislation Committee 2006a)

In March 2006, DIMIA tabled its written response, notably the second part of the question was not directly answered:

**Answer 282(5):** A *baseline profile* of the Tasmanian COAG Trial Site developed during the first six months of the Tasmanian Trial is provided in response to Question 240. It is important to note that often the samples are numerically small, and therefore may be statistically unreliable, and there are some data integrity issues. The Trial’s Inter-Governmental Co-ordinating Committee has considered this material, in addition to which several member agencies have presented their respective data baselines for discussion.

Importantly, the working focus of the Trial is on improving processes of effective and respectful communication, and effective engagement (in Senate Legal and Constitutional Legislation Committee 2006a) (*my emphasis*).

The “baseline profile” referred to by DIMIA is detailed and comprehensive. DIMIA states it was developed in the first six months of the trial however it does not state when the dataset was formally agreed on by all the partners. It appears an agreement between the partners had not been reached and this may explain why it was not implemented. Surprisingly, the
evaluation makes no reference to the DIMIA-developed baseline profile. Rather, it suggests the evaluation itself has produced some measures of performance for the trial and the proposed second stage evaluation. It states:

Some useful benchmarks emerge from the formative and qualitative nature of the review. These could contribute to a framework for testing the viability of projects and agreements, monitoring performance and reporting. Such a framework could be useful for evaluating the COAG Trial in 2007-08 (Pugh 2006, p. 72).

The evidence indicates that a set of baseline data indicators were not employed to measure the progress of the trial.

FUNCTIONALITY – POOR
Summary of analysis of whole-of-government coordination

The Tasmanian trial’s progress towards whole-of-government coordination is given a satisfactory rating for one key characteristic and poor ratings for the other eleven (see Table 19).

Table 19: Ratings for the key characteristics of whole-of-government coordination, Tasmanian COAG trial

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>KEY CHARACTERISTIC</th>
<th>RATING</th>
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<tr>
<td>Lead agencies</td>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
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<tr>
<td>Framework agreement</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joint steering committee</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implementation plan</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mapping whole-of-government expenditure</td>
<td>Poor</td>
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<tr>
<td>Protocols and dispute resolution process</td>
<td>Poor</td>
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<td>Realistic timeframes</td>
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<td>Risk assessment</td>
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<td>Trust and collaboration</td>
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<td>Skills Training</td>
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<td>Performance Monitoring</td>
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<td>Baseline data</td>
<td>Poor</td>
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Part B. Quality of the government-community partnership

This Part appraises how the aim for a government-community partnership was approached in the Tasmanian COAG trial. The appraisal considers what occurred in the trial against twelve key characteristics of such an approach, which were drawn-up earlier in this chapter.

The right partners

DIMIA and DPC-Tas were the respective Commonwealth and State Government partners to the Tasmanian trial. In the context of the COAG Trials Project, these agencies were appropriate partners. In relation to the Aboriginal partners, the evaluation clearly states the Commonwealth Government and Tasmanian Governments had agreed with the members of the Indigenous Family Violence Aboriginal Advisory Committee (IFVAAC) that it would fulfil the role as the formal Aboriginal partners to guide the overall conduct of the Tasmanian trial (Pugh 2006, p. 28). However, as described earlier, the evaluation reports that the two Governments reneged on this agreement.

At a subsequent meeting with the Tasmanian Government, the Commonwealth “suggested that the IFVAAC was inadequately representative of Aboriginal people in Tasmania and argued for wider representation” (Pugh 2006, p. 28) (my emphasis). The Commonwealth’s argument for “wider representation” seems unusual because it was seeking to narrow the scope of the trial from state-wide to the north-east corner of the State. Nevertheless, the Governments unilaterally changed the membership of the Aboriginal partners to the trial.

On 21 July 2003, five weeks before the media announcement of the Tasmanian COAG trial, Commonwealth and Tasmanian Government officials attended a meeting, which was the first meeting of the original IFVAAC. The Governments’ officials advised the meeting of the new selection process, the intended approach for a Tasmanian COAG trial and that they were seeking endorsement to proceed. It must have come as a surprise to the committee members who learned they were no longer deemed to be committee members for the
purposes of the COAG trial. The evaluation found the Aboriginal community members were angered and disillusioned with the COAG trial stating; “The anger was strongly indignant” (Pugh 2006, p. 21). Some objected, some were offended and many walked out of the meeting. There is no evidence that the community gave their endorsement to proceed with the trial (Pugh 2006, p. 21).

It appears that the IFVAAC withdrew from the COAG trial but continued to focus on working with the Tasmanian Government. The evaluation does not explicitly state that the IFVAAC was thereafter no longer an official partner of the Tasmanian COAG trial, but it is inferred. The evaluation reported that the IFVAAC soon after became the ‘ya pulingina kani Group’ and the Tasmanian Government provided secretariat services for the Group to fulfil this role, as originally recommended in the Report (Pugh 2006, p. 30).

This seems to be a plausible explanation as to why there were no Aboriginal representatives at the joint media announcement of the Tasmanian COAG trial held by Minister Ruddock and Premier Bacon. In the alternative to partnering with the IFVAAC, it is evident that the Commonwealth and State Government COAG-trial officials pursued avenues to develop relationships with Aboriginal communities at a more local level. This approach eliminated the opportunity for formal Aboriginal partners to share the governance of and strategically influence the conduct of the overall trial.

Under the new approach, the Governments reportedly retained the family violence theme for the trial. The evaluation reports that many Aboriginal communities were formally informed about the COAG trial as part of Phase 1, and some communities were even consulted for specific initiatives, but none of the cited instances equate to the appointment of Aboriginal partners for the overall conduct of the trial. The kind of relationship pursued was more akin to the traditional consultation model that COAG was intending to reform. In
2005, DIMIA reported that they had developed a consultation strategy rather than a formal partnership with the Aboriginal people of the trial region:

To date, the IGCC has agreed on a consultation strategy and how they can work together in engaging Aboriginal people in the trial site (DIMIA 2005 in Senate Legal and Constitutional Legislation Committee 2006a).

Interestingly, in the final months of the trial the Tasmanian Government was attempting to bring a number of stakeholders together including the COAG Trial and the *ya pulingina kani* Group:

Now at the time of writing [mid-2006], the State government is bringing together the *ya pulingina kani* Group, Safe at Home and the COAG Trial to explore possibilities for working together (Pugh 2006, p. 31).

This discussion has highlighted that there was an early agreement on the government and community partners to the trial but following the Commonwealth’s insistence to revise the membership of the IFVAAC, there were no Aboriginal partners to the trial in the sense intended by COAG. A rating of poor has been deemed.

FUNCTIONALITY – POOR

**Partnership agreement**

There was no partnership agreement signed between the Governments and the communities for the conduct of the Tasmanian trial even though the evaluation reports that there was an early agreement between a set of partners for the Tasmanian trial. The circumstances described in the immediately preceding key characteristic associated with the Commonwealth prompting a change in the membership of the IFVAAC, and the undesirable manner in which it asserted the scope and theme of the COAG trial, may be interpreted, amongst other things, as a demonstration of the risks of not formalising a partnership agreement.
In the alternative to a partnership agreement for the overall trial, the evaluation reports that two Shared Responsibility Agreements were signed, both with the Cape Barren Island Association. It may be argued that this is evidence of a partnership agreement in the context of the Tasmanian trial. However, the nature of Shared Responsibility Agreements is not a partnership in the sense that COAG originally intended because they were mainly one-off, single-issue agreements and involved only Commonwealth funding whereas the partnerships envisaged by COAG involved sustainable, strategic relationships over a wide range of services across jurisdictions. In any event, only the second SRA that was signed during the Tasmanian trial involved a formal commitment, namely the development of a health and well-being centre, but there is no evidence in the evaluation that this commitment was fulfilled.

A rating of poor has been deemed because a partnership agreement was not successfully negotiated for the overall trial.

FUNCTIONALITY – POOR

**Joint steering committee**

There is no evidence in the evaluation that a joint steering committee comprised of Commonwealth, State Government and Aboriginal representatives was established as a partnership to govern the overall conduct of the Tasmanian trial.

FUNCTIONALITY – POOR

**Steering committee authority, vertically and horizontally**

There is no evidence that a steering committee was established.

FUNCTIONALITY – POOR
Respect for the partners’ value frameworks

The appraisal for this characteristic searched for evidence of an explicit commitment and demonstrations by the partners to respect each other’s value frameworks.

There were no formal statements of commitment to respect the partners’ value frameworks for the specific context of the Tasmanian COAG trial. It may be implied that the Commonwealth Government at the national-level demonstrated such respect through the establishment of the COAG Trials Project as a centrepiece of its response to Aboriginal Reconciliation, particularly the adoption of the partnership principle. It may be implied that the Tasmanian Government’s progress of the family violence strategy, prior to and parallel with, the COAG trial had built some trust with Aboriginal community members through respectful interactions. Although, not an acknowledgment specifically made for the COAG trial, the evaluation also reports that the tenth goal of the Tasmanian Government’s long-term strategic plan, Tasmania Together, is to:

...acknowledge and respect the contribution that the Aboriginal community and its culture have made and continue to make to Tasmania and its identity; and

...enhance the participation of Aboriginal people in decision-making to meet the needs of the Aboriginal community and respect the rights of Aboriginal people to self-determination (Pugh 2006, p. 14).

At a more practical level, it may be argued that the trial’s two project workers sought to respect the value frameworks of the various local communities by recognising them and consulting with them in their locality. Two SRA’s were also successfully negotiated with the Cape Barren Island Association. However, overall the evidence in the evaluation illustrates that the Aboriginal community members felt disrespected by the COAG trial.

The circumstances described earlier regarding the effective dissolution of the role of the IFVAAC in the trial may be viewed as a demonstration by the Governments, particularly the
Commonwealth, of disrespect for the value framework of the Aboriginal members of the Committee. Aboriginal people who were at the meeting on 21 July 2003 told the evaluator:

- There was lack of respect given to IFVAAC members, a lack of listening to what they actually were saying.
- The Commonwealth process was offending IFVAAC members and the process that had gone into forming it (Pugh 2006, p. 29).

The evaluation also presented the evidence it received from a government-based Aboriginal field worker about the so-called New Arrangements for Indigenous Affairs, which became a feature of the Tasmanian trial:

The playing field isn’t level. It’s not an inclusive approach. It’s dominating, disciplinary, and disrespectful. Even members of the community in government are losing their souls. People won’t go the whole nine yards again because of their family, their family’s children, and their health. I’m going back to my own.

I feel turmoil. We’re losing our identity; it’s being chipped away. We don’t know what to do about it collectively. I feel shackled that we can’t do more, new things, be creative to create employment. I can’t go through [that] again. A new person might be able to work with all this. I can’t. It’s too big a change for my generation. It was not easy before. It’s just not comfortable – practically begging for SRAs (Pugh 2006, p. 50).

The evaluation noted that despite the difficulties, Aboriginal people were still prepared to work with government:

The people who spoke for this review want governments and the Aboriginal community to come round the table, and with respect for each other’s views and perspectives, talk about and plan ways to prevent and reduce violence in the Tasmanian Aboriginal community. Some people said this coming-together would not be possible, others said it would never happen (Pugh 2006, p. 53).
In 2005, DIMIA reported that the Tasmanian trial’s Inter-Governmental Coordinating Committee had:

...undergone cultural awareness training and each member agency has committed to providing its operational staff with similar training to enhance work with community trial partners (DIMIA 2005 in Senate Legal and Constitutional Legislation Committee 2006a).

The evaluator reports her investigation adopted the protocols that she applied in the processes to produce the *ya pulingina kani - Good To See You Talk* report on family violence in 2002, to “honour the ethics of hearing and interpreting the stories of people’s lives, beliefs, values and views” (Pugh 2006, p. 3).

In summary, there were no explicit commitments by the partners to respecting each other’s value frameworks however, overall the evidence in the evaluation illustrates that the Aboriginal community members felt disrespected by the COAG trial.

**FUNCTIONALITY – POOR**

*Trust and collaboration between governments and community*

The evaluation reports the Commonwealth Government and Tasmanian Governments had agreed to partner with the Indigenous Family Violence Aboriginal Advisory Committee (IFVAAC) to conduct a state-wide COAG trial with the focus on family violence issues (Pugh 2006, p. 28). However, as briefly referred to earlier, the two Governments reneged on this agreement. The circumstances in which this occurred are relevant to this key characteristic.

The Commonwealth Government prompted the renege of the original agreement because it wanted to change the scope of the Tasmanian trial from state-wide to only the north-east region of Tasmania. It also wanted to change the membership of the IFVAAC if it was to remain the Aboriginal partner to the trial. These changes were problematic because the Tasmanian Government’s recently-endorsed family violence policy was state-wide and the
membership of the Indigenous Family Violence Aboriginal Advisory Committee (IFVAAC) had already been finalised.

The selection process for the IFVAAC ensured it had some credibility. It was a state-wide, open invitation for expressions of interest with final selection by State Government officials. Eight members, all skilled and dedicated to addressing family violence issues, were selected. Despite this, based on the Commonwealth’s insistence, the two Governments undertook a new selection process on a “whiteboard” (Pugh 2006, p. 28). The evaluation described the process:

At the meeting, ATSIS and OAA listed their names on the whiteboard. It was noted that some of those nominated had not yet personally agreed. Some of the original eight selected through OAA were not selected again. Also some of those selected did not accept their invitation to join the advisory group (Pugh 2006, p. 28).

On 21 July 2003, the Commonwealth and Tasmanian Government officials attended the inaugural meeting of the original IFVAAC. It was five weeks before the government-only joint media announcement of the Tasmanian COAG trial. The Governments’ officials advised the meeting that there had been a new selection process for the IFVAAC and how the Tasmanian COAG trial was going to proceed. They were seeking the meeting’s endorsement to proceed. It must have come as a surprise to the committee members who learned they were no longer deemed to be committee members for the purposes of the COAG trial. The evaluation found the Aboriginal community members were angered and disillusioned with the COAG trial officials. It wrote; “The anger was strongly indignant” (Pugh 2006, p. 21). The evaluation further reported:

Some members voiced their objection to the way the selection process took place. They also objected to the proposal by the Commonwealth that the Trial site be confined to the north-east of Tasmania ...
A number of people walked out of the meeting. Those remaining were asked to vote on the location of the COAG Trial site. There was no longer a quorum of members in the room. At interviews for this COAG Trial Report, Aboriginal people who attended this IFVAAC meeting recalled that:

- The meeting went horribly wrong.
- There were misunderstandings about what the committee would be doing and about the COAG Trial.
- There was lack of respect given to IFVAAC members, a lack of listening to what they actually were saying.
- The Commonwealth process was offending IFVAAC members and the process that had gone into forming it.
- That [the process] is why some Aboriginal community people declined the invitation to go on IFVACC.

IFVAAC members had left the meeting in confusion and frustration (Pugh 2006, p. 29).

The evaluation’s account of the meeting then continued:

Those remaining were asked to vote on the location of the COAG Trial site. There was no longer a quorum of members in the room …

Aboriginal people expressed their belief that the decision about the location of the Trial site had not been agreed upon with the Aboriginal community and neither was the theme of family violence agreed (Pugh 2006, pp. 28-29).

It is evident the revised selection process for the family violence committee contradicted the Tasmanian Premier’s earlier commitment to implementing the recommendations in the family violence strategy. The evaluation does not explicitly state that the IFVAAC was thereafter no longer the official Aboriginal partner of the Tasmanian COAG trial, but it is inferred. It appears that the IFVAAC withdrew from the COAG trial but continued to focus on working with the Tasmanian Government. The evaluation reported that the IFVAAC soon
after became the ‘ya pulingina kani Group’ and the Tasmanian Government provided secretariat services for the Group to fulfil this role, as originally recommended in the Report (Pugh 2006, p. 30).

The evaluator conducted a focus group with community members as part of its review. Under the heading, “Loss of trust in governments”, the evaluation states:

Some three years after the COAG Trial started, it is important to acknowledge the anger and disillusionment with the COAG Trial that Aboriginal people expressed during the interviews for this review. The anger was strongly indignant. The loss of community support that occurred at the beginning of the Trial contributed to the slow difficult start that the project workers faced (Pugh 2006, p. 21).

The evaluation highlighted the community were not just angry and disillusioned:

In the review focus group, they expressed the frustration that very little seems to have been properly achieved so far, with sustainable effect, to draw their community out of disenfranchisement, poverty, dependence or low self-confidence. They seemed weary. They were confused about the purpose of the COAG Trial and why the ya pulingina kani Group, appointed and supported by the State Government, had not been properly recognised and invited, as an active group, in a key advisory role to the Trial processes. They expressed doubt and lack of faith that what governments initiate will be followed through. They told of their fear of being “assimilated” again through some kind of government guile. They were worried about the capacity of their own community groups and organisations to support and sustain Shared Responsibility Agreements (Pugh 2006, p. 60).

The evaluation also presented evidence from the government officials on the trial’s Lead Agency Forum who felt some trust had been rebuilt over the latter stages of the trial:

They believe that the project workers and the review process have built a certain level of trust in the COAG Trial. The next step is to take advantage of this and progress new ideas (Pugh 2006, p. 52).
The dissolution of the IFVAAC as a formal partner to the trial and the subsequent traditional consultative relationship with the local communities warrants a poor rating.

FUNCTIONALITY – POOR

Protocols for shared decision-making power and dispute resolution

The evaluation found that the trial had “established” a set of “partnership agreement protocols” (Pugh 2006, p. 9). The evaluation does not describe these protocols but there are indications that it is referring to the emerging protocols associated with the negotiation and implementation of the Commonwealth Government’s new Shared Responsibility Agreements. As demonstrated earlier, SRAs cannot be regarded as akin to the partnership arrangements envisaged by the relevant literature, policy statements at the time and COAG.

FUNCTIONALITY – POOR

Shared objectives and desired outcomes

There was no partnership agreement between government and community representatives for a set of shared objectives and desired outcomes for the Tasmanian trial.

FUNCTIONALITY – POOR

Role clarity and early detailed planning

There was no partnership agreement for which role clarity and early detailed planning between the partners was required.

FUNCTIONALITY – POOR

Sustained operation and membership of steering committee

There is no evidence a joint steering committee was established for the trial.

FUNCTIONALITY – POOR
Shared responsibility for whole-of-government expenditure in the trial region

There is no evidence a joint steering committee was established for the trial.

FUNCTIONALITY – POOR

Full access to information

There is no evidence a joint steering committee was established for the trial.

FUNCTIONALITY – POOR

Summary of analysis of government-community partnership

The Tasmanian trial's progress towards a government-community partnership is given poor ratings for all twelve key characteristics (see Table 20).

Table 20: Ratings for the key characteristics of government-community partnership, Tasmanian COAG trial

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>KEY CHARACTERISTIC</th>
<th>RATING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Right partners</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partnership agreement</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joint steering committee</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steering committee authority</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respect for partners’ values</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust and collaboration</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protocols for shared power</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared objectives and shared outcomes</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role clarity and early planning</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sustained operation and membership</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared responsibility for expenditure</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full access to information</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In contrast to the evaluations of the other trial sites, the Tasmanian evaluation paid greater attention to the personal dimensions of a government-community partnership such as the quality of ‘trust’ between the governments and the Aboriginal communities. This was a valuable measure of the quality of the trial’s partnerships.

The evaluation presented a detailed and frank description of the circumstances that led to the formation and, shortly thereafter, the breakdown of the partnership between the Governments’ lead agencies and the Aboriginal partners (the Indigenous Family Violence Aboriginal Advisory Committee) to oversee the trial (Pugh 2006, pp. 27-31). It found the communities’ distrust and disappointment of the breakdown of the partnership was still strongly felt in the concluding stages of the trial. Its evidence suggests the trial was unable to generate momentum following the breakdown.

The evaluation also described some government and community interaction in several communities and presented this as evidence of partnership-building. It reported that some of the local-level interactions involved discussions towards the signing of an SRA.\(^8\) Again, the evaluation presented illustrative evidence related to the personal dimensions and the nature of the partnership to highlight some inadequacies but it did not assess these interactions against the characteristics of a strategic government-community partnership. A local-level arrangement is not equivalent to a joint partnership responsible for the overall conduct of the trial.

The evaluation lacked a strong technical assessment of which key characteristics of a GCP were present, which may be indicative of the lack of attention to them in the trial therefore the evaluation findings provide some corroboration for the conclusions of this analysis.

\(^8\)It has been suggested earlier that the signing of an SRA was not the kind of strategic partnerships that COAG envisaged when it established the Trials Project.
Part C. Quality of social and economic improvements

There is no evidence in the evaluation that demonstrates measured socio-economic improvements for the population of the trial region attributable to the work of the trial. The evaluation lists a number of “achievements” from the trial (Pugh 2006, p. 8):

- Held meetings in six different local communities about the COAG trial;
- Signed an SRA with the Cape Barren Island community for the development of a community health and wellbeing centre, and implementation is underway;
- Commenced negotiations to identify funding for the pre-existing *meenah mienne* arts mentoring project for youth at risk in Launceston. An SRA was expected to be signed by September 2006, though it was signed on 8 August 2008;
- A lunchtime program for Aboriginal school students was conducted at St Helens to assist understanding of cultural and social issues that affect their well-being;
- Conducted and evaluated a two-day “taster program” of a family violence healing program in Launceston (Pugh 2006, p. 39). The Aboriginal women who attended “expected they would continue to attend the program in 2005 for nine spaced, one-day training sessions for each of four modules” but the “program was delayed” (Pugh 2006, p. 39); and
- Some consideration was given to exploring the potential for an accredited family well-being training program to be delivered through TAFE in Launceston (Pugh 2006, p. 8).

These ‘achievements’ cannot be regarded as evidence of measured socio-economic improvements. They should be regarded as evidence of government outputs and are minimal in nature relative to the promise of the overall COAG Trials Project. It is argued that these ‘achievements’ could have occurred without the national framework of the COAG Trials Project.
Conclusion – Tasmania

In relation to the achievement of whole-of-government coordination, there is a satisfactory rating for one key characteristic and poor ratings for the remaining eleven. In relation to the achievement of a government-community partnership, there are poor ratings for all twelve key characteristics. There is no evidence of measured socioeconomic improvements attributed to the trial.

The lack of a framework agreement underlies the twenty-three poor ratings.
New South Wales

Part A. Quality of whole-of-government coordination

This Part appraises how the aim for whole-of-government coordination was pursued in the New South Wales COAG trial. The appraisal considers what occurred in the trial against twelve key characteristics of such an approach, which were drawn-up earlier in this chapter.

Lead agencies

The lead agencies for the New South Wales trial were the Commonwealth Government Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) and the New South Wales Department of Education and Training (DET-NSW), with Dr Jeff Harmer, Secretary of DEST as the Commonwealth trial ‘sponsor’ and Jan McClelland, Director General of DET. The agencies retained this role for the duration of the trial though the heads of both Departments changed during the trial with Lisa Paul replacing Dr Harmer and Andrew Cappie-Wood replacing Jan McClelland. There is no evidence in the evaluation regarding the manner of the handover, particularly for the Commonwealth trial ‘sponsor’, or if the changes impacted on the progress of the trial.

It is evident the lead agencies saw the need for a strategic approach in the very early stages of the trial. For example, they successfully negotiated with all the partners an overarching formal agreement for the trial and established an Action Team to administer the trial. The Murdi Paaki Action Team was comprised of two full-time officers, one from DEST and one from DET-NSW. Both were based in Dubbo, which was outside of the trial region. An official from the Bourke office of ATSIS (then ICC), which was within the trial region, had some partial responsibility (Urbis Keys Young 2006a, p. i) and from 2005, an official from the Bourke office of DAA-NSW became a member of the Action Team (Urbis Keys Young 2006a, p. 15).
The Action Team had two roles; 1) the point of contact for the Aboriginal communities involved in the trial, and 2) it was responsible for coordinating whole-of-government responses to identified priorities (Urbis Keys Young 2006, p. 9). The evaluation found the Action Team was effective in the first role but had struggled to fulfil the second role, which is the subject of this discussion. It found the trial did not achieve a whole-of-government approach to servicing the Indigenous needs of the region:

While substantial improvements were noted in communication/collaboration between governments, government stakeholders acknowledged that these gains were yet to translate into more sustained, flexible, whole of government approaches leading to improved service delivery, of the type envisaged by the COAG mandate in the establishment of the trials (Urbis Keys Young 2006a, p. 16).

The evaluation broadly described the difficulties that were faced:

Many departments were said to have found it difficult to adopt the whole of government approach required in addressing Indigenous disadvantage. Most of those interviewed ascribed such difficulties to organisational and cultural barriers within bureaucracy, rather than anything directly associated with the Murdi Paaki COAG Trial (Urbis Keys Young 2006a, p. 26) (my emphasis).

The evaluation points to the difficulties of “organisational and cultural barriers within the bureaucracy” as the reason for not achieving a whole-of-government approach. However, these were the foreseeable difficulties that the trials were established to focus on and overcome. The evaluation does not describe any specific actions that were undertaken by the lead agencies to attempt to overcome the organisational and cultural barriers. Rather, the evidence indicates that the lead agencies paid insufficient attention to devising “new ways of working together” (Urbis Keys Young 2006a, p. 2), despite it being central to COAG’s original intent for the Trials Project. An indication is the complete absence of reference to the aim for a whole-of-government approach in the trial’s overarching framework.
agreement (Harmer et al 22 August 2003; Paul et al 3 December 2004). Further, the evaluation found the culture of the trial was not conducive to the aim of whole-of-government coordination:

...stakeholder feedback indicates that continuing cultural change at virtually all levels of the bureaucracy was required if a whole-of-government approach was to be sustained (Urbis Keys Young 2006a, p. 29).

Specifically, the evaluation reported:

People consulted in various communities in 2005 referred to the apparent lack of coordination between or even within government agencies, and gave some examples of decisions that seemed arbitrary and did not reflect any local community input. It was said that grants of funds, for example, might be made to communities in pursuit of agency programs or priorities of one kind or another, but without reflecting local needs or opportunities as people in the community saw them. In smaller communities it appeared that shortcomings in agency co-ordination has tended to lead to an under-supply of services; in larger centres there was in some situations a duplication of services or functions resulting from a lack of effective inter-agency co-operation (Urbis Keys Young 2006a, p. 28).

As with most of the other trial sites, the establishment of the OIPC on 1 July 2004, with its national responsibility for whole-of-government coordination in Indigenous affairs, added a further complication to the lead agency role for trial. The evaluation found:

At the Commonwealth level, a number of people saw the new arrangements in Indigenous affairs as adding another layer of complexity to the work of the Murdi Paaki Trial. OIPC’s involvement in the Trial tends to be seen by community representatives at this stage as bringing additional bureaucracy without any obvious benefits in improved coordination and service delivery (Urbis Keys Young 2006a, p. 29).

In this respect, the evaluation reported:
...concerns were expressed that OIPC (and the local ICC) has devoted too much attention to the development of SRAs, perhaps at the expense of the working relationships between government and community built up through the Trial outside of the SRA context (Urbis Keys Young 2006a, p. 15).

The evaluation commented on the comparative performance of the two lead agencies:

As a number of people saw it, there appears to be some contrast between the involvement of the two lead agencies over the Trial’s history. While DEST was said to be actively involved from the very beginning, it took some time for the NSW Government to fully recognise DET’s lead role in the Trial (Urbis Keys Young 2006a, p. 14).

The evidence points to the border-line of a poor rating because there was a remarkable lack of strategy by the lead agencies to enable a whole-of-government approach to the trial. However, a rating of satisfactory has been deemed because an overarching agreement was successfully negotiated and a full-time Action Team was established to administer the trial, which was assigned responsibility for coordinating all of the relevant agencies, albeit it was evidently unsuccessful in this endeavour.

FUNCTIONALITY – SATISFACTORY

**Framework agreement**

The evaluation reports that a framework agreement was successfully negotiated and signed by all the partners to the New South Wales trial on 22 August 2003 (Urbis Keys Young 2006a, p. 6). It was referred to as a Shared Responsibility Agreement (SRA) and was signed by the ATSIC Murdi Paaki Regional Council, the Commonwealth of Australia and the Government of New South Wales (Harmer et al 22 August 2003). Interestingly, the heads of the lead agencies signed the framework agreement rather than the responsible Ministers, as was the case in the other trials. The main issue to be considered here is whether the
framework agreement incorporated a strategy or any specific provisions on how a whole-of-government approach was going to be pursued for the trial.

The framework agreement includes a description of the trial objectives, regional priorities, and a commitment to establish a performance monitoring system and a dispute resolution process. These are some of the key characteristics associated with a whole-of-government approach, and their inclusion demonstrates general adherence, at least in form, to the recognised public management standards at the time for intergovernmental arrangements of this nature (Australian National Audit Office 2003 as cited in Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet and Australian National Audit Office 2006, pp. 14-15).

The framework agreement also establishes the ATSIC Regional Council and the sixteen local Community Working Parties (CWPs) as the trial's primary points of contact with the Indigenous community. However, there is no provision in the framework agreement outlining how a whole-of-government approach would be developed for the trial. The agreement does not even explicitly state that an aim of the New South Wales trial was for a whole-of-government approach to Indigenous services in the region (Harmer et al 22 August 2003; Paul et al 3 December 2004). It is indicative of a lack of strategic intent to achieve this aim.

While the intent for a whole-of-government approach, as stated in the trial’s joint media announcement and in the COAG Communiqué of 5 April 2002, was lost in the preparation of the trial’s framework agreement, it was not totally lost from the trial. The evaluation of the trial made a number of findings in relation to the achievement of whole-of-government, including several references to this aim by stakeholders in the evaluation evidence. For example, the evaluation found that a draft agreement for a whole-of-government approach
to the Murdi Paaki region had been prepared in the concluding stages of the trial, in April 2006. The evaluation stated:

Member agencies of the Regional Coordination Management Group (i.e. all NSW Government agencies active in Murdi Paaki) have developed an agreement outlining the nature of future whole of government working arrangements. Once endorsed the agreement will set out specific strategies for acting in coordinated fashion with other agencies (Urbis Keys Young 2006a, p. 16)

The evaluation also reports two later versions of the framework agreement were subsequently signed. They were dated 3 December 2004 (Paul et al 2004) and 1 August 2005. Only the original versions, dated 22 August 2003, and the amended version, dated 3 December 2004, were obtained for this research. The 1 August 2005 version reportedly served only to “to take account of the abolition of ATSIC” (Urbis Keys Young 2006a, p. 6).

The existence of two amended versions of the framework agreement may demonstrate the partners were conscious of keeping the framework agreement up-to-date reflecting changing circumstances. Apart from the change of lead agency signatories, there are some other notable differences including:

1. The latter inserts the phrase: “This Agreement ... is not legally binding in any way between the parties” (Paul et al 2004, p. 1). This amendment speaks for itself and is in contrast to most shared responsibility agreements, which were binding;

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9 This date is not stated in the official final version of the evaluation report. It was stated in an earlier version (Urbis Keys Young, Revised Draft Report, 1 September 2006), p. 22, but appears to have been deleted for the final version. The deletion of a specific date for an evaluation is unusual. It may have been deleted to hide the fact that it took nearly three years for a draft whole-of-government agreement to be prepared for the trial. There are other interesting changes between the draft and final versions such as the deletion of a discussion on “Cost effectiveness” in the latter.

10 In another documentary source, it is reported that a framework agreement for the New South Wales trial was first signed around April/May 2003 but it was not publicly announced because the New South Wales election had been called and the Minister for Education and Training had changed (Senate Legal and Constitutional Legislation Committee 2003b, Budget Estimates Hearing, Hansard 29 May 2003, p. 539 per Hawgood).
2. The latter inserts three new sections in the framework agreement to describe; 1) COAG Priorities, 2) Australian Government Priorities, and 3) New South Wales Government Priorities (Paul et al 2004, pp. ii-iii). This illustrates significantly increased attention to government priorities in the conduct of the trial and may be viewed as contradicting the original intent of the COAG Trials Project, which was to coordinate government services according to Indigenous-identified priorities; and

3. The latter version weakens the original commitment to implement the four community-identified Regional Priorities (Paul et al 22 August 2003, p. ii). It simply acknowledged the Regional Priorities and committed to “use them as a guide when agreeing on local priorities and outcomes” (Paul et al 3 December 2004, p. iii) (my emphasis).

In summary, the latter version becomes non-legally binding, gives significant emphasis to government priorities and deletes the Governments’ original commitment to implement the communities’ four priorities. A rating of poor has been deemed because the key characteristic under consideration here is whether the agreement provided a strategy for a whole-of-government approach, and as stated previously, neither of the two versions of the framework agreement accessed for this research reflected COAG’s original intent for a whole-of-government approach in the trial region.

FUNCTIONALITY – POOR

**Joint steering committee**

The trial’s framework agreement does not provide for the establishment of a joint steering committee to drive a whole-of-government approach. However, the evaluation reports that there were two main intergovernmental structures established for the New South Wales trial - the Murdi Paaki COAG Trial Steering Committee and the Murdi Paaki Regional Group
There were several other intergovernmental structures in operation at the time but these were the two main ones for the trial.

The membership of the Murdi Paaki COAG Trial Steering Committee was comprised of government representatives from the two lead agencies and Aboriginal leader Sam Jefferies, who was the Chair of the Murdi Paaki Regional Council and following its demise became the Chair of the Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly. The evaluation reports the government representatives on the Steering Committee were Dr Wendy Jarvie, DEST and Trevor Fletcher, DET-NSW. It is not known whether they fulfilled this role for the entire duration of the trial. This is relevant because the literature indicates changes in personnel can cause instability.

In the body of the evaluation report, the DEST and DET-NSW officials are described as “co-chairs” (p. 10) but an appendix of the report lists the Aboriginal representative, Sam Jefferies as a co-Chair (Urbis Keys Young 2006a, Appendix A). In November 2003, Brendan Nelson, then Commonwealth Minister for Education, Science and Training described the role of the joint steering committee:

> The Steering Committee is responsible for progressing regional priorities, addressing barriers and improving the delivery of services. The Steering Committee is supported by a group of field officers who work across all levels of government and negotiate directly with the Community Working Parties (Nelson 2003 as cited in ATSI SJC 2004, p. 237).

The evaluation does not state how many meetings were convened by the Steering Committee, who attended, or the decisions that it made. Secretariat and administration services for the trial were provided by the Murdi Paaki Action Team (Urbis Keys Young 2006, p. 15).

In regards to the second main intergovernmental structure, the Murdi Paaki Regional Group, the evaluation provides little detail about its membership or functions. It simply
states that it “consists of regional managers from key Commonwealth and State agencies, and is responsible for the implementation of Community Action Plans (CAPs)” (Urbis Keys Young 2006a, p. ii). It was therefore potentially a very important structure to implementing a whole-of-government approach to the trial region. However, the evaluation does not state when it was created, which specific government agencies were members, how often it met or give examples of how it contributed to a whole-of-government approach. Though, it does state that the Regional Group was restructured in early 2006 to reflect four new “key regional priorities” that it deduced from an analysis of the sixteen CWPs’ community action plans (Urbis Keys Young 2006a, p. 10).\footnote{This new set of key regional priorities did not retain the original priority for the trial to support and strengthen community and regional governance structures. Coupled with the abolition of ATSIC, this may be indicative of a shift from COAG’s aim for a government-community partnership and a broader policy departure from enabling organised Indigenous participation in government processes.}

On the performance of the two main intergovernmental structures for the trial, the evaluation found:

> Feedback relating to the roles of the Steering Committee and the Regional Group was more mixed. While certainly important in building senior agency commitment to the Trial, both structures were seen as too large to respond quickly to emerging issues (Urbis Keys Young 2006a, p. 15).

The evaluation reports that there were other intergovernmental structures in operation for the Murdi Paaki region during the trial. These included the OIPC and its ICC offices, which were established part way through the trial; the Australian Government State Managers’ Forum; the Western Regional Coordination Management Group; and the CEOs Group on Aboriginal Affairs. The latter two were State Government structures not specific to the Murdi Paaki COAG Trial (Urbis Keys Young 2006a, p. 15). This demonstrates that there were at least seven intergovernmental structures available to the communities in the Murdi Paaki
region during the period of the trial. It illustrates the difficulties faced by the Murdi Paaki COAG Trial Steering Committee in fulfilling its responsibility to drive a whole-of-government approach to Indigenous services in the region. In the United Kingdom under the Blair Government’s *Joined-Up Government* policies, the number of centralised coordinating committees had flourished to such an extent that they created more of the very problems they had set out to redress (Pollitt 2003, p. 43). For the Murdi Paaki trial, the lead agencies would have had to develop a new set of protocols to ensure coordination between the seven intergovernmental structures, as well as between the relevant agencies involved in the region. The complexity becomes mind-boggling.

A rating of poor has been deemed because it appears there was an absence of strategy, detail and progress by joint steering committee to devising and implementing a whole-of-government approach to Indigenous services in the trial region.

**FUNCTIONALITY – POOR**

**Implementation plan**

In the executive summary of the evaluation report, dated 26 October 2006, it states that “an implementation plan based on identified community needs is currently in development” (Urbis Keys Young 2006a, p. ii). Later in the report, the evaluation recommended:

> ...a comprehensive implementation plan (based on the CAPs) is required to assist governments in determining how best to respond to community priorities and how to ensure the involvement of non-lead agencies (Urbis Keys Young 2006a, p. 31).

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12 At the national level, there was also the Secretaries Group on Indigenous Affairs, the Ministerial Taskforce on Indigenous Affairs, numerous other Ministerial Councils and of course COAG.
Therefore, it appears that an implementation plan for the overall trial was not established. However, the evaluation report reports that a Murdi Paaki Strategic Plan was endorsed by the Steering Committee in 2005. It does not provide a specific date. It found:

The Murdi Paaki Strategic Plan sets out principles and information to assist Trial partners in planning, coordinating and implementing the Trial (Urbis Keys Young 2006a, p. 13).

There is no further detail about this Strategic Plan such as agreed outcomes, budgets, timeframes or specific responsibilities. A poor rating has been deemed.

FUNCTIONALITY – POOR

**Mapping and developing whole-of-government funding arrangements**

There is no evidence in the evaluation that the lead agencies undertook to map the total Commonwealth and State Government funding for Indigenous-related services in the trial region.

FUNCTIONALITY – POOR

**Protocols and dispute resolution**

The focus of attention for this key characteristic is on the protocols that guided the internal decision-making of the Steering Committee, and the other structures, as well as the protocols that were developed to ensure the structures were collectively organised to produce a holistic services plan in the trial region based on the original agreed priorities.

In terms of providing protocols to enable a whole-of-government approach to the trial region, the framework agreement was inadequate. The original and amended versions simply provided an in-principled commitment to “a spirit of partnership” and “a basis for cooperation and partnership between the community representatives and governments” (Harmer et al 22 August 2003; Paul et al 2004). There was no detail about the arrangements
or the mechanisms that would be applied to drive such an approach. For example, it was highlighted earlier that the framework agreement did not refer to the aim of a whole-of-government approach and it did not provide for the establishment of a joint steering committee.

There was an excellent opportunity for the lead agencies to develop such protocols between the two main intergovernmental structures, the Steering Committee and the wider Murdi Paaki Regional Group, which collectively were responsible for the development and implementation of a whole-of-government approach to Indigenous services in the trial region (Urbis Keys Young 2006a, p. ii). A set of protocols may have identified what resources were available to be coordinated and implemented during the trial. This would have enabled the Steering Committee to convey the opportunities and limitations to the sixteen Community Working Parties, who were each developing their own Community Action Plan. Such protocols could have also guided the Action Team and the various regional managers to develop a coordinated approach to strategically implementing the finalised sixteen Community Action Plans.

However, there is no evidence in the evaluation that such protocols had been developed. Rather, the responsibility to coordinate all of the relevant agencies’ resources was assigned to the Murdi Paaki Action Team, which was comprised of relatively low-level government officials based in Dubbo and Bourke (Urbis Keys Young 2006a, p. ii). It is suggested that this operational-level arrangement suffered from a lack of strategic protocol and in part explains why a whole-of-government approach was not implemented for the trial. Unfortunately, the evaluation does not explore why the Action Team was not successful in developing a whole-of-government response to community priorities. It does not explore whether a lack of appropriate protocols contributed to the lack of progress in this respect.
The evaluation reported that the New South Wales Government agencies had developed draft protocols of this nature for the Murdi Paaki region half-way through the final year of the trial. The NSW agencies had “developed an agreement outlining future whole-of-government working arrangements” (Urbis Keys Young 2006a, p. 16). There is no detail about these arrangements but the evaluation intimated the Commonwealth Government agencies could join it. It stated:

Once endorsed, the agreement will set out specific strategies for acting in coordinated fashion with other agencies (Urbis Keys Young 2006a, p. 16).

Regarding a dispute resolution process for the trial, the framework agreement provided a commitment to develop a process but there is no evidence in the evaluation that this commitment was fulfilled. This process may have been of assistance to the Murdi Paaki Action Team when it was presented with barriers from the other agencies in developing coordinated responses to the community-identified priorities. A rating of poor has been deemed because the evidence indicates intergovernmental structures were created without the necessary protocols.

FUNCTIONALITY – POOR

Realistic timeframes

The attachment to the framework agreement described a single project for the trial, which was to “provide secretariat and administrative support for the sixteen Murdi Paaki Community Working Parties (CWPs)” (Harmer et al 22 August 2003). This one-page project plan includes some timeframes for short-term and longer-term outcomes. The evaluation indicates these timeframes were not met. There is no evidence that other timeframes were set. However, the evaluation makes several references to substantial delays in negotiating and signing off on SRAs and in developing community action plans.

FUNCTIONALITY – POOR
Risk assessment

There is no evidence of the lead agencies developing a risk management plan for the challenges associated with implementing a whole-of-government approach for the New South Wales trial.

FUNCTIONALITY – POOR

Trust and collaboration between the agencies

The joint media announcement involving two senior Commonwealth Ministers and a Deputy Premier at the commencement of the New South Wales trial issued a clear directive to the relevant government agencies to collaborate for the purposes of the trial. The trial’s framework agreement also provided a simplistic, in-principled commitment for government agencies to work together in “a spirit of partnership” for the trial (Harmer et al 22 August 2003; Paul et al 3 December 2004).

However, there was detail in the framework agreement about how a climate of trust and collaboration between the agencies would be developed and sustained. As an example, literature at the time pointed to the use of incentives as a means of encouraging trust and collaboration (see Australian Public Service Commission 2004, p. 237). The lack of detail in the framework agreement suggests the lead agencies had paid only limited attention to developing a strategy for a trustful and collaborative culture in the formative stages of the trial.

The evaluation provides some evidence a collaborative culture existed between the two lead agencies, which is important but not sufficient for a whole-of-government approach (Urbis Keys Young 2006a, p. 14). The lead agencies’ collaboration was most evident through the establishment and sustained operation of the small Action Team. The evaluation found that the continuity of the personnel in the Action Team had contributed to the building of trustful relationships (Urbis Keys Young 2006a, p. ii).
The Action Team comprised of relatively low-level government officials but it bore the bulk of responsibility for trying to coordinate the agencies’ responses to the trial (Urbis Keys Young 2006a, p. ii). The more senior government officials were involved in the trial through the Steering Committee and the Regional Managers Group but the evaluation reported concerns about the quality of the collaboration between the Steering Committee and the Regional Managers Group (Urbis Keys Young 2006a, p. 15). Interestingly, the evaluation reported the human services agencies had embraced the collaborative challenges of the trial better than the economic and natural resource agencies (Urbis Keys Young 2006a, p. 29).

A rating of poor has been deemed because there was a lack of strategy to nurture and sustain a trustful and collaborative culture across all the relevant agencies for the duration of the trial.

FUNCTIONALITY – POOR

**Skills training**

There is no evidence in the evaluation that any of the government officials involved in the trial had undertaken any training in facilitating a whole-of-government approach. In this respect, the evaluation recommended that the responsible government officials familiarise themselves with the significant body of relevant knowledge that existed at the time. It stated:

...those responsible for the Trial might take note of the considerable amount of research and activity that has taken place in other contexts on the issue of achieving greater government coordination (Urbis Keys Young 2006a, p. 31).

FUNCTIONALITY – POOR
Performance monitoring

The trial’s framework agreement included a commitment to measure performance. It stated:

The [ATSIC] Council and the Governments agree to monitor and evaluate progress against agreed benchmarks and milestones as well as agree to make performance information available for national evaluations (Harmer et al 2003, p. iii; Paul et al 3 December 2004, p. iv).

The evaluation reported that the trial Steering Committee was responsible for monitoring and evaluation (Urbis Keys Young 2006a, p. ii). It found that a “Murdi Paaki Monitoring and Evaluation Framework” had been developed by the Murdi Paaki COAG trial partners “at the Trial’s outset” (Urbis Keys Young 2006a, p. 32). This Framework was designed to provide performance information in three areas: Progress in implementing the Trial; Community Perspectives on the Trial; and Outcomes in key priority areas (Urbis Keys Young 2006a, p. 10). It reports that the Monitoring and Evaluation Framework became the responsibility of the Murdi Paaki Data Working Group but does not provide any further information about this Group (Urbis Keys Young 2006a, p. 12). In November 2003, Brendan Nelson, then Commonwealth Minister responsible for the trial lead agency DEST, advised that an “Evaluation Framework Committee” had been established for the New South Wales trial “to facilitate the collection of baseline data and discuss how the trial will be evaluated” (Nelson 2003 as cited in ATSI SJC 2004, p. 237).

The “Murdi Paaki Monitoring and Evaluation Framework” is twelve pages long and provides a comprehensive and detailed approach to monitoring and evaluating the trial (Senate Employment Workplace Relations and Education Legislation Committee 2006f, Answers to Questions on Notice, DEST Question No. E528_06 – Amended). It includes: a description of the program logic; a range of measures for evaluating trial effectiveness including whole-of-government; data collection and monitoring processes; and reporting timeframes.
Interestingly, it also forecasts what outcomes should be expected from the trial in the short, mid and long terms. For example, it states:

**Within 2 to 5 years**, there should be evidence of better identification, planning and targeting of resources. These should result in measurable improvements in areas such as child immunisation, oral health, age appropriate social development, and the identification of mental health care needs of children (Senate Supplementary Estimates Hearing 2005-2006, Answers to Questions on Notice - Education, Science and Training - DEST Question No. ES28_06 – Amended, p. 7).

However, there is no evidence in the evaluation that a performance monitoring system was established and implemented. Rather, the evaluation found that there was “no regular performance monitoring reports relating to outcomes” (Urbis Keys Young 2006a, p. 33). Therefore, while the framework agreement contained a commitment to monitor performance and contained a specific strategy for this purpose, it did not occur. Unfortunately, the evaluation does not explore why the performance monitoring did not occur. Rather, it highlighted the newly established OIPC had discarded the original Monitoring and Evaluation Framework, which prompted some stakeholder concern:

Under the new arrangements OIPC brought forward its own approach to evaluation – presumably to generate some consistency across all the Trial sites. Nevertheless, the introduction of the OIPC model of evaluation raised concerns for some of those involved in decisions about evaluation (Urbis Keys Young 2006a, p. 32).

The discarding of the trial’s comprehensive and detailed Monitoring and Evaluation Framework is interesting because the OIPC was not one of the lead agency partners in the trial yet it was perceived to possess the authority to change the performance monitoring and evaluation arrangements. At the end of the report, the evaluation recommended the

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13 For an example of the terms of the OIPC’s replacement evaluation, see Senate Legal and Constitutional Legislation Committee 2006b, Answer to Question on Notice No. 239 from Supplementary Budget Estimates Hearing, 1 November 2005).
partners develop performance indicators to measure improvements in the quality of community governance (Urbis Keys Young 2006a, p. 34). It stated:

...the Murdi Paaki Steering Committee and the Data Working Group might consider developing indicators of community governance and community cohesion (perhaps through a regular survey of CWP members). This would allow for the monitoring of improvements in governance levels over time, as well as making differences across the Murdi Paaki region and in individual communities more apparent (Urbis Keys Young 2006a, p. 34).

A poor rating has been deemed because while a commitment was made to monitor the performance of the trial, and a monitoring framework was developed, it was not implemented.

FUNCTIONALITY – POOR

**Baseline data**

The evaluation found that relevant and timely baseline data from 2002-03 had been “collated by DAA and the lead agencies” in October 2005 (Urbis Keys Young 2006a, p. 33). A report containing the data for the Murdi Paaki region was published in November 2006 (Aboriginal Affairs NSW 2006). The evaluation does not explore why a set of baseline data was not developed in the early stages of the trial.

FUNCTIONALITY – POOR
Summary of analysis of whole-of-government coordination

The New South Wales trial’s progress towards whole-of-government coordination is given a satisfactory rating for one key characteristic and poor ratings for the remaining eleven (see Table 21).

Table 21: Ratings for the key characteristics of whole-of-government coordination, New South Wales COAG trial

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>KEY CHARACTERISTIC</th>
<th>RATING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lead agencies</td>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Framework agreement</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joint steering committee</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implementation plan</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mapping whole-of-government expenditure</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protocols and dispute resolution process</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Realistic timeframes</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Risk assessment</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust and collaboration</td>
<td>Poor</td>
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<tr>
<td>Skills Training</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance Monitoring</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baseline data</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There is corroboration for these conclusions in the government-commissioned evaluation. The evaluation found little progress by the trial towards whole-of-government coordination for Indigenous services in the region. It stated:

At this stage there is limited capacity at many levels of bureaucracy to work in whole-of government fashion to improve services for Indigenous people and communities (Urbis Keys Young 2006a, p. 31).
It found “there was mixed feedback from stakeholders” about the extent to which government programs and services are being delivered in more coordinated fashion as a result of the Trial (Urbis Keys Young 2006a, p. 28):

From the government perspective, improved structures for government coordination and communication have been put in place (for example, the Action Team and the Murdi Paaki Steering Committee), although the extent to which this has translated into better outcomes for Indigenous communities and individuals is at this stage quite limited (Urbis Keys Young 2006a, p. 29).

The evaluation concluded there remained a need to devise a functioning whole-of-government approach for the trial.

The Action Team now constitutes a visible ‘face of government’, meaning that (in theory) communities/CWPs need only deal with one set of government officials instead of negotiating separately with each and every government agency. While the capacity of governments to work in coordinated fashion is still being built, this represents an important step towards simplifying relationships between communities and the government sector (Urbis Keys Young 2006a, p. 28).

In summary, some structures were established to enable government coordination but there was a lack of attention to reforming the protocols and instilling the necessary culture.
Part B. Quality of the government-community partnership

This Part appraises how the aim for a government-community partnership was approached in the New South Wales COAG trial. The appraisal considers what occurred in the trial against twelve key characteristics of such an approach, which were drawn up earlier in this chapter.

The right partners

The issue under consideration here is whether the government and community partners for the New South Wales COAG trial were the right partners to drive the bureaucratic reforms being sought by the COAG Trials Project. Within the settings of the COAG Trials Project, the lead agencies, DEST and DET-NSW, were suitably placed to be partners for the New South Wales trial. Both departments had long experience in developing Indigenous-specific education strategies and programs. They were also relatively large and influential departments in their own jurisdictions.

It is not possible to give a more considered judgement about the suitability of the two agencies as partners for the trial because the basis of their appointment is unknown. Their appointment may be regarded as a preliminary decision that does not warrant further analysis but a case study conducted in 2002 of a government-community partnership in South Australia suggests the reasons should be transparent and rationalised against the purpose:

It is vital to have the right people “at the table” who are committed to and capable of representing their sectors and who are consistent attendees — to ensure continuity and consistency (Szirom et al 2002, p. 85).

The choice of DEST and DET-NSW as the lead-agency partners may have presented additional barriers to driving a whole-of-government approach to Indigenous services in the trial region. For example, in the Australian system of government, the central agencies such
as the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet or Department of Treasury, generally have the standing responsibility for overall government coordination, with ultimate responsibility resting with Cabinet (6 et al 2002, p. 11). DEST and DET-NSW were line-agencies rather than central agencies. Therefore, some formal arrangements or protocols to delegate some of the central agencies’ standing responsibility to the respective trial lead agencies may have been necessary. This suggests that, while being well-placed within the settings of the COAG Trials Project, the line agencies were not best-placed to drive the fundamental bureaucratic reforms being sought by COAG. It raises the question of whether the settings of the COAG Trials Project were the best vehicle to achieve the desired reforms. This issue is revisited in Chapter 6: Conclusions and Wider Inferences of the thesis.

The Aboriginal partners to the trial were the Murdi Paaki ATSIC Regional Council and the sixteen Community Working Parties (CWPs). The Murdi Paaki ATSIC Regional Council was comprised of democratically-elected representatives and was part of a resourced and experienced national Commission for Indigenous representation across all spheres of government. The Murdi Paaki ATSIC Regional Council was the only group nationally to nominate its region to be the subject of a COAG trial site (ATSI SJC 2004, p. 46, footnote 101). The self-nomination likely influenced the geographical scope of the trial as it was aligned with the Regional Council’s scope of geographical responsibility. The Murdi Paaki Regional Council’s self-nomination is a good indicator of its appropriateness to be a partner to the New South Wales trial. However, as history now shows, it was vulnerable to being completely abolished, as had occurred about half-way through the trial. Therefore, self-nomination alone should not be regarded as sufficient to be deemed one of the right partners. Other factors such as being sustainably resourced and able to guarantee participation as a partner for the duration of the project are also important.
The trial region’s sixteen Community Working Parties (CWPs) were listed as a separate Aboriginal partner in the trial’s framework agreement, though their participation was formalised under the signature of the Chair of the Murdi Paaki ATSIC Regional Council (Harmer et al, 22 August 2003; Paul et al 3 December 2004). The CWPs represented the local Indigenous communities in the sixteen larger towns in the region. The membership of the CWPs varied from leaders of Indigenous organisations to interested individuals, and number of members ranged from 15 to 45 (Urbis Keys Young 2006a, p. 6). Following the abolition of ATSIC, the sixteen Chairs of the CWPs combined to form the Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly. Prior to the trial, they already had experience in working with government agencies in the planning and delivery of services for their communities (Murdi Paaki ATSIC Regional Council 2004, p. 6).

It is suggested therefore that the CWPs’ local representative status and previous experience indicates they were well-placed to be a partner to the trial. However, the CWP’s were borne out of the early work of the Murdi Paaki ATSIC Regional Council and had been dependent on the ATSIC Regional Council for resources to fulfil their roles. Both the CWPs and the broader Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly were unincorporated bodies, did not employ staff, and did not manage funds directly. Their capacity for a sustained commitment was doubtful (Urbis Keys Young 2006a, p. 6). Like ATSIC, their status was vulnerable to wider political agendas.

The Commonwealth Government’s decision to abolish ATSIC had an immediate consequence for the NSW COAG trial. Its two formal Aboriginal partners were replaced with a fledgling, unincorporated, ill-resourced group of people. The Murdi Paaki ATSIC Regional Council was concerned it would result in reduced Aboriginal capacity to participate in government processes. It stated:

The concern we have is that any new mechanisms, however they are developed, will be merely advisory and consultative and will lack the authority necessary to ensure mainstream agencies discharge their
responsibilities towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people efficiently and effectively within a planning and priority setting framework. The result for Indigenous people is exclusion from participation in decision-making and the loss of a capacity for self-management and self-sufficiency (Murdi Paaki ATSIC Regional Council 2004, p. 5).

Evidently, the Murdi Paaki ATSIC Regional Council was concerned about the loss of authority that ATSIC possessed and that Aboriginal participation would revert to advisory or consultative mechanisms.

Figure 14a: Cartoonist Peter Nicholson’s depiction of the Commonwealth Government’s decision to abolish ATSIC

Source: Sanders 2004, p. ii, which included the following acknowledgement: “Thanks to Peter Nicholson for permission to reprint this cartoon from the Weekend Australian of 17 April 2004.”
The ATSIC Council was concerned the abolition of ATSIC, as part of the so-called *New Arrangements for Indigenous Affairs*, was metaphorically throwing the baby out with the bath water (Botsman 2007, p. 69 and see Figure 14a):

One consequence of the government’s decision is that the progress made in the last decade in strengthening the participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in decision-making and partnerships with government may be lost to an uncertain future (Murdi Paaki ATSIC Regional Council 2004, p. 4).

In summary, it is concluded the right partners were involved in the NSW trial when considered in the context of the COAG Trials Project at the time it was announced. With the benefit of hindsight, the experience of the NSW trial demonstrates the decision to abolish ATSIC contradicted, and undermined COAG’s original aim for a government-community partnership. It raises the question of whether the undoubtable political right to abolish ATSIC should have been exercised when it impacted so negatively on the opportunity that the COAG Trials Project presented to achieve the larger objectives of socio-economic equity and practical reconciliation.

**FUNCTIONALITY – SATISFACTORY**

**Partnership agreement**

A framework or partnership agreement was successfully negotiated and signed by the partners to the New South Wales COAG trial (Harmer et al, 22 August 2003; Paul et al 3 December 2004). The framework agreement included a description of the trial objectives, regional priorities, and commitments to establish a performance monitoring system and a dispute resolution process. These are key characteristics associated with the recognised public management standards at the time for intergovernmental arrangements of this nature (Australian National Audit Office *Guidance Paper No. 7*, July 2003 as cited in
Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet and Australian National Audit Office 2006, pp. 14-15).

The framework agreement established the ATSIC Regional Council and the sixteen local Community Working Parties (CWPs) as the trial’s primary points of contact with the Aboriginal community. It also recognised that there were other important points of contact within the Aboriginal communities of the region whose views needed to be incorporated.

An attachment to the framework agreement describes an agreed project to “provide secretariat and administrative support for the sixteen Murdi Paaki Community Working Parties (CWPs)” (Harmer et al 22 August 2003). It included a basic description of responsibilities for each of the partners, some benchmarks, reporting arrangements, and short and long term outcomes. Essentially, the Australian and State Governments’ would provide funding and training support to Community Development Employment Program (CDEP) workers, who would provide secretariat services to the CWPs to enable their participation in the COAG trial (ATSI SJC 2004, p. 236).

It is evident this was an attempt to enable the CWP’s to participate as partners in the trial, and beyond. However, an arrangement limited to only recruiting from the pool of people eligible for CDEP, with one-off top-up funding was not going to be sufficient for each CWP to fulfil its rapidly expanding responsibilities. There are also many other administrative costs associated with providing secretariat services in this complex context. Further, the CDEP program was vulnerable itself to being abolished.

A rating of satisfactory has been deemed because a formal partnership agreement was successfully negotiated and it functionally guided the progress of the trial, particularly the significant attempts to implement the agreed project described in the attachment to the agreement. This project aimed to provide for the appointment and training of a secretary
for each of the Community Working Parties but ultimately was only partially successful (Urbis Keys Young 2006a, p. 9).

**FUNCTIONALITY – SATISFACTORY**

**Joint steering committee**

The framework agreement did not provide for the establishment of a joint steering committee. The evaluation reports that the Murdi Paaki COAG Steering Committee was established in 2003 (Urbis Keys Young 2006a, p. 12). A precise date is not stated. The Governments’ membership was “senior representatives of DEST and DET” as “co-chairs” (Urbis Keys Young 2006a, p. 10). Representatives from OIPC and DAA-NSW were later added as members of the Steering Committee (Urbis Keys Young 2006a, p. 10).

Aboriginal membership on the committee was limited to one individual, Sam Jefferies, who was the Chair of the Murdi Paaki ATSIC Regional Council, and following the abolition of ATSIC, the Chair of the fledgling Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly. One Aboriginal representative on the joint steering committee was insufficient. There should also have been direct representation from the Community Working Parties. In this respect, the evaluation reported the chairs of the Community Working Parties attended a Steering Committee meeting held in Sydney towards the end of the trial following requests to work with “…‘decision-makers’, rather than only with comparatively junior personnel on the ground” (Urbis Keys Young 2006a, p. 11).

The evaluation reported that the Steering Committee:

- Provided overall direction for the Trial, with particular responsibility for strategic planning, communication strategies, and monitoring and evaluation (p. ii);
- Developed a Monitoring and Evaluation Framework in 2003 (p. 12);
Commissioned an “independent review” of six Community Working Parties in 2005 (p. 13);

Invited some of the Chairs of the CWPs to a meeting in Sydney (p. 17); and

Commissioned the final evaluation in early 2006.

In relation to the performance of the Steering Committee, the evaluation found stakeholder views of the Steering Committee were “mixed”. It reportedly built “senior agency commitment to the Trial” but it was seen as “too large to respond quickly to emerging issues” (Urbis Keys Young 2006a, p. 15). The evaluation concluded:

> From the government perspective, improved structures for government coordination and communication have been put in place (for example, the Action Team and the Murdi Paaki Steering Committee), although the extent to which this has translated into better outcomes for Indigenous communities and individuals is at this stage quite limited (Urbis Keys Young 2006a, p. 29).

A satisfactory rating has been deemed because it is apparent a joint steering committee was established and functioned, though its membership and effectiveness was wanting.

**FUNCTIONALITY – SATISFACTORY**

**Steering committee authority, vertically and horizontally**

The issue under consideration here is whether the joint Steering Committee had the necessary authority on behalf of all relevant government agencies and Indigenous people of the trial region to design and implement a strategic partnership for the delivery of all relevant programs and services. The evaluation reported the Murdi Paaki COAG Steering Committee provided “overall direction for the Trial, with particular responsibility for strategic planning, communication strategies, monitoring and evaluation, and the implementation of Community Action Plans” (Urbis Keys Young 2006a, p. 10). Therefore, it had the responsibility but did it have the authority to fulfil that responsibility?
From the Governments’ perspective, the necessary critical authority was a delegation of powers from the other relevant government agencies to the trial’s Steering Committee. The delegation of powers needed to be sufficient to enable the Steering Committee to develop and implement a holistic, coordinated plan for Indigenous-related services in the region involving the resources of multiple agencies. From the Aboriginal representatives’ perspective, the necessary critical authority was an ability to commit and sustain the effective participation of the Community Working Parties in the partnership.

There is no direct discussion in the evaluation report of the vertical and horizontal authority of the Steering Committee. However, some deductions may be drawn about its authority from evidence in the evaluation report. Starting with the New South Wales trial’s framework agreement, it did not provide for the establishment of a joint steering committee. There was no clear understanding at the outset of the authority that each partner was bringing to the trial. Therefore, it may be said that all the partners entered the trial processes in good faith, with an assumption that each partner could deliver on any commitments made. This may be viewed as a risky agreement and perhaps laden with too much uncertainty given the desperate socioeconomic circumstances of the citizens of the trial region.

The individual membership of the joint steering committee was another source of authority. The evaluation reported that the members included “senior representatives of DEST and DET-NSW (co-chairs), the Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly, OIPC and DAA” (Urbis Keys Young 2006a, p. 10). It does not present any further detail about the seniority of the government officials or the scope of their delegated powers to perform this role. It is not even stated if the same person represented each lead agency at every meeting or if several different government officials performed the responsibility. Therefore, it is not known what authority each government official brought to the Steering Committee meetings.
It is evident the Aboriginal representative on the Steering Committee, Sam Jefferies, had some delegated authority from the sixteen Community Working Parties (CWPs). Each CWP had agreed to develop a Community Action Plan and present it to the Steering Committee. The Steering Committee was responsible for ensuring secretariat and administrative services were made available to support the CWPs work. It took most of the duration of the trial for the secretarial support for each CWP to be funded and appointed, and the Community Action Plans to be finalised. It appears the Steering Committee did not have the necessary authority to rapidly respond to problems that arose for each Community Working Party.

A different intergovernmental group, the Murdi Paaki Regional Group was assigned responsibility for implementing the Community Action Plans. There is no evidence in the evaluation that any of the Community Action Plans were implemented. This Regional Group was comprised of regional managers of Commonwealth and State Government agencies within Murdi Paaki region but there is no indication they were equipped with the authority to flexibly adjust the available resources to implement the sixteen Community Action Plans.

It is not evident the Steering Group possessed the vertical and horizontal authorities to fulfil its responsibilities for a holistic government-community partnership therefore a rating of poor has been deemed.

FUNCTIONALITY – POOR

*Respect for the partners’ value frameworks*

The framework agreement states that it “recognises and respects each of the parties’ rights and responsibilities, and provides a basis for cooperation and partnership between the community representatives and governments” (Harmer et al 22 August 2003; Paul et al 4 December 2004). The general model for the trial was based around supporting each of the
sixteen CWPs to develop their own community action plan. The evaluation indicates that the Action Team had tried to support the CWPs to develop their Community Action Plans.

FUNCTIONALITY - SATISFACTORY

**Trust and collaboration between governments and community**

An early indication that the partners intended the trial to involve a trustful and collaborative relationship was the initial powerful joint media announcement. Phillip Ruddock, then Commonwealth Minister for Immigration, Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs and recognised at the time as the Father of the Australian Parliament said “we must work together” (Ruddock et al 2003).

The trial’s framework agreement does not explicitly refer to nurturing a trustful and collaborative culture for the trial. However, the use of expressions in the agreement such as “spirit of partnership” and “establish partnerships and share responsibility” imply an intent for good working relations, though, other than through the development of structures, there was no indication of how it was going to occur (Harmer et al 22 August 2003; Paul et al 4 December 2004).

The evaluation of the trial specifically refers to trust three times. In the first, it concluded that developing trust had been a key focus of the trial. It stated:

> A key focus of the Murdi Paaki COAG trial to date has been an emphasis on developing trust, building relationships and strengthening governance (Urbis Keys Young 2006a, p. 8).

It pointed to five workshops conducted for the chairpersons of the Community Working Parties as evidence of how the trial ‘advanced these principles’ (Urbis Keys Young 2006a, p. 8). It stated:
Attendance at these Workshops also helps inform the Chairs about what other CWPs are doing. This kind of learning, however, does not necessarily flow on to all CWP members (Urbis Keys Young 2006a, p. 24).

The evaluation concluded these workshops caused trust to be built but in another part of the report, it found the CWP chairs had “expressed their desire to work with the ‘decision-makers’, rather than only with comparatively junior personnel on the ground” (Urbis Keys Young 2006a, p. 17). This suggests some dissatisfaction with the collaboration arrangements that were in place. The CWP chairs were subsequently were invited to attend a Steering Committee meeting held in Sydney around mid-2006.

The evaluation’s second reference to trust was its finding that:

The continuity of Action Team personnel – who have come to represent the ‘faces of government’ in communities – has been important in building trust between government representatives and CWP members (Urbis Keys Young 2006a, p. ii) (my emphasis).

The evaluation does not describe the evidence it relied upon to assert that “trust” and “strong relationships” had been built between the governments and communities, such as for example, if the evidence was gleaned from interviews with Aboriginal representatives. The lack of reference to specific evidence to support the assertions undermines its credibility. The credibility of the claims are questioned because it is evident that only one Aboriginal person from the Murdi Paaki region, Sam Jefferies, Chairperson of the Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly, was interviewed for the evaluation (Urbis Keys Young 2006a, Appendix A List of Stakeholders Consulted). In relation to this, the evaluation states:

The current evaluation focused on seeking information and feedback from government representatives, with community input being sought from the Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly [Chairperson Sam Jefferies] rather than at the community level (Urbis Keys Young 2006a, p. 3) [my clarification].
The evaluation states that it supplemented Aboriginal community views for the evaluation from a survey that the evaluation team had conducted for the trial approximately eighteen months earlier. It stated:

Findings from the 2005 community consultations have been integrated into this report where appropriate, in order to achieve a balance between community and government input into the evaluation of the COAG Trial (Urbis Keys Young 2006a, p. 3).

The evaluation commenced in March 2006 and the final report is dated 26 October 2006, which indicates there was sufficient opportunity for the members of the CWPs to be interviewed for the evaluation. It is not stated why none of the CWP members were interviewed for the final evaluation.

The third reference to trust in the evaluation report relates to teething problems for the so-called New Arrangements for Indigenous Affairs. It states; “the ICCs in Murdi Paaki had not yet established trusting relationships with communities in the region” (Urbis Keys Young 2006a, p. 16).

Another indication that trust and collaboration was not as abundant as the government officials who were interviewed for the evaluation advised, may be deduced from the evaluation’s findings that some government representatives and community members were frustrated at the “substantial delays” between finalising negotiations and the funding being provided for the SRAs (Urbis Keys Young 2006a, p. 26). The evaluation found that the delays had “held up progress of the Trial overall” (p. ii) with “a number of negotiated SRAs still unsigned” (p. 26).

A rating of satisfactory has been deemed because it appears there was some trust between the Action Team and the Chairs of the CWPs as evidenced by their attendance at the five three-day workshops over the period of the trial and their willingness to negotiate SRAs.
with some government representatives. The slow progress of the trial in relation to the provision of secretariat services for the CWPs and the implementation of the SRAs undermined the trust because the Action Team was not empowered to deliver timely responses.

FUNCTIONALITY – SATISFACTORY

 Protocols for shared decision-making power and dispute resolution

The issue here is whether protocols were developed to enable the Aboriginal partners to be “genuinely involved” (Herron and Newman 2000) with “full and effective participation in decisions affecting funding distribution and service delivery” (Commonwealth Grants Commission 2001, pp. xviii-xix) for the trial.

The evaluation found that some community stakeholders had an understanding that protocols were to be followed in the conduct of the trial:

From the community perspective … some agencies were said to have operated outside of established protocols from time to time – for example by not consulting CWPs about issues affecting their communities, or making funding decisions unilaterally. As one person put it, such agencies ‘need to be reminded of how business needs to be done’ (Urbis Keys Young 2006a, p. 22).

It is not clear what protocols were being referred to, as there is no evidence that any written protocols were developed. It is speculated that unwritten protocols or general understandings had emanated from the five Community Governance Workshops that were conducted during the trial for the chairpersons of the Community Working Parties.

While the appointment of the Chairperson of the Murdi Paaki ATSIC Regional Council as a member of the trial Steering Committee illustrates a protocol towards shared decision-making, there is no evidence in the evaluation indicating preparation of decision-making protocols to guide the deliberations of the joint Steering Committee. Other than being
responsible for the overall trial, it is unclear what its role was or how it was intended to operate. Nor is there evidence that a dispute resolution process was established in the event that barriers arose in attempting to achieve the aims of the trial.

Assigning responsibility to the sixteen Community Working Parties to develop their own Community Action Plan (CAP) to identify “local service needs and priorities” is further indication of some formal Aboriginal involvement in the decision-making processes however as highlighted earlier, this planning process took the full duration of the trial to finalise (Urbis Keys Young 2006a, p. 7).

The evaluation reported that the Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaCSIA) undertook an analysis of these Community Action Plans in early 2006 (in the final year of the trial). The purpose of the FaCSIA analysis was to “identify priorities for government action from a region-wide perspective” (Urbis Keys Young 2006a, p. 7). Ten broadly-stated “themes” were identified: 1) Education; 2) Culture and wellbeing; 3) Health; 4) Employment and Enterprise Development; 5) Economic Development; 6) Children and Young People; 7) Families; 8) Law and Justice; 9) Housing and Infrastructure; and 10) Community Governance (Urbis Keys Young 2006a, p. 7).

Notably, this list of themes essentially reflects the content of the triennial Regional Plan that was developed by the Murdi Paaki ATSIC Regional Council in September 2003 just weeks after the commencement of the trial (see ATSI SJC 2005, p. 285 for a summary of the Murdi Paaki ATSIC Regional Plan 2003-2005). Therefore, the implication is one of the trial’s most significant outputs was to duplicate the content of the Murdi Paaki ATSIC Regional Plan 2003-2005, and in less detail. Further, the contention that a list of ten broadly-stated themes represents a set of priorities seems incongruous with the purpose of identifying priorities.
There is no evidence that the 2006 FaCSIA analysis of the Community Action Plans resulted in the production of an overall coordinated implementation plan for the region, based on the new government-identified ten priority themes. It may be inferred that the sixteen Community Action Plans (CAPs), which took the full duration of the trial to develop, simply amounted to community-prepared wish-lists. The implementation decisions about what services would be provided and their priority remained with the government officials. According to the evaluation, these important implementation decisions were yet to be made for the trial (Urbis Keys Young 2006a, p. iii). The evaluation, dated 26 October 2006 (around the time the trial was due to expire), concluded:

...there was optimism on the part of those consulted that the Trial’s last phase will yield substantial benefits for communities so long as government can respond appropriately and in coordinated fashion to community needs.

... However, a comprehensive implementation plan (based on the CAPs) is required to assist governments in determining how best to respond to community priorities and how to ensure the involvement of non-lead agencies (Urbis Keys Young 2006a, p. 31) (my emphasis).

These circumstances illustrate Aboriginal involvement in the processes of government for the trial amounted to far less than COAG’s original intention. A rating of poor is deemed because although attention was given to formally involving Aboriginal representation in some of the process of government, it was a very limited role and did not equate to the type of shared decision-making power that would be exemplified in a genuine partnership.

FUNCTIONALITY – POOR

Shared objectives and shared outcomes

The trial’s framework agreement outlined three shared objectives. They were:
• Establish partnerships and share responsibility for achieving measurable and sustainable improvements for Indigenous people living in the Region;

• Support and strengthen local governance, decision making and accountability of all parties; and

• Learn from a shared approach - identify what works and what doesn’t and apply lessons to future approaches both at the community level and more broadly (Harmer et al 22 August 2003; Paul et al 4 December 2004).

It illustrates one of the agreed objectives was partnerships with shared responsibilities. As highlighted earlier, it is notable that the aim of whole-of-government coordination is not explicitly stated. Nevertheless, this list demonstrates there was a set of shared objectives between the Governments and Aboriginal representatives at the trial’s outset.

The framework agreement stipulated four priorities for the trial that had evolved from community consultations across the region (Harmer et al 22 August 2003; Paul et al 4 December 2004). They are too broadly-stated to be considered as specific desired outcomes.

In the final year of the trial, the evaluation reported that the Regional Managers Group would “focus on four key portfolio areas” (Urbis Keys Young 2006a, p. 10). It essentially reproduced the ten themes identified by the FaCSIA analysis of the Community Action Plans described earlier but presented in a four dot-point format, as illustrated here:

• Education, Training, Employment and Economic Development

• Health, Housing, Families and Young People

• Law and Justice

• Environment, Culture and Heritage (Urbis Keys Young 2006a, p. 10).
A conspicuous absence from this revised list of priorities is the focus on strengthening regional and community governance structures, which featured in the trial’s original framework agreement and was specifically referred to in the joint media announcement. This is an indication of some inconsistency in the agreed shared outcomes for the overall trial.

The evaluation also found that the partners had different expectations from the trial, which is another indication of an absence of shared objectives and shared outcomes:

it was recognised that progress under the Murdi Paaki COAG Trial has not kept pace with community expectations. Long delays while communities developed their CAPs, along with lengthy negotiations over SRAs, have limited the amount that could be achieved in the first two to three years of the Trial (Urbis Keys Young 2006a, p. 31).

Additionally, the evaluation found only some agencies cooperated with the shared objective of working in partnership with the CWPs.

According to community representatives, one limitation on CWP effectiveness was the perceived unwillingness of some government agencies to embrace the new CWPs and the COAG Trial as a way of working with communities as a whole and acting on their priorities (Urbis Keys Young 2006a, p. 26).

The introduction of the so-called New Arrangements for Indigenous Affairs also affected the shared objectives and shared outcomes from the New South Wales trial. It appears that the Commonwealth Government’s new policy at the time of promoting ‘shared responsibility agreements’ interrupted, or maybe even hijacked, the implementation of COAG’s original intent for the trials. For example, the evaluation found:

...concerns were expressed that OIPC (and the local ICC) has devoted too much attention to the development of SRAs, perhaps at the expense of the working relationships between government and community built up
through the Trial outside of the SRA context (Urbis Keys Young 2006a, p. 15).

A rating of poor has been deemed because there was not a clear and specific set of agreed objectives and shared outcomes that were pursued by the partners for the duration of the trial.

FUNCTIONALITY – POOR

Role clarity and early detailed planning

There was some assigning of roles and some associated early planning for the provision of secretariat and administrative support for the sixteen Community Working Parties (Harmer et al 22 August 2003, Attachment; Paul et al 4 December 2004, Attachment). It is evident there were attempts to fulfil these commitments, albeit with inordinate delays.

It is evident the trial’s focus, in relation to the government-community partnership, was to organise some secretariat support for the CWPs, and there was some early planning in this respect. However, the delays in sourcing and finalising the funding suggest that the roles of the agencies for this task were not clearly stipulated. For example, the original plan was to identify 16 places under the Community Development and Employment Program (CDEP) but the role of DEWR, which had administrative responsibility for this program, was not described in the plan (Harmer et al 22 August 2003, Attachment; Paul et al 4 December 2004, Attachment). Further, the plan stated broadly that “the Commonwealth Government” will “provide top up funding support for the secretariat support positions” but the roles of the particular agencies to fulfil this task was not described. Finally, the plan stated that the State Government would “ensure … access to appropriate accredited training” for the CDEP participants but again, the roles of the particular agencies to fulfil this task was not identified. Perhaps not surprisingly, there is no evidence that such training was provided. It indicates that greater role clarity for the agencies in the early planning was necessary.
The evaluation reports that a non-binding commitment to two-years funding for secretariat support to the CWPs was finalised more than two years later on 26 October 2005 (Urbis Keys Young 2006a, p. 18) (my emphasis). A further twelve months later, as the trial was about to conclude, the evaluation reported that some of the CWPs were still awaiting the recruitment of a Facilitator (Urbis Keys Young 2006a, p. 9). This may explain, at least in part, the reason for the delays in the development of the Community Action Plans.

Finally, the trial’s primary focus on organising secretariat support for the CWPs was only part of the strategy necessary for an effective government-community partnership. There was, arguably, a more important need for the agencies to devise specific protocols for partnership-style interactions between the CWPs and the intergovernmental committees, which as highlighted earlier, were not developed.

A poor rating has been deemed because the trial’s early planning for a government-community partnership was limited to organising secretariat support rather than devising a complete strategy for this aim, and perhaps consequently, this was the extent of its overall achievement.

FUNCTIONALITY – POOR

Sustained operation and membership of steering committee

The evaluation reports that the Murdi Paaki COAG Steering Committee was established in 2003 (Urbis Keys Young 2006a, p. 12). A precise date is not stated. It also reports two government officials, Dr Wendy Jarvie, DEST and Trevor Fletcher, DET-NSW, represented the two lead agencies on the Steering Committee but it is not clear if they fulfilled this role for the duration of the trial (Urbis Keys Young 2006a, p. 10). It is clear that Sam Jefferies was a consistent member of the Steering Committee on behalf of the Aboriginal partners. It is also clear that there was no change in the lead agency arrangements for the trial.
The number of meetings convened by the Steering Committee is not stated even though in the evaluation states that it analysed the “minutes of meetings of the Murdi Paaki Steering Committee” (Urbis Keys Young 2006a, p. 35). No further detail about the meetings is provided. It also reported that “agencies involved in the Trial report regularly to the Steering Committee” (Urbis Keys Young 2006a, p. 33) but no further detail is provided about the content of these agency reports. The evaluation also states that the Steering Committee jointly commissioned the evaluation in early 2006 (Urbis Keys Young 2006a, p. 3). Therefore, it is assumed that the Steering Committee operated for the duration of the trial. Overall, the evidence illustrates some functionality of the Steering Committee with representation from each of the trial’s three partners for the duration of the trial therefore a rating of satisfactory is deemed.

FUNCTIONALITY – SATISFACTORY

*Shared responsibility for whole-of-government expenditure in the trial region*

There is no evidence that the trial Steering Group had assumed responsibility for whole-of-government expenditure in the trial region.

FUNCTIONALITY – POOR

*Full access to information*

The issue under consideration here is whether all the partners on the Steering Committee had access to the same information to underpin its decisions, particularly, whether the Aboriginal representative had access to the same information that the Governments’ representatives were privy too. There is a complete absence of evidence in the evaluation regarding the operation of the Steering Committee and therefore it is no possible to appraise the degree of information sharing that occurred between its members.
At a more operational level, it is evident that the five workshops conducted during the trial with the chairs of the CWPs involved information-sharing. However, the evaluation also reported that insufficient information had been provided to the Aboriginal participants:

Some CWP members also believed that not enough direction had been provided to the CWPs at the commencement of the Trial to enable them to understand their roles and how decisions were to be made. This meant – at least in the eyes of some – that CWPs had struggled on their own to work within a system they didn’t fully understand (Urbis Keys Young 2006a, p. 26).

Another indication of poor information flow is the evaluation’s findings that some government representatives and community members were frustrated at the “substantial delays” between finalising negotiations and the funding being provided for the SRAs (Urbis Keys Young 2006a, p. 26). The evaluation found that the delays had “held up progress of the Trial overall” (p. ii) with “a number of negotiated SRAs still unsigned” (p. 26). It appears there was a pattern of delays and they became a source of frustration for the negotiators because they did not know the reasons for the delays. The evaluation also provided some evidence indicating poor information flow between the different levels of government. For example, it stated:

As noted elsewhere in this report, there have been some tensions and misunderstandings in both government and communities since the new arrangements in Indigenous affairs came into being. These problems could be regarded as an unintended consequence of the interface between two initiatives – one by COAG and one by the Australian Government – designed to improve services for Aboriginal people. As at other Trial sites, there is a need to clarify the ways in which the lead agencies and OIPC can best contribute to better outcomes for Indigenous people and communities (Urbis Keys Young 2006a, p. 29).
It is evident that information flows from the Steering Committee to the stakeholders on the ground was wanting, as was the information flow from the higher-level funding decision-makers to the Steering Committee, thus warranting a poor rating.

FUNCTIONALITY – POOR

Summary of analysis of government-community partnerships

The New South Wales trial’s progress towards a government-community partnership is given satisfactory ratings for six key characteristic and poor ratings for the remaining six (see Table 22).

Table 22: Ratings for the key characteristics of government-community partnership, New South Wales COAG trial

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>KEY CHARACTERISTIC</th>
<th>RATING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Right partners</td>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partnership agreement</td>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joint steering committee</td>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steering committee authority</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respect for partners’ values</td>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust and collaboration</td>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protocols for shared power</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared objectives and shared outcomes</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role clarity and early planning</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sustained operation and membership</td>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared responsibility for expenditure</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full access to information</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
There is corroboration for these conclusions in the findings of the government-commissioned evaluation. Both reviews found new structures were created by the trial to promote government-community partnerships. The evaluation concluded this represented “substantial progress”:

While working towards the Trial’s objectives is clearly a long-term project, substantial progress has been made in enhancing the capacity of both governments and communities to work with each other. Structures to promote coordination between government agencies working in Murdi Paaki have been established. The governance capacity of communities has improved, and many communities appear better able to articulate their priorities to government in constructive fashion. These developments can be expected to contribute significantly to achieving the objectives and priorities articulated at the Trial’s commencement (Urbis Keys Young 2006a, p. ii).

However, the manner and culture of operation for the necessary partnership was not instilled. The new structures were not accompanied with new administration processes and the nurturing of a new holistic collaborative culture. There were no shared objectives and shared outcomes, there were no protocols for genuine shared decision-making and the partners at the operational level had insufficient authority to fulfil COAG’s intent for a partnership approach to the Trials Project.

It is suggested the relatively higher quality of performance of the NSW trial towards the partnership principle is due in large part to the democratic power that the Murdi Paaki Aboriginal leaders possessed. The next part considers whether any social and economic improvements were attributed to the four years of work that was put into the New South Wales trial.
Part C. Quality of social and economic improvements

The evaluation report was dated more than three years after the signing of the framework agreement for the New South Wales trial and more than four years since COAG announced the Project. Despite this length of time, substantial effort and resources, there is no evidence in the evaluation of social and economic improvements for the Aboriginal people in the trial region that were measured to be a direct result of the trial. It found better socioeconomic outcomes as a result of the Trial are “quite limited”:

From the government perspective, improved structures for government coordination and communication have been put in place (for example, the Action Team and the Murdi Paaki Steering Committee), although the extent to which this has translated into better outcomes for Indigenous communities and individuals is at this stage quite limited (Urbis Keys Young 2006a, p. 29).

The evaluation found:

Substantially improving outcomes in key areas like education and employment is likely to take decades rather than years. A five-year ‘Trial’, then, can be expected to lay the groundwork for positive change, rather than bring about major improvements on the ground (Urbis Keys Young 2006a, p. iii).

And:

Stakeholders argued that the Trial is a long term initiative and that better outcomes will eventually flow on from better inter-agency coordination and improved community governance (Urbis Keys Young 2006a, p. 29).

The evaluation stated that improved social and economic outcomes would be the true test of the trial’s progress and reported that some government officials were hopeful that such outcomes may be forthcoming.

Officials familiar with the Regional Group’s purpose were optimistic that its recent restructure – into four sub-groups with responsibility for different
portfolio areas – will facilitate more positive results in the future (Urbis Keys Young 2006a, p. 15)

It reported that “there was mixed feedback from stakeholders” about the extent to which government programs and services are being delivered in more coordinated fashion (Urbis Keys Young 2006a, p. 28).

**Conclusion – New South Wales**

In relation to the achievement of whole-of-government coordination, there is a satisfactory rating for one key characteristic and poor ratings for the remaining eleven. In relation to the achievement of a government-community partnership, there are satisfactory ratings for six key characteristics and poor ratings for six key characteristics. There is no evidence of measured socioeconomic improvements attributed to the trial.

There was very little progress by the New South Wales COAG trial towards the development of a sustained whole-of-government approach for Indigenous services in the region. This appraisal has illustrated that the progress was limited to the establishment of some structures and there was no progress in relation to protocol reforms and instilling the necessary collaborative culture.

This appraisal has found that there was relatively more progress towards the development of a government-community partnership in the New South Wales trial but again there were no reforms to traditional decision-making processes that enabled genuine Aboriginal involvement in the decisions of government. The evaluation concluded:

While substantial improvements were noted in communication/collaboration between governments, government stakeholders acknowledged that these gains were yet to translate into more sustained, flexible, whole of government approaches leading to improved service delivery, of the type envisaged by the COAG mandate in the establishment of the trials (Urbis Keys Young 2006a, p. 16).
Nevertheless, the evaluation noted:

Among stakeholders familiar with the COAG Trials elsewhere in Australia, Murdi Paaki is regarded as the most advanced Trial site in terms of community capacity and governance (Urbis Keys Young 2006a, p. ii).

Since 1999, perhaps prophetically, the Murdi Paaki ATSIC Regional Council had been working intensely to establish an independent Regional Authority, similar to the model of the Torres Strait Regional Authority (Murdi Paaki ATSIC Regional Council 2004, p. 8). The Chairperson, Sam Jefferies, argued this would provide greater Aboriginal-control in regional decision-making and service delivery:

Its value lies in its negotiating and coordinating role and its capacity to enter into agreements and funding contracts on behalf of communities, giving a regional voice, and strengthening the capacity of communities (Jefferies 2004 as quoted in House of Representatives Standing Committee, Many Ways Forward, 2004, p. 121).

The evidence suggests this aspiration was more distant following the New South Wales COAG trial.
Victoria

Part A. Quality of whole-of-government coordination

This Part appraises how the aim for whole-of-government coordination was pursued in the Victorian COAG trial. The appraisal considers what occurred in the trial against twelve key characteristics of such an approach, which were drawn-up earlier in this chapter.

Lead agencies

At the commencement of the Victorian trial, the Commonwealth lead agency was the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR), led by then Minister Tony Abbott, and Department Secretary, Dr Peter Boxall was the trial ‘sponsor’. The lead agency for the Victorian Government was the Department of Premier and Cabinet (DPC-Vic), headed by Secretary Terry Moran. Soon after the trial formally commenced, DPC-Vic relinquished the role and the Department of Victorian Communities assumed responsibility. DEWR also relinquished the role as lead agency about half-way through the trial but the changeover was more complicated.

The evaluation reports that DEWR relinquished the role in October 2005 (Morgan Disney et al 2006a, p. 4) and that Dr Peter Boxall, Secretary of DEWR, announced the decision at a Senate Supplementary Estimates Hearing in November 2005 (Morgan Disney et al 2006a, p. 17). At this supplementary estimates hearing, Senator Penny Wong queried the timing of the decision. Dr Boxall advised that the changeover had been occurring over the past four or five months. Dr Boxall stated that discussions between DEWR and OIPC officials had occurred approximately five months earlier, and that the decision to handover was “confirmed” at a meeting of the Secretaries Group on Indigenous Affairs earlier that year in “May or June” (Senate Employment Workplace Relations and Education Legislation Committee 2005, Hansard 3 November 2005, p. 34). Dr Boxall told the Senate Committee:
...there is a sort of gradual phasedown of the lead agency role in COAG trial sites, which is then being taken up by OIPC. That was the whole reason for establishing OIPC and the Indigenous coordination centres. It is not an idea where the government decides to establish OIPC and Indigenous coordination centres and keeps cranking up the COAG trial sites. The COAG trial sites were a forerunner to the establishment of the Indigenous coordination centre network (Senate Employment Workplace Relations and Education Legislation Committee 2005, *Hansard 3 November 2005*, p. 32).

...

We said to OIPC, ‘We are comfortable with you gradually assuming the role in the case of Shepparton and the cape,’ and that is what they have done (Senate Employment Workplace Relations and Education Legislation Committee 2005, *Hansard 3 November 2005*, p. 33).

Senator Wong then questioned whether the Indigenous community were aware of DEWR’s withdrawal from the role as lead agency:

**Senator Wong**—Does the community know about the handover—that DEWR is no longer the responsible agency in terms of evaluating the trial? Have they been informed?

**Dr Boxall**—The community is aware that we have gradually passed over responsibility to the OIPC, but they are also aware that because we have responsibility for Indigenous employment and economic development we are still very active in these communities, as we are in many others.

**Senator Wong**—Could you provide on notice copies of all correspondence or public information provided to the community which indicate the handover to which Dr Boxall is referring, please (Senate Employment Workplace Relations and Education Legislation Committee 2005, *Hansard 3 November 2005*, p. 34).

In contradiction to this advice, the evaluation of the Victorian trial found that the Indigenous community, and the State and Local Governments were not informed of the changeover. It stated:
The withdrawal of DEWR as lead agency without informing other levels of government or the community, this was seen as disrespectful of the community (Morgan Disney et al 2006a, p. 23).

The process for the lead-agency handover was later explained in a written answer to a Question on Notice arising from the Senate supplementary estimates hearing. On behalf of the Minister, DEWR stated:

As part of the handing over of responsibility of the lead agent role in Shepparton, DEWR ensured that the Office of Indigenous Policy Coordination (OIPC) was invited to attend the Aboriginal Community Facilitation Group meetings (Senate Legal and Constitutional Legislation Committee 2006b, Answer to Question on Notice w434-06 tabled in March 2006).

However, according the evaluation, the final meeting of the Aboriginal Community Facilitation Group (ACFG) meeting was in November 2004 (Morgan Disney et al 2006a, p. 51). Therefore, there were no ACFG meetings in which OIPC could have attended as part of the reported handover arrangements between June 2005 and November 2005. This is an anomaly.

The speculation for this anomaly focuses on whether DEWR intentionally or inadvertently misled the Senate estimates committee. It is hard to fathom a reason why DEWR would intentionally mislead other than to portray DEWR’s withdrawal as lead agency was more deliberate and rational than the other levels of government and the community had perceived. Alternatively, the responsible DEWR official who penned the answer to the question on notice inadvertently confused the ACFG meetings with the Steering Group meetings, of which there were four meetings during the period in question. If it is the latter, it suggests some imprecision in DEWR’s understanding of the important distinction between the roles and composition of the two committees. For a project promoting whole-of-
government coordination, in which clarity of roles and responsibilities is essential, this should not have happened.

Three months later, in February 2006, Dr Boxall was again questioned about the timing of the change in lead agency role before a Senate estimates committee. This time the questioning was by Senator Trish Crossin and Dr Boxall was evasive:

Senator CROSSIN—Dr Boxall, I asked you when you relinquished being the coordinator for that trial.

Dr Boxall—I have just given you the minister’s answer to that question, and I am not prepared to update the minister’s answer.

Senator CROSSIN—Do you have a month or a time frame?

Dr Boxall—I do not. The minister has answered that, in the handing over of the responsibility of the lead agents role, OIPC was invited to attend the meetings, reported regularly on progress, so it was gradually over time.

Senator CROSSIN—I see. Thank you. Are you responsible for any of the COAG trials now?

Dr Boxall—No. (Senate Employment Workplace Relations and Education Legislation Committee 2006g, Hansard 16 February 2006, p. 5)

Despite the confusion regarding which Commonwealth agency was responsible for the second-half of the trial, a rating of satisfactory is determined primarily because the original lead agencies had successfully negotiated a framework agreement between the partners with some appropriate settings to guide the overall conduct of the Victorian trial.

FUNCTIONALITY – SATISFACTORY

Framework agreement

A framework agreement for the Victorian COAG trial was signed on 4 September 2003 as part of the trial’s joint media announcement, some seventeen months after COAG established the Project (Abbott et al 2003). It was signed by:
• Tony Abbott, then Commonwealth Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations;
• Steve Bracks, Premier of Victoria;
• Gavin Jennings, Victorian Minister for Aboriginal Affairs;
• Anne MacAmish, Mayor Greater Shepparton;
• Daphne Yarram, Chair ATSIC Binjirru; and
• Thirteen members of a recently established committee called the Aboriginal Community Facilitation Group (ACFG) [comprised of Adrian Appo, Geraldine Atkinson, Marlene Atkinson, Mary Atkinson, Neville Atkinson, Rex Atkinson, Vicki Atkinson, Graeme Briggs, Kaye Briggs, Paul Briggs, Joyce Doyle, Jenn Martin and Justin Mohamed].

It was referred to as a Compact and the title of the agreement was: *Compact Outlining a New Collaboration between Aboriginal Community Facilitation Group – on behalf of the Aboriginal community of Greater Shepparton; the Australian Government through the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations; the Victorian Government; the City of Greater Shepparton and the ATSIC Binjirru Regional Council (the Compact)* (Abbott et al 2003).

The *Compact* provided a framework for the conduct of the Victorian trial. It included descriptions of the purpose, vision, objectives, guiding principles, twelve strategic areas for action, how the partners will work together, some timelines and a commitment by the three Governments to work collaboratively with each other, and with the Aboriginal representatives. The *Compact* stated three objectives for the trial reproduced below, with the latter two reflecting the two aims of the COAG Trials Project. Notably, the term ‘whole-of-government’ is not used at all in the agreement:
Building on and promoting the strength, assets and contributions of the Aboriginal community and its ability to shape the future and manage its own affairs;

- Developing a **strong and productive partnership** between all levels of government and the Aboriginal community, whilst learning from a shared approach; and

- **Changing the way governments work at all levels** so that they can respond in a **collaborative and holistic** way to support community aspirations and approaches (Abbott et al 2003, p. 1) (*my emphasis*).

The *Compact* comprised of eight pages including two attachments. Given the potential complexities, there may have been insufficient detail, and contemplation, about how implementing a whole-of-government approach was going to occur. The lack of attention to the aim of transforming government processes may be illustrated by the *Compact*’s statement of the “Vision” for the trial. It states:

> Strong social, economic and cultural sustainability and equity for the Aboriginal people of Greater Shepparton (Abbott et al 2003, p. 1).

It is suggested that the “Vision” should also have included an expression for the aspiration of whole-of-government coordination for Indigenous services in the region. A satisfactory rating is deemed for this key characteristic because the framework agreement was the result of successful negotiations between the partners, it reflected the two aims of the overall COAG Trials Project and, as will be demonstrated, it contained many of the elements of recognised good practice for an agreement of this nature, some with both form and substance.

**FUNCTIONALITY – SATISFACTORY**

**Joint steering committee**

The *Compact* established a “Steering Group” whose function was to “negotiate and implement policy, program and service delivery responses to community priorities and
strategies and monitor progress” (Abbott et al 2003, p. 4). The Steering Group was to be comprised of the:

- Aboriginal Community Facilitation Group;
- Secretary Victorian DPC, or his senior delegate;
- Secretary DEWR, or his senior delegate;
- CEO City of Greater Shepparton, or his senior delegate; and
- Chair of ATSIC Binjirru Regional Council (Abbott et al 2003, p. 3).

Therefore, from a whole-of-government perspective, the three government jurisdictions were represented by very senior officials, and the Commonwealth and State agencies brought to the table a formal lead-agency status for their respective jurisdictions. The evaluation found the “Steering Group met monthly until the end of 2005 and then agreed to meet bi-monthly” (Morgan Disney et al 2006a, p. 22). It was a forum “for some difficult conversations” (p. 6).

The evaluation commented on the performance of the Steering Group. The comment was not based on an objective set of performance indicators compiled during the trial. Rather, it was based on the opinions of the stakeholders that were interviewed and its own analysis of the meeting minutes.\(^{14}\) The evaluation found; “stakeholder opinions on the success of the Steering Group varied considerably” (p. 22). The Steering Group “continued to have high level membership and leadership from all stakeholder groups”; there was some “limited information sharing”; and that “some positive relationships have been formed” (p. 6). However, the evaluation also found:

...these positive achievements are moderated by some strong views within the Aboriginal community in particular that the Trial has heightened ongoing tensions within the Aboriginal community and that little has

\(^{14}\) It is unclear how the minutes of the Steering Group meetings were analysed and whether only a sample of the minutes were analysed.
changed about how governments work with Indigenous communities
(Morgan Disney et al 2006a, p. 6) (my emphasis).

The evaluation does not provide any examples of outcomes, procedural improvements or socio-economic, which emanated from specific decisions of the Steering Group. However, the evaluation analysed the meeting minutes of the Steering Group and states broadly that “a range of topics and issues have been progressed over the past three years but they lacked strategy” (p. 22). It stated:

...the minutes do not provide a sense of the meetings being as strategic as they could be or that issues related to new ways of working have been the subject of any substantial consideration by the Group (Morgan Disney et al 2006a, pp. 22-23) (my emphasis).

The evaluation also reported that another series of meetings, involving only Commonwealth and State Government lead agencies, including the two Secretaries, were meeting frequently for the first year of the trial. It stated:

Victorian Government and Australian Government Heads of Agencies met regularly ... Fortnightly lead agency meetings were held until at least the end of 2004 between the State Manager of DEWR, the Deputy Secretary of DVC, and the Outcomes Brokers (Morgan Disney 2006c et al, p. 21).

It is suggested these senior Government officials should have devised and generated the whole-of-government approach to Indigenous services in the trial region in concert with the ACFG and the Steering Group (Auditor-General 2007b, p. 48; MAC 2004, p. 26; Pollitt 2003, p. 44; Szirom et al 2002, p. 17). There is no evidence to indicate that the evaluation analysed the minutes of these senior intergovernmental meetings. The evaluation makes no comment on the efficacy of these intergovernmental meetings in generating a whole-of-government approach. This account illustrates the trial’s Steering Group was the subject of some scrutiny and accountability by the evaluation but the frequent senior-level intergovernmental meetings were not.
A poor rating has been deemed because while a representative Steering Group was established to drive a whole-of-government approach for the trial, the evidence from the evaluation is that it did not have a strategy to devise “new ways of working” (Morgan Disney et al 2006a, pp. 22-23).

FUNCTIONALITY – POOR

Implementation plan

There is no evidence in the evaluation that the lead agencies or the Steering Group produced a detailed implementation plan for the trial. However, it may be argued that the content in the Compact amounts to a broadly described, overall implementation plan.

The Compact presents a number of broader aspects that would be expected of an implementation plan including the purpose, vision and objectives. It describes twelve strategic areas for action in attachment one. It describes three phases of implementation including timelines for the first nine months in attachment two. It refers to a budget of $500,000 committed by the Victorian Government over three years “to resource the community's participation in projects flowing from the Compact” (p. 4). It includes a commitment to establish a performance monitoring process.

It is evident from the content of the Compact that there was an early intent to develop an overall implementation plan for the trial. But, it appears this did not go beyond the terms of the Compact, which lacked detail on how it would implement the necessary characteristics for a whole-of-government approach and a partnership approach. Further, there is no evidence in the evaluation to indicate that the partners were working collaboratively to tick off the commitments in the Compact.

FUNCTIONALITY – SATISFACTORY
Mapping and developing whole-of-government funding arrangements

The Compact included a commitment to undertake a “Government service mapping” process and that it would be completed by “August 2003” (Abbott et al, Attachment One). The evaluation reports that this was completed by the Governments and was shared with the ACFG (Morgan Disney et al 2006a, p. 26). However, there is no further detail in the evaluation about what emanated from the mapping exercise or any evidence about how it was applied to develop a holistic funding strategy for the trial.

The evaluation also reports that a Strategic Planning and Policy Unit (SPPU), which commenced operation as the secretariat for the Victorian trial in January 2006, would undertake another “mapping of Aboriginal and mainstream resources, services and assets including building improved data and information” (p. 37).

The functionality of this key characteristic is rated poor because while it appears a mapping exercise was undertaken, there is no evidence that it was employed to devise a whole-of-government funding strategy for all the Indigenous-related services in the trial region.

FUNCTIONALITY – POOR

Protocols and dispute resolution

The Compact provided for some protocols towards enabling the Governments to work collaboratively, including the establishment of the Steering Group. It also contained some broad statements of principle for the Governments to work together such as:

Jointly, all levels of government commit to:

- Work collaboratively and openly with each other ... to coordinate policies and services across levels of government;
- Broker and help locate resources to support the community in Projects associated with this Compact;
Respond in good faith to community priorities and aspirations, and be flexible and innovative with resource use; and

Collect and share with Compact partners any government held information, which could help progress the shared objectives, subject to agreed protocols (Abbott et al 2003, p. 4) (my emphasis).

These statements of principles were too broad. The emphasis in the last dot point illustrates the partners appreciated more detailed protocols would be required to enable the new Steering Group to fulfil its role. Another concern is that the principles were pitched at enabling government-cooperation rather than the more complex concept of whole-of-government coordination. The key concern however is that more detailed protocols were necessary to translate the principles into practice and there is no evidence in the evaluation that this occurred. For example, there is no evidence that the other relevant departments had delegated authority to the lead agencies and the Steering Group to negotiate resource commitments on their behalf. Therefore, the partners did not have the necessary authority to develop a whole-of-government approach to the community-identified needs in the trial region.

The Compact did not provide for the establishment of a dispute resolution process and there is no evidence in the evaluation that a dispute resolution process was established.

FUNCTIONALITY – POOR

Realistic timeframes

The second attachment to the Compact outlined three phases to the trial:

- Phase 1 – Projects, responsibilities and timelines;
- Phase 2 – Initiation; and
- Phase 3 – Consolidation (Morgan Disney et al 2006a, p. 20).
Only Phase 1 was accompanied with timelines, which covered approximately the first nine months of the trial. The evaluation referred to these agreed timelines but it provided no evidence on whether they were monitored or achieved. Nor did it make a judgement on whether they were realistic. Generally, the evaluation found a “limitation” of the trial was:

Project time frames not driven by the local community; the 12 month funding agreement for Youth at the Centre is seen by some as too short to be useful (Morgan Disney et al 2006a, p. 35).

It also questioned whether the Compact, which established twelve priorities for the trial, was too ambitious:

The above priorities suggest a massive agenda which no small Trial could possibly, or humanly, achieve in two or three years; it is more in keeping with a whole of government, mainstream, whole of community, and well-resourced set of coordinated programs and economic initiatives which would need to involve every government agency, the business community and every Indigenous organisation available over ten to twenty years (Morgan Disney et al 2006a, p. 20).

It is evident that some timeframes were set for the trial and some of the tasks were achieved in the time set therefore this characteristic has been deemed a satisfactory rating.

FUNCTIONALITY – SATISFACTORY

Risk assessment

There is no evidence the lead agencies developed a risk management plan for the challenges associated with implementing a whole-of-government approach for the Victorian trial.

FUNCTIONALITY – POOR
Trust and collaboration between the agencies

This discussion considers the degree of trust and collaboration between the governments’ officials involved in the Victorian COAG trial and its efficacy to underpin a whole-of-government approach. As demonstrated earlier, the Compact contained numerous broadly stated principles for the three Governments to collaborate. For example, the Compact included a joint commitment by “all levels of government” to “work collaboratively and openly with each other … to coordinate policy and services across levels of government” (p. 4). This included a commitment to “collect and share with Compact partners any government-held information” (p. 4) and to “review the operation of this Compact collaboratively and on an annual basis” (p. 5). The Compact established a Steering Group, with membership from all three Government jurisdictions to drive the collaboration.

The evaluation made a number of findings that indicate there was some cooperation between various government agencies, particularly in the first year of the trial. It highlights that a Steering Group was established and met regularly. It reported that the “Victorian Government and Australian Government Heads of Agencies met regularly” and that “fortnightly lead agency meetings were held until at least the end of 2004” (p. 21). It also found that there was “some limited information sharing at least around processes and initiatives in each member’s agency” (p. 6). However, the evaluation found little evidence about how the commitments to collaboration were translated to strategic action (Morgan Disney 2006c, p. 22). The evaluation recommended:

It is very important for governments to develop stronger working relationships with each other, across and between all levels, to understand the work and constraints of other portfolios and governments, and to appreciate their role in holistic responses (Morgan Disney et al 2006a, p. 34).
In relation to the nature of the cooperation that occurred, the evaluation found that “some positive relationships have been forged, especially across government, through the Steering Group and between leaders” (p. 6) (my emphasis). It also found that the trial had “drawn together people from all levels of government who have not worked together before and many of these connections and relationships are now quite strong” (p. 23) (my emphasis). However, the evaluation does not explain what qualities were evident to classify the relationships as “positive” and “quite strong”. For example, the evaluation could have pointed to government outputs or outcomes that emanated as a result of such collaboration. Nor does it state whether these connections served the needs and purposes of the trial. The evaluation also found that many of the stated commitments to collaborate were not implemented such as the development of performance indicators and benchmarks, the conduct of an annual review, and the development of information sharing protocols.

This chapter is forming an overall impression that the implementation of the COAG Trials Project paid insufficient attention to the qualities of government collaboration that would be necessary for a whole-of-government approach. The evaluation of the Victorian trial suffers from the same inattention. For example, it did not investigate the degree of trust among the various government officials though it found there was a good foundation early in the trial:

Every person interviewed acknowledged that, without exception, the partners entered the process with a high level of goodwill and with good intentions (Morgan Disney et al 2006a, p. 23).

In summary, the evaluation findings indicate that there was some regular interaction between the government jurisdictions. However, as the literature illustrates, regularly meetings alone are unlikely to result in effective government coordination, let alone whole-of-government coordination. Many meetings in this context are often simply information
sharing exercises (for example see Quantum & Nyaarla 2006, p. 18; Auditor-General 2007b). Therefore, the evidence cannot be regarded as sufficient for a satisfactory rating towards an environment of trust and effective collaboration.

FUNCTIONALITY – POOR

Skills training

The evaluation pointed to the literature to highlight the importance of developing interpersonal skills in collaborative pursuits (p. 34) and found:

There is a need to increase the capacity and capability of government officers and agencies to work in partnership with each other… (Morgan Disney et al 2006a, p. 34).

There is no evidence in the evaluation report that any government officials were given any training in implementing whole-of-government coordination or in undertaking cross-cultural work. Rather, the evaluation recommended a skills audit across the three levels of government:

Undertake a skills audit of all staff engaged in the activities within the Trial to date to assess the skills in capacity building, community engagement, partnerships and working in whole of government approaches of all staff, at all levels, and develop a training strategy to improve these skills (Morgan Disney et al 2006a, p. 41).

FUNCTIONALITY – POOR

Performance monitoring

As stated earlier, the Compact included a commitment to “jointly develop performance indicators and benchmarks to measure progress” (Abbott et al 2003, p. 5). However, the evaluation found:

No performance indicators or benchmarks were established prior to this 2006 evaluation being undertaken. It is our assessment that not addressing
this commitment has not helped the Trial process and has contributed to
the frustration and disappointment of some partners (Morgan Disney at al
2006c, p. 19).

It also found:

Shared accountability is an issue for governments – there needs to be a
structure among and between government players to cope with this
(Morgan Disney at al 2006c, p. 35).

In line with this finding, the evaluation made a recommendation for the next stage of the
trial:

...a key priority must be establishing an agreed evaluation framework from
the outset. This evaluation framework must include attention to how
relationships and methods of working together are changing, and with what
outcomes, and what are achievable life outcomes for the Aboriginal
community within the next agreed timeframe. This work will need to be
strategic and based in best practice - drawing on the growing body of
international evidence and knowledge (including Australian based) about
working in partnerships with Indigenous communities (Morgan Disney at al
2006c, p. 8).

The evidence supports a poor rating despite the early commitment to monitor performance.

FUNCTIONALITY – POOR

**Baseline data**

The *Compact* included a commitment to develop a set of baseline data by December 2003
(in attachment one) however the evaluation found that “...no documentation was
undertaken to establish what the problems were in Shepparton in 2003” (p. 13). DEWR
Secretary Dr Boxall and senior officer Bob Harvey gave evidence to a Senate Supplementary
Estimates Hearing on 3 November 2005 that DEWR did not prepare a set of baseline data at
the commencement of the trial, not even on the unemployment rates.
Senator WONG—As the department responsible for both Indigenous employment and employment policy more generally, have you been asked to provide to OIPC in relation to baseline data on employment?

Mr Harvey—At this stage we are just participating. The framework has been drawn up. At this stage we have not provided baseline data. What tend to be drawn on for baseline data are the ABS statistical surveys. Unfortunately, the last one was in 2001. At this stage we are not providing baseline data but I am sure we will be called on to provide information.

Senator WONG—So as yet you have not?

Mr Harvey—No.

...

Senator WONG—Doesn’t the department think that is a concern—that the community actually want some sort of performance indicator and they are not getting one from the government?

Dr Boxall—The department cannot give views on the community’s initiative in this regard (Senate Employment Workplace Relations and Education Legislation Committee 2005, Hansard 3 November 2005, p. 32).

FUNCTIONALITY – POOR
Summary of analysis of whole-of-government coordination

The Victorian trial’s progress towards whole-of-government coordination is given satisfactory ratings for four key characteristics and a poor rating for the remaining eight (see Table 23).

Table 23: Ratings for the key characteristics of whole-of-government coordination, Victorian COAG trial

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>KEY CHARACTERISTIC</th>
<th>RATING</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lead agencies</td>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Framework agreement</td>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joint steering committee</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implementation plan</td>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mapping whole-of-government expenditure</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protocols and dispute resolution process</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Realistic timeframes</td>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Risk assessment</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust and collaboration</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skills Training</td>
<td>Poor</td>
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<tr>
<td>Performance Monitoring</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baseline data</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Victorian trial had a relatively greater degree of satisfactory ratings for WOGC than the other trial sites. This was largely due to the signing and detailed content of the framework agreement (the Compact). It suggests the Governments’ paid greater attention to the early form of the trial to entice an agreement, though it appears giving substance to the form was overtaken by other perceived priorities. The evaluation concluded:
It became very clear during the evaluation that the core purpose of the Trials – to find new ways of working with Indigenous communities and across governments, and to learn from trying new approaches to achieve agreed outcomes – has to some extent been lost in the pursuit of tangible improved outcomes or even outputs such as higher numbers of Indigenous people employed, increased economic opportunities, retention rates in education, consensus in the Indigenous community, increases in funding to Indigenous communities etc. This applies to both government and Indigenous expectations (Morgan Disney 2006 et al 2006a, p. 11).

It is suggested that this relatively high number of satisfactory ratings, compared to the other trial sites, may reflect a comparatively greater degree of democratic power of the Aboriginal leaders involved in the Victorian trial.
Part B. Quality of the government-community partnership

This Part appraises how the aim for a government-community partnership was approached in the Victorian COAG trial. The appraisal considers what occurred in the trial against twelve key characteristics of such an approach, which were drawn-up earlier in this chapter.

The right partners

The original partners to the Victorian trial were DEWR and DPC-Vic, ATSIC Binjirru Regional Council and the fledgling Aboriginal Community Facilitation Group. Each is discussed.

There is a strong argument that DEWR was the right Commonwealth lead agency for the Victorian trial because the Shepparton Aboriginal community had demonstrated for more than a decade that financial self-determination was a priority. As demonstrated earlier, they were referred to as “Indigenous entrepreneurs” (Cutcliffe 2004, p. 18). They had established the First Nations Credit Union, the Rumbalara Football Netball Club, the Rumbalara Aboriginal Co-operative Ltd, and the Ganbina Koori Economic and Employment Agency with its effective Ladders to Success program. DEWR may have been the best-positioned of all the Commonwealth agencies as lead agency for a trial region with such a strong commercial imperative.

However, there is an argument that challenges this contention. The essence of the argument is based on the reasons given for DEWR’s relinquishment of the role as Commonwealth lead agency about half-way through the Victorian trial, as described earlier in this section of the thesis. Dr Boxall explained to a Senate Supplementary Budget Estimates hearing the reason for the change of lead agency:

DEWR did it because our main emphasis is on employment under the new approach to servicing Indigenous communities, and we believed and we agreed with OIPC that their responsibility is the overall conduct of the Indigenous Coordination Centres and so we thought it was appropriate that
They take the lead (Senate Employment Workplace Relations and Education Legislation Committee 2005, Hansard 3 November 2005, p. 33).

This illustrates that the comfort of the traditional silo-culture was never too far away for DEWR. It also suggests some discomfort for DEWR as lead agency in a whole-of-government Indigenous affairs context. None of the other lead agencies were so brash as to formally withdraw from the lead agency role mid-way through the trial as a consequence of the establishment of the OIPC. It suggests DEWR was appropriately monitoring the broader policy environment and was keen to avoid a duplication of roles between itself and the emerging OIPC. If DEWR’s reasoning that the Commonwealth agency with specific responsibility for whole-of-government coordination in Indigenous affairs, that is OIPC, was best suited to the role of lead agency, it raises the question why ATSIC, which had that statutory responsibility and more than a decade of experience when the trials commenced, was not considered appropriate as a lead agency for any of the eight trial sites.

DPC-Vic also relinquished the role of lead agency though much earlier in the trial. The Department of Victorian Communities assumed the role. This change weakened the central power of the lead agency to influence the necessary coordination of State Government agencies though it potentially enabled key relevant line-agencies to have a closer strategic involvement in the trial.

In relation to Aboriginal participation, it is arguable ATSIC Binjirru Regional Council was an appropriate partner based on its democratically-representative membership, its administrative resources, and its broader national presence including more than a decade of experience, corporate knowledge and community contacts. The evaluation found the “local Indigenous community had a strong attachment to ATSIC as the elected body” (Morgan Disney at al 2006c, p. 15). One of the weaknesses of the ATSIC Binjirru Council was it had responsibility for a region beyond the Greater Shepparton. The population data indicates approximately half lived in the Greater Shepparton region. Further, there were other
Aboriginal organisations and leaders with a greater local knowledge and presence than the ATSIC Binjirru Council.

Compared to the resources and experience that ATSIC brought, the ACFG was a fledgling, informal committee only established in early 2003 specifically for the purposes of the trial. Following the abolition of ATSIC, the Aboriginal Community Facilitation Group (ACFG) became the sole Aboriginal partner to the trial. A potential strength was its membership, which comprised of a range of leaders from local organisations and various local family groups. In theory, this would indicate that the ACFG was one of the right partners, however, the localness of the ACFG also brought some deep community tensions to the table as reported by the evaluation:

The Aboriginal leaders from both the Yorta Yorta and Bangerang peoples entered the process of the Aboriginal Community Facilitation Group (ACFG) aware of the tensions around the issues related to the Yorta Yorta claim and the Bangerang people. They were all very determined to try and work together. Many members reported that they were unclear at the outset whether they had been appointed as representatives of the community or as representatives of their respective organisations (Morgan Disney et al 2006a, p. 15).

The evaluation concluded that it was beneficial for these tensions to be confronted:

The tensions between the ACFG members, and the difficulties and confusions of being representative, are being discussed more openly within the ACFG, and within the Steering Group; the COAG process is perceived to have assisted in opening up these conversations (Morgan Disney et al 2006a, p. 23).

The evidence in the evaluation indicates that the ACFG only met four times during the trial; 14 October 2003, November 2003, December 2003 and November 2004. To supplement the lack of administrative capacity of the ACFG, the Victorian Government funded the position of a Community Facilitator and the Australian Government, through DEWR, funded a
community development consultant at the commencement of the Trial. Later, in 2004, a consultant was contracted to work with the ACFG and the wider community on the resourcing model for the Indigenous governance and community engagement strategy (Morgan Disney et al 2006).

The evaluation found stakeholder views about the success of the ACFG “varied” (p. 21). Some members argued that the group worked hard to reach agreement in the early stages with heavy existing workloads and substantial community commitments and faced a very difficult task. Others argued that the ACFG never really addressed substantial issues related to governance, that some members dominated, and that some members acted outside the agreements of the group and the Compact (Morgan Disney et al 2006a, pp. 21-22). Some members withdrew from the ACFG during 2005. The evaluation stated the reasons for withdrawal included concern or perceptions that:

- The COAG process had increased divisions within the community – this included concern that ‘caucusing’ with select ACFG members by government officers - by both State and Australian Governments, outside formal meetings, cut across both Aboriginal ways of working and created a sense of there being an ‘in’ group and an ‘out’ group. Some members of the ACFG are seen to have colluded in this process.

- Some ACFG members were not being as open as they had all agreed to be in building bridges into the wider community, this included perceived ‘gate-keeping’ on some of the priorities (Morgan Disney et al 2006a, p. 22).

The evaluation also reported concerns that the wider Aboriginal community were not aware of the trial. It stated:

...few people in the wider community appeared to know about the Trial and a perception that some of the ACFG members could have done more to facilitate access to the wider community – this perception that very few
people know about the Trial was expressed by both some Aboriginal and
government stakeholders... (Morgan Disney et al 2006a, p. 23)

Innovatively, the trial’s Aboriginal leaders commissioned their own evaluation of the
Victorian trial, which was conducted by Tony Cutcliffe, Eureka Project in 2004 (2004). The
evaluation considered the role of the ACFG and acknowledged:

[E]ach of the members of the Facilitation Committee are highly respected
and noteworthy achievers in their respective fields (Cutcliffe 2004, p. 30).

However, Cutcliffe concluded that the establishment of the ACFG was “an artificial construct
which simply provides its Indigenous members with yet another layer of officialdom…”
(Cutcliffe 2004, p. 30) He stated:

COAG has created an additional tier of bureaucracy with the so-called
Facilitation Committee model comprising of bureaucrats and Aboriginal
people. Aboriginal people now have to deal with the bureaucratic
procedures of the committee as well as continuing to deal with the
bureaucrats who are involved in existing programmes (Cutcliffe 2004, p. 8).

The Facilitation Committee model has created a bottleneck through which
all new initiatives must pass and be approved, before Aboriginal people can
deal with the bureaucrats directly involved in the areas concerned (Cutcliffe
2004, p. 8).

Cutcliffe also found that the bureaucratic genesis of the ACGF encouraged the Aboriginal
members to act in a manner that conflicts with decision-making protocols in Aboriginal
society:

The Aboriginal membership on the Facilitation Committee provides no
opportunity for the community to reflect the organic nature of its
leadership, where varying people and groups are ordinarily required and
encouraged to be involved in decision-making processes. The methodology
is incompatible with the internal cultural governances of the Aboriginal
community and is focused on corporate or bureaucratic methodologies
(Cutcliffe 2004, p. 8).
Tom Calma, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, who was monitoring the progress of the COAG Trials Project, reported some similar concerns about the Victorian trial. Calma stated:

Concern has been expressed in the Shepparton trial site, in Victoria, about the lack of appropriate engagement of traditional owners of the region in the trial. The Reference Group in Shepparton is composed of representatives of Indigenous service delivery organisations rather than involving the broader Indigenous community. It was stated that this has resulted in the process for engaging with Indigenous peoples in the trial being too focused on engaging with service delivery organisations with the consequence that certain family groups were overrepresented whereas other family groups were not represented at all. A number of different groups have stated that this has led to increased tensions within the community. The Commonwealth’s lead agency for the COAG site acknowledges that there have been problems in engaging with the community and are taking steps to seek to rectify this situation. Concern was also expressed that the consultation mechanisms established in the Shepparton trial site were being used by service delivery agencies to ‘bid’ for extra funding and to have other funding reallocated to their organisations (ATSI SJC 2005, p. 94).

A rating of satisfactory has been deemed in relation to this key characteristic. It is evident that the failings of each partner was not due to their inherent capacity but rather their inability to model, and comply with, a set of roles and responsibilities designed to fulfil COAG’s original intent for the Trials Project.

FUNCTIONALITY – SATISFACTORY

**Partnership agreement**

The *Compact* was the result of a successful set of negotiations between the potential partners and was signed on 4 September 2003. The *Compact* contained many of the elements recognised as best practice for the type of government-community partnership
that COAG intended. It showed the partners had agreed on the purpose, vision, objectives and guiding principles for the trial, as well as a number of strategic areas of action. It also established a joint steering committee and importantly some broad protocols for how the various partners would work together.

However, the broadness of its stated commitments impacted negatively on its overall implementation. There was no implementation plan, the protocols for shared decision-making were inadequate and there was no dispute resolution process. It contained a commitment to establish a performance monitoring system but there were no details about how this would occur and subsequently it did not eventuate.

The Compact’s objectives were explicitly aligned with COAG’s original two aims for the Trial Project and it included some early commitments from each partner for implementation, some of which were partially implemented (for example, some of the timelines and the mapping of government services in attachment two). For these reasons, it stands out amongst the other partnership agreements and is therefore deemed a good rating.

**FUNCTIONALITY – GOOD**

**Joint steering committee**

The Compact established a “Steering Group” whose function was to “negotiate and implement policy, program and service delivery responses to community priorities and strategies and monitor progress” (Abbott et al 2003, p. 4). The Steering Group was to be comprised of the:

- Aboriginal Community Facilitation Group;
- Secretary Victorian DPC, or his senior delegate;
- Secretary DEWR, or his senior delegate;
• CEO City of Greater Shepparton, or his senior delegate; and

• Chair of ATSIC Binjirru Regional Council (p. 3).

Therefore, from the perspective of a government-community partnership, at the outset very senior government officials were sitting alongside Shepparton Aboriginal leaders with overall responsibility for the trial. There were potential strengths and weaknesses of the commitment for such senior officials to sit as members of the Steering Group. On one side, it provided an opportunity for the Aboriginal leaders to take their concerns to the top of the bureaucracy. On the other side, the availability of such senior officials would have been limited and often delegates were sent in their place. Another option could have seen less senior but more available officials with sufficient delegations appointed to the Steering Group, and the Secretaries would become involved if disputes needed to be escalated for resolution. The evaluation does not provide detail regarding which government officials attended the Steering Group meetings or if they had sufficient delegations.

The evaluation reports that the Steering Group met monthly until the end of 2005 and then agreed to meet bi-monthly (Morgan Disney et al 2006a, p. 22). Regarding the performance of the Steering Group, the evaluation did not have access to any objective performance indicators but reflected on the qualitative data it obtained from the interviews:

Stakeholder opinions on the success of the Steering Group also varied considerably. Some ACFG members argue that the meetings often felt like rubber stamping decisions made by the government members between meetings and see this as being disrespectful of ACFG members. Others argued that some ACFG members did deals outside the COAG Steering Group meeting, in the process undermining the expressed commitment to open and transparent decision making. Others believed that some significant progress had been made in getting significant issues onto the agenda and building relationships with governments (Morgan Disney et al 2006a, p. 22).
A satisfactory rating is deemed because the joint steering committee was established through successful negotiation and it appears that it continued to meet frequently throughout the trial.

FUNCTIONALITY – SATISFACTORY

**Steering committee authority, vertically and horizontally**

As stated earlier, the individual members of the Steering Group were authoritative. The *Compact* stipulated the members would be the Secretaries of DEWR and DPC-Vic (or their “senior delegate”), the CEO of the City of Greater Shepparton (or his “senior delegate”), the Chair of the ATSIC Regional Council and the thirteen Aboriginal leaders who collectively had formed the ACFG.

In theory, the Governments’ membership may have provided the necessary vertical and horizontal authority in their respective jurisdictions. However, the almost immediate change of the Victorian lead agency from DPC-Vic to the Department of Victorian Communities may have weakened this authority. The lengthy and imprecise handover of Commonwealth lead agency status during 2005 from DEWR to OIPC may also have weakened the Steering Committee authority. For example, in regards to the latter, Dr Peter Boxall, Secretary of DEWR, travelled to Shepparton on eight occasions in his lead agency role but his final visit was in November 2004, less than half-way through the trial (Senate Legal and Constitutional Legislation Committee 2006e, *Answer to Question on Notice W477-06*, tabled March 2006).

In practice, there was a lack of protocols for how the Steering Group was to operate in terms of negotiating and implementing a strategic plan for the community-identified priorities. There is no evidence that other relevant government departments had delegated authority to the trial Steering Committee to negotiate resource commitments. Therefore, it did not have the necessary authority to develop a whole-of-government approach to the trial region. This caused much angst and, amongst other things, resulted in some members
of the ACFG withdrawing from their commitments in the Compact (Cutcliffe 2004, pp. 7-8; Morgan Disney et al 2006a, p. 22).

In relation to the Aboriginal representatives, ATSIC Binjirru Regional Council lost its authority as a partner following the decision of the Commonwealth Government in April 2004 to abolish ATSIC.\footnote{It is arguable that the loss of authority occurred twelve months earlier in April 2003 when the Commonwealth Government stripped ATSIC of responsibility for $1 billion in funding, which was reallocated to a new Commonwealth agency, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Services (ATSIS) (ATSI SJC 2004, p. 90).} In relation to the ACFG, the evaluation reports that there were concerns about its representativeness of the wider Aboriginal community, that is, its horizontal authority (p. 25). The concerns led to the engagement of a consultant early in the trial to undertake a community consultation on the nature of a resource unit that would enable the ACFG to involve the wider Aboriginal community in the trial.

In late 2004, the Steering Committee agreed on the model for a Strategic Planning and Policy Unit (SPPU), which would be a resource for community planning processes on the strategic priorities (p. 17). However, the Unit was established in January 2006, nearly two and a half years after the signing of the Compact (p. 37). Upon establishment, the evaluation indicates the SPPU was well-positioned to enable the necessary horizontal authority for the ACFG. It reported the Victorian and Australian Governments jointly funded the Strategic Planning and Policy Unit with $924,000 over two years (p. 24) and the City of Greater Shepparton was appointed to auspice the arrangement (p. 37). A “Planning Day” for the Governance Group of the Strategic Planning and Policy Unit was held in April 2006 (p. 18).

A rating of poor has been deemed. The Compact provided for very senior government officials to sit on the Steering Group but the implementation demonstrates that this, in itself, is not sufficient to ensure that the Steering Group, as a collective, had sufficient
authority to undertake its assigned responsibilities. Further protocols for delegation of powers to the Steering Committee were necessary.

FUNCTIONALITY – POOR

Respect for the partners’ value frameworks

The guiding principles for the trial described in the Compact include:

- We commit to working as equals...”;
- Aboriginal community values, practices and history will be recognised and supported; and
- Greater inclusiveness with the non-Aboriginal community and increased respect for Aboriginal people and culture is fundamental (Abbott et al 2003, p. 1).

The evaluation frequently referred to respect as a key component of relationship building and provided some indications of it during the trial. For example, it noted the Compact included a commitment from all levels of Government to “respect existing Aboriginal community organisations and structures” (Abbott et al 2003, p. 4) (my emphasis); a commitment to develop a “Pride, Image, Social Connectedness & Respect Strategy”; and a commitment to develop a strategy for “Cultural enhancement” (Abbott et al 2003, p. 5).

This demonstrates an early commitment to respecting Aboriginal values.

The evaluation also highlighted the Trial worked through a number of existing Aboriginal organisations and the Governments had funded a number of consultancies to assist the ACFG to engage with the wider Aboriginal community (Morgan Disney et al 2006a, p. 24). It found that the Aboriginal community had demonstrated respect for Government and specifically stated: “All of the ACFG members stayed at the table until early 2005 in a genuine effort to stay engaged in the Trial” (p. 24). It also highlighted, as another indication of respect, that the members of the Rumbalara Cooperative who withdrew approximately
half-way through the trial had “expressed ... a desire to retain the principles and the intent of the trial” (p. 24).

However, the evaluation also presents evidence that indicates some non-compliance with the respect principle. It stated:

There is a perception amongst many of the Aboriginal stakeholders, and some government stakeholders interviewed, that governments have demonstrated limited cultural awareness and understanding through the Trial, including not advising the Elders Group prior to commencing the Trial or coming into the community with initiatives, and of not respecting familial responsibilities and community processes (Morgan Disney et al 2006a, p. 24).

Though, it noted:

It is not clear what role the ACFG played in encouraging the practice of governments acknowledging and/or visiting Elders, nor could we find any records of cultural awareness raising conversations in meetings (Morgan Disney et al 2006a, p. 24).

Further, the evaluation reported that “the withdrawal of DEWR as lead agency without informing other levels of government or the community ... was seen as disrespectful of the community” (p. 23). It also reported that some participants found the trial processes disrespectful:

Some ACFG members argue that the meetings often felt like rubber stamping decisions made by the government members between meetings and see this as being disrespectful of ACFG members (Morgan Disney et al 2006a, p. 22).

The evaluation also referred to the Commonwealth Government’s decision to abolish ATSIC during the trial. The evaluation reported, “…the local community had a strong attachment to ATSIC” and:
By the time this evaluation commenced most of the Indigenous leaders interviewed had moved beyond their sadness and disappointment about the abolition of ATSIC and just want to get on with improving conditions for their community (Morgan Disney et al 2006a, p. 15).

An independent evaluation of the Victorian trial, which reported in October 2004, found a very low level of trust and collaboration in the Victorian COAG trial (Cutcliffe 2004). The Cutcliffe evaluation was based on “extensive input from the Aboriginal leaders and representatives” (Cutcliffe 2004, p. 7) of the region and is presented with forewords by Paul Briggs OAM, Yorta Yorta man and President, Rumbalara Football and Netball Club, and Neville G. Atkinson, Chairperson, Rumbalara Aboriginal Cooperative Ltd. The Cutcliffe findings in this respect are concerning:

The upshot of this situation is that the COAG initiative seems to be characterised by subtle forms of bullying and intimidation with the ‘partnership’ based on coercion and arrogance rather than mutual effort and respect (Cutcliffe 2004, p. 46).

The OIPC-commissioned evaluation recommended the next stage of the trial focus on building respectful relationships as it “will be more likely to lead to shared solutions and to improving life outcomes for Indigenous people in the region” (Morgan Disney et al 2006a, p. 5). It stated: “Engaging in this next stage respectfully must be a shared goal for all partners” (Morgan Disney et al 2006a, p. 9).

FUNCTIONALITY – POOR

**Trust and collaboration between governments and community**

This discussion considers the degree of trust and collaboration in the trial’s government-community partnership. The Compact stated the purpose of the trial was to “establish a new way of working together” involving “cooperation and partnership between the parties” through “joint action, mutual support and shared responsibility” (p. 1). The evaluation
referred to the literature on a number of occasions to highlight the importance of building trust to support collaboration (pp. 10, 33, 34 & 43). It highlighted that the time taken to build trust and relationships is considerable and that changes in personnel impact on trust building (Morgan Disney et al 2006a, p. 35).

The evaluation found that all parties entered into the trial with good will and good intent (p. 11). The preceding discussion about the degree of respect for the partners’ value frameworks suggests that there were pockets of trust and collaboration between the Government and Aboriginal partners during the trial, particularly during the early stages. However, the evaluation found:

The level of cynicism about the Trial in the Indigenous community and some government agencies, encountered very early by the evaluation team, was high (Morgan Disney et al 2006a, p. 12) (my emphasis).

It appears the early good will and good intent dissipated. This is likely due to the failures to fulfil commitments and expectations. The evaluation concluded:

The evaluation team suggests that the process to date has in fact been a very human one and that focusing on building relationships in this next phase will be more likely to lead to shared solutions and to improving life outcomes for Indigenous people in the region. However the evaluation team cautions that this will require time, support and respectful processes with little room for blame, anger and cynicism (Morgan Disney et al 2006a, p. 5).

The Cutcliffe findings in this respect are concerning:

The implications of the COAG failure lie not just with the conceptual reinforcement of institutionalised racism. The implications, in practical terms are disturbing and profound. Not only does the new ‘model’ of business prevent any new or sustainable social innovation, it actually threatens all those gains which the Aboriginal community has fought to establish and protect during the past 20 years (Cutcliffe 2004, p. 46).
The lack of cross-cultural training may have also contributed to the development of a less than trustful and collaborative environment. The weight of evidence leans towards the conclusion that overall the level of trust and collaboration in the trial warrants a poor rating.

FUNCTIONALITY – POOR

Protocols for shared decision-making power and dispute resolution

Other than a very brief and broad statement of the role of the trial’s Steering Group (Morgan Disney et al 2006a, p. 21), there is no evidence in the evaluation that protocols for shared decision-making, including a dispute resolution process, were established for its operation. The evaluation reported that some partners had negative perceptions of the operation of the Steering Group including; “the meetings often felt like rubber stamping decisions made by the government members between meetings” (p. 22) and “some ACFG members did deals outside the COAG Steering Group meeting, in the process undermining the expressed commitment to open and transparent decision making” (p. 22).

The lack of protocols underpinned concerns about government action and there is evidence of concerns from government stakeholders about potential conflicts of interest within the ACFG (Morgan Disney et al 2006a, p. 30). A “Draft Operations Manual” was produced for the ACFG very early in the trial in November 2003 (p. 16). The evaluation also reported that a memorandum of understanding was signed between the Strategic Planning and Policy Unit Governance Committee and the Greater Shepparton City Council on 12 January 2006 (p. 17).

As demonstrated earlier in relation to the vertical and horizontal authority of the Steering Group, there were no specific protocols for to ensure the partners had a shared decision-making power for the governance of the trial.

FUNCTIONALITY – POOR
**Shared objectives and shared outcomes**

The *Compact* included a joint commitment to furthering twelve strategic areas for action (see Attachment One). This indicates the partners had agreed on a set of shared objectives and broad agreement on outcomes. Surprisingly, the evaluation found confusion amongst many of the partners about how the list of twelve strategic areas for action was even developed:

> It is not clear exactly how this occurred and different members (both government and Indigenous) had different memories and accounts of how these strategic areas were finally agreed (Morgan Disney et al 2006a, p. 20).

Each of the twelve strategic areas for action is described very briefly and only in broad terms. The evaluation specifically found “there was no shared agreement on what outcomes were possible from the Trial within 2-3 years” (p. 11). Consequently, the evaluation concluded, “expectations may have been way too high with the result that the community in particular was invariably likely to be disappointed” (p. 11). The evaluation found there were “too many” strategic areas of action and this made the trial “more difficult” (p. 26). The evaluation does not systematically work through each strategic area for action to assess the degree of progress by the trial on each, which suggests that while an early shared commitment existed, it does not appear to have guided the implementation. The evaluation suggests the imperative to get “runs on the board” preoccupied the partners from agreeing on a set of shared outcomes:

> ...one of our most critical observations is that this Trial appears to have been very preoccupied with getting ‘quick wins’ or ‘runs on the board’ by way of community outcomes such as education improvements and increased employment rather than focusing on **how** the stakeholders would work together and agree on what they were seeking as shared outcomes (Morgan Disney et al 2006a, p. 30).
Therefore, there is no evidence to indicate that the partners were jointly working towards a set of shared objectives and shared outcomes for the trial.

FUNCTIONALITY – POOR

**Role clarity and early detailed planning**

There is no evidence in the evaluation that this occurred. Rather, much of the evidence presented strongly suggests a lack of role clarity for the Steering Group and the ACFG. In relation to early detailed planning, the evaluation found there were significant attempts in this regard. It stated:

> Most members attended and contributed to the various planning meetings and attended a multitude of meetings, especially in the first two years of the Trial (Morgan Disney et al 2006a, p. 32).

The meetings led to an agreement to establish a Strategic Planning and Policy Unit, which, after much delay, occurred in the final year of the trial in January 2006. The evaluation reported that a “Planning Day” for the Governance Group of the Strategic Planning and Policy Unit was held in April 2006 as the evaluation of the trial concluded (p. 18).

FUNCTIONALITY – POOR

**Sustained operation and membership of steering committee**

In relation to the trial Steering Group, the Commonwealth and State lead agencies changed during the trial, which resulted in changes in the responsible government officials.

The evaluation did not provide evidence regarding the attendance of the Secretaries of DEWR and DPC-Vic at the Steering Group meetings or the identity of the senior delegate who attended in their place. However, it is stated elsewhere that Secretary Dr Boxall attended the trial site on the following dates:
• 28-29 October 2002;
• 21 February 2003;
• 4-5 June 2003;
• 25-26 August 2003;
• 10-11 December 2003;
• 8 April 2004;
• 24-25 November 2004 (Senate Employment Workplace Relations and Education Legislation Committee 2006e, Answer to Question on Notice W477-06).

The Chair of ATSIC Binjirru Regional Council was a formal partner of the trial and a member of the Steering Group for only the first half of the trial prior to ATSIC being abolished. Some of the key leaders of the Shepparton Aboriginal community withdrew their participation in the ACFG, and therefore their role on the Steering Group, about half way through the trial.

The evaluation did not provide evidence about the rate of turnover of government officials working on the trial but a high turnover was a feature of many of the other trial sites and therefore is likely to have been a feature of this trial. Despite the numerous and significant changes in membership, the evaluation found the “Steering Group met monthly until the end of 2005 and then agreed to meet bi-monthly” (Morgan Disney et al 2006a, p. 22), which indicates sustained operation throughout the trial, though the evaluation does not investigate the content and outcomes of these frequent meetings, and how they progressed the aims of the COAG Trials Project.

Tony Abbott, then Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations visited the trial site once in his role as ‘lead-agency’ Minister on 4 September 2003. On 7 October 2003, Kevin Andrews was appointed Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations and assumed responsibility for the Victorian trial. Minister Andrews also visited the trial site once on 10-11 December 2003.
In summary, it appears that a Steering Group with varying membership operated with varying degree over the duration of the trial. This warrants a poor functioning of this key characteristic.

FUNCTIONALITY – POOR

**Shared responsibility for whole-of-government expenditure in the trial region**

There is no evidence the trial Steering Group assumed responsibility for whole-of-government expenditure in the trial region.

FUNCTIONALITY – POOR

**Full access to information**

The *Compact* states that all levels of Government agreed to:

Collecting and sharing with Compact partners any government-held information which could help progress the shared objectives, subject to agreed protocols (Abbott et al 2003, p. 4).

The evaluation found:

It was difficult to establish the extent to which this was achieved. Some ACFG members believe that governments did not share information and data openly, whilst other members believe that there was a sharing of information through some of the specific strategies. Early in the Trial governments jointly undertook a mapping of funding for the Shepparton Indigenous community which was shared by all partners with the ACFG. The education strategy has certainly led to more open sharing of information and the Strategic Planning and Policy Unit is currently working on several proposals to build and improve the data available including through the ABS Census (Morgan Disney et al 2006a, p. 26).
The evaluation also pointed to the establishment of the Strategic Planning and Policy Unit in January 2006, “which has a major role in data building and information sharing” but found that the “delay in establishing the Unit probably impacted on meeting this commitment” (p. 27).

FUNCTIONALITY – POOR

**Summary of analysis of government-community partnerships**

The Victorian trial’s progress towards a government-community partnership is given a good rating for one key characteristic, satisfactory ratings for three key characteristics and poor ratings for the remaining eight (see Table 24).

**Table 24: Ratings for the key characteristics of government-community partnership, Victorian COAG trial**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>KEY CHARACTERISTIC</th>
<th>RATING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Right partners</td>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partnership agreement</td>
<td>Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joint steering committee</td>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steering committee authority</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respect for partners’ values</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust and collaboration</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protocols for shared power</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared objectives and shared outcomes</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role clarity and early planning</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sustained operation and membership</td>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared responsibility for expenditure</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full access to information</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Part C. Quality of social and economic improvements

The evaluation did not present any evidence of socioeconomic improvements in the trial region’s Indigenous population attributable the work of the trial. The failure to develop a set of baseline data and a performance monitoring system for the trial resulted in the evaluation simply reporting a mixture of views in this regard:

There are very divergent views across the stakeholder groups regarding the outcomes achieved from this Trial. These range from a view that there have been no outcomes, that the outcomes have not been very tangible and too much time had been wasted on internal politics, or that there had been too many poor government processes. Others argued that the outcomes were really only becoming obvious now such as a growing awareness of the need to address relationships, some tangible improvements in education and some slow progress on increased employment. This question about outcomes brought the evaluation team back to the issue of what is (sic) was that partners were wanting (sic) to evaluate (Morgan Disney et al 2006a, p. 36).

Nevertheless, the evaluation reported that there were a number of “broad outcomes” that arose from the trial. These were largely procedural developments or government outputs such as the establishment of the Strategic Planning and Policy Unit in the final year of the trial. It also highlighted that most of the partners are still engaged in the trial and that the involvement of the City of Greater Shepparton has grown over the course of the trial, though it does not state what benefits arose for the Indigenous population from this increased involvement (Morgan Disney et al 2006a, p. 6).

Conclusion – Victoria

In relation to the achievement of a whole-of-government approach, this appraisal deemed a satisfactory rating in four of the twelve characteristics, with the remaining eight receiving a poor rating. In relation to the achievement of a government-community partnership, this appraisal deemed a good rating for the content and early functioning of the *Compact*
agreement. The evidence suggests that this was due to the early good will and involvement of the Secretaries of DEWR and DPC-Vic. It deemed two other key characteristics as satisfactory. There is no evidence of socioeconomic improvements as a result of the conduct of the trial.

One of the key findings of the evaluation is that the trial was very focused on ‘getting things done’ often using old ways of working. It found more attention was needed to address how to work differently. As a result, some of the Indigenous leaders and community members were frustrated and disappointed at “what appears to be a lack of progress”. Other leaders feel that there has been progress and that this is not adequately acknowledged (Morgan Disney et al 2006a, p. 5).
Australian Capital Territory

Part A. Quality of whole-of-government coordination

This Part appraises how the aim for whole-of-government coordination was pursued in the Australian Capital Territory COAG trial. The appraisal considers what occurred in the trial against twelve key characteristics of such an approach, which were drawn-up earlier this chapter.

Lead agencies

The lead agencies were the Commonwealth Department of the Environment and Heritage (DEH) and the ACT Chief Minister’s Department (CMD-ACT). David Borthwick, Secretary of DEH, was the Commonwealth’s trial ‘sponsor’ and Mike Harris was the Chief Executive Officer, Chief Minister’s Department. Both Departments retained the lead agency role for the duration of the trial.

It is evident the lead agencies saw the need for a strategic approach to fulfil their responsibilities early in the trial. They successfully negotiated an agreement between the five groups of trial partners to guide the conduct of the trial. The lead agencies committed to; “coordinating ... government”, “coordinate the provision of information”, and “convene regular meetings ... of government agencies” (Kemp et al, 15 April 2004).

A satisfactory rating is deemed because the lead agencies were appointed and undertook to implement a strategic approach through the successful negotiation of a framework agreement with each other and the Indigenous partners in line with COAG’s aims for the trial.

FUNCTIONALITY – SATISFACTORY
Framework agreement

The lead agencies successfully negotiated a framework agreement between the Commonwealth and Territory Governments, the ATSIC National Commission, the ATSIC Queanbeyan Regional Council and a representative group of ACT-based Indigenous organisations. Commonwealth Minister for Environment and Heritage David Kemp, ACT Chief Minister Jon Stanhope, ATSIC National Acting Chair Lionel Quartermaine, ATSIC Queanbeyan Regional Chair Keith Morgan and Chair of the Indigenous Working Group, Ros Brown signed it as part of the trial’s joint media announcement (Kemp et al 2004).

It was referred to as a Shared Responsibility Agreement (SRA) and was titled, *Shared Responsibility Agreement between the Australian Government through the Department of the Environment and Heritage and the Australian Capital Territory Government through the Chief Minister’s Department for the ACT and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community of the ACT and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission - A Council of Australian Governments' Initiative* (Kemp et al 2004). The purpose of the agreement was to reform government processes:

> The Agreement acknowledges that the purpose of this trial is to bring about reforms to existing programs and services so as to assist the members of the Community to more readily address issues and concerns and achieve their aspirations (Kemp et al 2004, p. 1).

The framework agreement outlined the trial’s guiding principles, the five objectives and three “key priorities”, namely; 1) social and emotional well-being, 2) culture and learning, and 3) capacity building for all (Kemp et al 2004). It also provided for: the establishment of a steering committee; a commitment to performance measurement and evaluation including quarterly reviews of progress; data sharing; a dispute resolution process and an agreement termination process. The inclusion of all these features in the framework agreement demonstrates general adherence, at least in form, to the recognised public management
standards at the time for intergovernmental arrangements of this nature (Australian National Audit Office 2003 as cited in Auditor-General and Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet 2006, pp. 14-15). While it established some relevant structures, it did not provide protocols for how the structures were to operate to pursue whole-of-government coordination.

A surprisingly conspicuous absence from the framework agreement is an explicit use of the term ‘whole-of-government’. COAG’s intent for a whole-of-government approach in each trial site was lost in the translation of the Project from the political-level to the public administration-level and likely to have had implications for its implementation. Losing focus on COAG’s intent for a whole-of-government approach may be inferred as poor project management (Project Management Institute 2004) or, in this case, it may infer some political strategy.

To explain the latter, it is curious whether the lack of explicit commitment to a whole-of-government approach in the framework agreement is a reflection of the experience of the earlier established trial sites, which Minister Vanstone alluded to at the joint media conference. Progress towards whole-of-government approaches had been largely unsuccessful, as the appraisal of the earlier sites has demonstrated (Cutcliffe 2004; Gibbons 2004 as quoted in ATSI SJC 2005, p. 92; ATSI SJC 2005, pp. 93-95). The omission may suggest the Governments thought it best to avoid using the term ‘whole-of-government’ in the ACT framework agreement rather than buttress Minister Ruddock’s earlier steely determination, where he wrote:

The Commonwealth is determined that these trials will succeed [in] turning the whole of government approach into reality (Ruddock 2002a, p. 5).

While the expression ‘whole-of-government’ is not used in the framework agreement, there are several other indicators that collectively infer the intent for such an approach including:
the Partners have agreed to work together to ... examine existing programs, services and modes of delivery and to take whatever actions deemed necessary in order to streamline and improve services to the Community.

...support and strengthen local governance arrangements within and between the Community, ATSIC, the ACT Government, and the Australian Government.

...ensure that the strategies developed to address Community issues are both holistic and sustainable (Kemp et al 2004).

Further, the appointment of lead agencies to take responsibility for coordinating Indigenous-related government activity in the region and the overall intergovernmental nature of the high-level, comprehensive framework agreement, leave little doubt that a whole-of-government approach was being sought. However, the absence of an explicit reference to the term ‘whole-of-government’ in the framework agreement may have resulted in insufficient imperative and focus across the trial to implementing this aim. The evaluation found:

In this Trial the lead Australian government agency experienced some difficulties in engaging the relevant Commonwealth agencies and the lead ACT Government central agency also took some time to gain the support of some of the line agencies. The ACT Government lead agency did have some capacity to influence other agencies over time (Morgan Disney et al 2006b, p. 5).

The finding indicates the lead agencies had engaged with some agencies but it cannot be equated to achieving a whole-of-government approach. The absence of the term ‘whole-of-government’ in the agreement should warrant a poor-rating for this key characteristic because it was such a fundamental aim of the Project but the relevant descriptions in the framework agreement collectively amount to demonstrating the intent for a whole-of-government approach. A satisfactory rating is deemed because the framework agreement
was the result of successful negotiations between the partners, it largely reflected the two aims of the overall COAG Trials Project and it contained many of the elements of recognised good practice for an agreement of this nature.

FUNCTIONALITY – SATISFACTORY

**Joint steering committee**

The issue to be considered for this key characteristic is whether a steering committee was established for the trial and whether it functioned to drive a whole-of-government approach. This includes consideration of whether it was strategically positioned to fulfil this role and whether there was some attempt at strategic implementation.

The ACT trial framework agreement established a Steering Committee with “overall responsibility for progressing the objectives of this Agreement, including the specific initiatives or projects agreed by all partners” (Kemp et al 2004). It also provided for the following membership:

- Chairperson, Indigenous Working Group;
- Chairperson, ATSIC Queanbeyan Regional Council;
- Secretary, Australian Government Department of the Environment and Heritage; and
- Chief Executive, ACT Chief Minister’s Department (Kemp et al 2004).

Therefore, the framework agreement provided for a suitably-positioned joint steering committee for the trial. In its first twelve months, the Steering Committee met ten times following a monthly schedule and then twice more over the next six months, leading up to the commencement of the evaluation (Morgan Disney et al 2006b, p. 13). The evaluation states that the ATSIC Regional Chair Keith Morgan rarely attended the meetings but there is
no exploration of why. He was not interviewed for the evaluation and therefore it reflects the views of only three of the four members of the steering committee:

...three of the members highlighted that the working relationships that developed were excellent and that respect was developed for each others’ roles and tasks (Morgan Disney et al 2006b, p. 14).

The Steering Committee and the IWG appear to have worked best at building relationships, listening to each other and improving understandings of how to work together (Morgan Disney et al 2006b, p. 16).

The purpose of establishing a steering committee is to focus responsibility and accountability (Auditor-General 2007b, p. 48), however the evaluation found that there were ten new structures specifically established for the ACT trial. The ten structures were:

- ACT COAG Steering Committee;
- Priority Working Groups;
  - Self-esteem and cultural identity;
  - Substance abuse;
  - Justice; and
  - Education.
- Joint Partners’ Committee;
- Trial Project Officers’ Group;
- Commonwealth Officers’ Group;
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled Council; and
- Indigenous Working Group

Each structure had different, yet overlapping roles and responsibilities with each other and with the aims of the trial (see Morgan Disney et al 2006b, pp. 14-16). Recall, all of this administrative activity was for the benefit of the Indigenous population in the ACT of only 3,576 persons. Further, the list does not include the national structures for the COAG Trials.
Project including the Ministerial Taskforce on Indigenous Issues, the Secretaries Group on Indigenous Affairs, the ATSIC National Commission, the ATSIC Queanbeyan Regional Council and a swathe of committees established under the ACT Government such as those described earlier.

The evaluation reported that some of the stakeholders interviewed believed that “the Trial was over-governed” (Morgan Disney et al 2006b, pp. 14 & 16). It found the complexity of the arrangements was confusing, which was contrary to the aim of government coordination:

A number of stakeholders expressed a view that perhaps the Trial was over-governed, with too many groups; this appears to have led to some confusion about the role of each group (Morgan Disney et al 2006b, p. 14).

The evaluation gave only cursory attention to this critical finding as illustrated in the two following extracts, which effectively represent the sum total of the evaluation’s analysis:

On the question of whether the Trial was over-governed, an alternative view is that while it looks like there were too many groups in the structure, only three – the Steering Committee, the IWG and the Commonwealth Officers Group - were in place for most of the Trial. The other groups were slightly more informal and were set up to move issues forward. There is some evidence that the other structures have assisted in building awareness of how important it is to work together (Morgan Disney et al 2006b, p. 16).

Overall, however, the structures are seen as having some success at building partnerships, improving the way governments work together, and involving and enabling the community to contribute to their own solutions (Morgan Disney et al 2006b, p. 14).

The brevity of the evaluation’s discussion of the “over-governed” concerns may be inferred as a missed opportunity to identify and evaluate the trial Steering Committee’s strategy for
a whole-of-government approach. Rather, the evaluation was practically dismissive of the concern, preferring to draw the simple conclusion that they resulted in the stakeholders’ awareness of how important it is to work together, which was already understood and was the basis for establishing the overall Project.

It is evident from the number of new structures that implementing a whole-of-government approach for the ACT was a large and difficult task, which would have been unachievable without a strategy. The lack of strategy may have been a cause of what some of the earlier literature identified as iatrogenic circumstances, that is, the new coordinating-structures may cause more of the very miseries they are supposed to reduce (6 et al 2002, p. 44; Kavanagh and Richards 2001, p. 17; Ling 2002 as quoted in Hunt 2005, p. 8).

In summary, a joint steering committee was established with overall responsibility to progress a whole-of-government approach for the trial and it met twelve times in the first eighteen months. It oversaw the development of numerous new structures for the trial to achieve whole-of-government coordination but it appears insufficient attention to strategy may have compounded the problems it was seeking to redress. Nevertheless, a rating of satisfactory has been deemed because it attempted to function in accordance with its whole-of-government agenda.

FUNCTIONALITY – SATISFACTORY

Implementation plan

There is no evidence in the evaluation that the Steering Committee had developed an overall implementation plan for the trial.

FUNCTIONALITY – POOR
**Mapping and developing whole-of-government funding arrangements**

There is no evidence that whole-of-government funding arrangements were developed for the trial but service-mapping was undertaken for the four key priorities.

The Steering Committee established four working groups, one for each of the agreed key priorities. The Working Groups each undertook a service-mapping exercise to identify the services available, the amount of funding from both levels of government, possible new initiatives, and potential areas for re-engineering and revising existing programs (Morgan Disney et al 2006b, p. 8). The evaluation reported that the mapping was the basis of discussion for one meeting in two Working Groups and for four meetings for each of the other two Working Groups. There is no description of the content of the meetings’ discussions or which Working Groups met either once or four times. The service-mapping was also the basis of a one-day workshop hosted by the IWG, however “no further analysis appears to have been undertaken” (Morgan Disney et al 2006b, p. 15). The evaluation stated:

> Whilst this data does not appear to have been used as well as it might have during the Trial, it is now being used to progress some work within the ACT Government and in the ongoing initiatives (Morgan Disney et al 2006b, p. 23).

The evaluation also reports that recommendations were made as part of the mapping exercises but there is no further detail (Morgan Disney et al 2006b, p. 35). While the mapping exercise was reportedly undertaken, there is no detail about its contents, such as financial expenditure, or the content of the ensuing discussions. Evidently, the mapping exercise did not result in the development of holistic funding arrangements for the trial and for these reasons a poor rating has been deemed.

FUNCTIONALITY – POOR
Protocols and dispute resolution

The focus of attention for this key characteristic is on the protocols that guided the internal decision-making of the Steering Committee and within the other intergovernmental structures, as well as the protocols that were developed to ensure the numerous structures were collectively organised to produce and implement a holistic services plan in the trial region for the four agreed priority areas.

There is provision for some of this protocol in the trial’s framework agreement. It provides for the establishment of a steering committee, its membership and its overall responsibility, though there is no indication of how the Steering Committee would make final decisions.

The framework agreement provides a broad statement of principle that the path towards a whole-of-government approach is to reform existing programs and services:

The Agreement acknowledges that the purpose of this trial is to bring about reforms to existing programs and services so as to assist the members of the Community to more readily address issues and concerns and achieve their aspirations (Morgan Disney et al 2006b, p. 1) (my emphasis).

It also provides some slightly more detailed guidance for the intergovernmental structures but the descriptions are still at the level of principle:

In order to do this, the Partners have agreed to work together to:

• establish partnerships and share responsibility for achieving measurable and sustainable improvements for people living in the Community;

• support and strengthen local governance arrangements within and between the Community, ATSIC, the ACT Government, and the Australian Government;

• support and strengthen decision making and accountability processes which honour the spirit of shared responsibility;
• examine existing programs, services and modes of delivery and to take whatever actions deemed necessary in order to streamline and improve services to the Community;

• learn from a shared responsibility approach - identify what works and what doesn’t and to apply these lessons in future approaches to ensure that the strategies developed to address Community issues are both holistic and sustainable (Kemp et al 2004, pp. 1-2).

It is evident from the evaluation that the protocol described in the framework agreement was influential in the conduct of the trial but it lacked detail on how the numerous intergovernmental structures would be collectively coordinated to achieve outcomes in the four agreed priority areas. The framework agreement contemplated the need for more detailed arrangements and provided a process for these to be developed. It stated:

Where required, more detailed governance arrangements will be negotiated between the Partners, agreed by the Steering Committee, and included in an annexure to this Agreement (Kemp et al 2004, p. 5).

There is evidence in the evaluation that the Steering Committee had developed two specific mechanisms but it appears that neither was documented and annexed to the Agreement. First, the Steering Committee established four priority working groups to undertake a service-mapping exercise as part of a strategy towards development of a holistic plan for the trial region. Pre-existing consultative committees formed the basis of each of the four working groups and officers from the two governments joined them. Each working group was to report back to the Steering Committee, the Joint Partners Group and the Advisory Groups’ forum by the end of 2004 (Morgan Disney et al 2006b, p. 13). This is more detailed protocol but there was no protocol as to what should happen once the mapping exercise was completed. Perhaps as a consequence, a holistic plan for the trial arising from the mapping exercises did not eventuate. It demonstrates the protocol provided insufficient
guidance to the numerous intergovernmental structures on how to develop a holistic plan from the service-mapping.

Second, the Steering Committee oversaw the establishment of the Joint Partners Committee, which comprised of six Commonwealth Government agencies and four ACT Government agencies. This structure should have been instrumental in the production of a holistic plan from the mapping exercise but the evaluation found its effectiveness suffered from a lack of operational protocol:

Decisions were reportedly sometimes difficult to make as people who were sent as representatives had limited decision making power and were often very junior in the departments represented. It was also reported that decisions and agreements were sometimes made external to the agency involved and the agency was then informed of the decision and hence had no ownership of the issue or the decision (Morgan Disney et al 2006b, p. 15).

There is no evidence that a dispute resolution process was employed during the trial though the framework agreement contained a vague and inadequate provision. It stated:

A process for settling disputes will be determined by members of the Steering Committee on a case by case basis (Kemp et al 2004, p. 6).

Relevantly, the evaluation concluded that the development of a specific mechanism was necessary to enable a whole-of-government approach:

...it is critical to have a mechanism within each level of government which enables the lead agency to engage other CEOs or Ministers with the process. Whilst within the two lead agencies in the ACT Trial, there has been a high level of commitment and effort, it is more difficult to achieve sustained change without a whole of government approach across both levels (Morgan Disney et al 2006b, p. 19).

In summary, the lead agencies paid early attention to developing some protocol guidance towards a whole-of-government approach but it remained at the level of principle and
lacked foresight beyond the mapping exercise. There was a lack of protocol detail for how the various intergovernmental structures were to digest the services-mapping and produce a holistic plan for the trial. This is a critical step in the development of a whole-of-government approach, therefore a poor rating has been deemed.

FUNCTIONALITY – POOR

**Realistic timeframes**

The framework agreement referred only to two timeframes. First, it stated the Indigenous Working Group term was to commence on 30 September 2003 and its term was limited to 24 months. Second, it stated any partner wishing to withdraw from the agreement must give three months written notice with reasons (Kemp et al 2004). The evaluation reports that only the first timeframe was complied with (Morgan Disney et al 2006b, p. 25).

The Steering Committee set a further timeframe, which was that service-mapping was to be completed by “the end of 2004” (Morgan Disney et al 2006b, p. 13). This timeframe was met. While two of the three timeframes were complied with, the paucity of timeframes for the overall public management of the trial over its duration is indicative of unsound implementation planning and therefore a rating of poor has been deemed.

FUNCTIONALITY – POOR

**Risk assessment**

There is no evidence that the lead agencies undertook a risk assessment to implementing a whole-of-government approach.

FUNCTIONALITY – POOR
Trust and collaboration between the agencies

This key characteristic focuses on the quality of the relationships between the government partners. The evaluation described the nature of the relationships prior to the ACT trial, which indicates a pre-existing level of low trust and collaboration:

At the commencement of the Trial, communication between government departments within the ACT was perceived by many stakeholders including the community, as inconsistent and unclear and as poor between the two levels of government (Morgan Disney et al 2006b, pp. 8-9).

Despite the pre-existing ‘poor’ relationships, there is no evidence in the evaluation that the quality of trust between the government agencies was monitored or purposefully nurtured during the trial. The evaluation presented some evidence that indicates trustful relationships between the agencies did not exist. For example, it may be inferred from the following finding that trust did not exist between DEH and the other Commonwealth agencies and between DCM-ACT and the other ACT Government agencies:

In this Trial the lead Australian government agency experienced some difficulties in engaging the relevant Commonwealth agencies and the lead ACT Government central agency also took some time to gain the support of some of the line agencies (Morgan Disney et al 2006b, p. 5).

Further, it appears some mistrust arose from a lack of clarity early in the trial about the limits of the commitments that each partner could make. The evaluation found:

In several projects, the limitations and/or parameters of governments, with respect to future resourcing or support for proposed options, could have been clearer at the outset. Articulating these early in the process may have assisted in reducing intra and cross government and community frustration and disappointment, and allowed for exploration of alternative solutions more quickly (Morgan Disney et al 2006b, p. 5).

However, the evaluation also found there were “excellent” relationships between three of the four Steering Committee members:
The Steering Committee met monthly; three of the members highlighted that the working relationships that developed were excellent and that respect was developed for each others’ roles and tasks (Morgan Disney et al. 2006b, p. 14).

The weight of this finding is qualified because the evaluation does not describe the indicators that were relied upon to ground the “excellent” classification. It is further qualified because it reports the views of only three of the four members of the Steering Committee.

In summary, the evaluation found that relationships between the partners, and to a lesser degree between the various structures, were formed during the trial but there is no evidence that the quality of the relationships between all the relevant agencies providing Indigenous-related services in the trial region involved a culture of trust and collaboration.

**FUNCTIONALITY – POOR**

*Skills training*

There is no evidence that training in whole-of-government approaches was provided to any of the government officials.

**FUNCTIONALITY – POOR**

*Performance monitoring*

The framework agreement stipulated a commitment-in-principle to “establish partnerships and share responsibility for achieving measurable and sustainable improvements for people living in the Community” (Kemp et al. 2004, p. 2). More specifically, clause 6 of the framework agreement, titled, “Performance Measurement and Evaluation”, stated, “...the
primary benchmark for measuring the progress against each of the objectives...” would be
the “COAG Strategic Areas for Action”\textsuperscript{16}.

Therefore, this demonstrates the early intention was to employ two sets of indicators to
measure the impact of the trial, namely; 1) Progress of the intended administrative reforms,
and 2) Socio-economic improvements in the trial population. In relation to the first, the
framework agreement does not describe how the indicators of administrative reform would
be developed and employed. In relation to the second, the framework agreement states the
“COAG Strategic Areas for Action” would be applied but these are mostly national-level
indicators, which the Productivity Commission employs to track annual progress. Their
suitability for monitoring the trial is questionable.

While there is some attention to performance monitoring in the framework agreement,
there is no evidence that a performance monitoring and measuring process was developed
and implemented for the ACT trial. Therefore, a rating of poor has been deemed.

FUNCTIONALITY – POOR

\textit{Baseline data}

The framework agreement stated the “COAG Strategic Areas for Action” would be applied
as the “primary benchmark” for measuring trial progress. However, the applicability of this
benchmark is questionable because most of the indicators were aggregated at the national-
level and there were thirty indicators (Steering Committee for the Review of Government
Service Provision 2003). This suggests the data was unlikely to be a reliable indicator for the
Indigenous population of the ACT, and the large number would have involved a time-
and resource-intensive monitoring process, well beyond the resources available to the trial. In
any event, these indicators were not applied to measure the performance of the trial.

\textsuperscript{16} The seven “Strategic Areas for Action” were the second tier of the \textit{Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage Framework} developed by the Productivity Commission (Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision 2003).
There was another source to establish reliable baseline data for performance monitoring of the trial. It was a 2004 study by the ACT Chief Minister’s Department called *A Social and Cultural Profile of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People in Canberra*. The Chief Minister saw much value in this study for improving public administration:

The findings of this study will provide us with valuable information to assist our policy development in the future. That report will help Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Canberra in a number of ways. It will be given to all agencies and departments involved in policy and programs to provide a better understanding of the social and cultural circumstances of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Canberra. On the other side of the coin, it gives the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Canberra a tool to use for communicating with government agencies when pushing for existing and new programs and services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (Australian Capital Territory Legislative Assembly 2004b, *Hansard*, 26 August 2004, p. 4365 per Stanhope).

This data was not referred to for the implementation or the evaluation of the ACT trial.

FUNCTIONALITY – POOR
Summary of analysis of whole-of-government coordination

The Australian Capital Territory trial’s progress towards whole-of-government coordination is given satisfactory ratings for three key characteristics and poor ratings for the remaining nine (see Table 25).

Table 25: Ratings for the key characteristics of whole-of-government coordination, Australian Capital Territory COAG trial

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>KEY CHARACTERISTIC</th>
<th>RATING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lead agencies</td>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Framework agreement</td>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joint steering committee</td>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implementation plan</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mapping whole-of-government expenditure</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protocols and dispute resolution process</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Realistic timeframes</td>
<td>Poor</td>
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<tr>
<td>Risk assessment</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust and collaboration</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skills Training</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance Monitoring</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baseline data</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In relation to whole-of-government coordination, the progress was limited to the establishment of numerous structures and there were no accompanying protocols to instil partnership-style collaboration. The evaluation concluded:

Some people were and still are cynical about the whole of government approach, while others were and still are optimistic (Morgan Disney et al 2006b, p. 8).
Whole-of-government coordination was not a key feature of the ACT trial. It was not even mentioned in the trial’s framework agreement. COAG’s original primary aim was not a visible priority for the implementation of the ACT trial. This is a further indication of the earlier observation that the emphasis on whole-of-government had substantially diminished over the duration of the Trials Project.

There are only two instances in the evaluation report, which might be considered as a relevant finding. The first instance, which is reproduced below, is a single sentence:

Both the ICC and ACT Government acknowledge the need to further develop the whole-of-government partnership (Morgan Disney et al 2006b, p. 17).

The second instance is similarly simplistic. The context is a list of a “suggestions” prepared by the evaluators to improve the governmental aspects of the trial, if it were to continue. It is an isolated general statement with no further associated commentary:

The capacity of government needs to be improved in such areas as cross cultural awareness, how to implement whole of government strategies and how to work with Indigenous communities (Morgan Disney et al 2006b, p. 27).
Part B. Quality of the government-community partnership

This Part appraises how the aim for a government-community partnership was approached in the Australian Capital Territory COAG trial. The appraisal considers what occurred in the trial against twelve key characteristics of such an approach, which were drawn-up earlier in this chapter.

The right partners

The framework agreement stipulated the partners to the trial’s government-community partnership. The Commonwealth and Territory Government partners were the DEH and CMD-ACT respectively. Both were well-placed within the context of the COAG Trials Project to undertake the role as a trial partner. DEH was a member of the Secretaries Group on Indigenous Affairs and had experience in Indigenous affairs policy, primarily in the context of Indigenous natural resource management and co-management of some national parks, including Uluru and Kakadu. CMD-ACT was authoritatively positioned to drive the holistic coordination of the relevant Territory Government agencies. It too had experience in Indigenous affairs policy, with the establishment of an Office of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs that was linked to an advisory group called the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Consultative Council (ATSICC). Both the Office and the Consultative Council had been in operation since 1995.

The evaluation found that DEH had some difficulty engaging with the other Commonwealth Departments, because Indigenous affairs was not regarded as “core business” for DEH (Morgan Disney et al 2006b, p. 5). It is curious whether the difficulties it experienced in engaging with the other Commonwealth Departments was an example of ‘departmentalism’, whereby the agencies with traditionally recognised socioeconomic responsibilities for Indigenous affairs such as DIMIA, FaCS, DEST, DEWR and DoHA asserted a perceived authority in this domain. It raises a question as to the suitability of its
appointment as lead agency partner in an Indigenous affairs policy context; did DEH have sufficient authority to lead the Commonwealth in holistically addressing the systemically-wretched circumstances of the trial’s Indigenous population or was it an unnecessarily experimental appointment in light of the socioeconomic urgencies of the trial population?

The framework agreement also stipulated three separate Indigenous partners to the trial:

1) It committed to establishing a new confederation of the ACT-based Indigenous associations referred to as the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled Council (ATSICCC);
2) A new Indigenous Working Group (IWG), which was an executive group of the ATSICCC; and
3) The ATSIC Queanbeyan Regional Council (Kemp et al 2004, p. 4).

The evaluation reports that the impetus for the first, the ATSICCC structure, emanated from a decision of the “Community Leaders Workshop” held in September 2003. The membership of the proposed confederation was described in the framework agreement:

- the United Ngunnawal Elders Council (UNEC) – representing the interests of traditional owners;
- the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-based organisations;
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Government advisory bodies; and
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander advocacy groups (Kemp et al 2004, p. 4).

The evaluation reports that the ATSICCC “never eventuated as other processes were being implemented to achieve representative Indigenous mechanisms” (Morgan Disney et al 2006b, p. 14). It does not state who made the decision to abandon this fundamental commitment of the framework agreement. There is no evidence in the evaluation from any of the Indigenous groups’ view of the decision to abandon this commitment. This may be
viewed as a loss to the trial because its membership would have enabled the trial to reach deep into the Indigenous community.

It appears that the IWG, the second Indigenous partner to the trial, assumed its place. This is interesting because the original role of the IWG was to be the executive group to the ATSICCC but rather it appears to have replaced it. This would have implications for Indigenous representation more broadly because the IWG’s term of office was limited to only 24 months (Kemp et al 2004, p. 4). The Chairperson of the IWG, Ros Brown, was funded from the COAG Project’s national Flexible Funding Pool to fulfil the role full-time for the same period (Kemp et al 2004, p. 4).

The evaluation reported that the IWG had “the most consistent membership” and “became an active participant in the Trial” process (Morgan and Disney et al 2006b, p. 14). The evaluation found the IWG had difficulties in finding “suitable times to meet” because the members of the IWG were already actively involved in many community structures and processes (Morgan and Disney et al 2006b, p. 14). The evidence in the evaluation indicates that the IWG only met once (Morgan Disney et al 2006b, Appendix Three: Table of Significant Dates). The lack of meetings suggests that the full-time Chairperson Ros Brown became the central Indigenous representative for the trial.

The third Indigenous partner to the trial was the ATSIC Queanbeyan Regional Council. According to the framework agreement, its role was to advocate the interests of the trial’s Indigenous community and to ensure the conduct of the trial was aligned with its triennial Regional Plan 2003-2006 (Kemp et al 2004, p. 4). However, only hours after the joint media announcement for the ACT trial, then Prime Minister John Howard and Minister for Indigenous Affairs Amanda Vanstone announced their decision to abolish ATSIC, in another media conference.
Prime Minister Howard stated that the abolition of the National Commission of ATSIC would take effect immediately upon the passing of legislation. A bill was introduced into the Commonwealth Parliament only weeks later. Further, the ATSIC Regional Councils would be abolished one year later, with effect from 30 June 2005. ATSIC was two of the five signatories (40%) of the ACT trial, effectively leaving Ros Brown, the government-funded, full-time Chairperson of the IWG as the only remaining Indigenous partner for the ACT trial.

The majority of ATSIC/ATSIS programs and services were transferred to mainstream departments on 1 July 2004. At her second joint media conference on Indigenous affairs for the day Senator Vanstone laid the blame on ATSIC for the lack of progress on Indigenous disadvantage.

ATSIC was not serving them well, that’s the whole point, indigenous Australians haven’t been getting value for the money we’ve been spending and the whole purpose and priority of this Government in terms of Indigenous affairs is to deliver better services on the ground (Howard & Vanstone 2004, p. 8).

No evidence was provided to support the contention. Minister Vanstone continued:

Now that’s more important to me and to members of the Government than arguing about who represents who and bureaucratic indigenous structures or bureaucratic government structures. We’ll be judged on whether we deliver better outcomes to indigenous (sic) Australians, whether they get better value (Howard & Vanstone 2004, p. 8).

Minister Vanstone’s statement that the Commonwealth Government did not want to focus on the bureaucratic structures of government and Indigenous communities was in stark contrast to the two primary aims of the COAG Project, which was to focus on changing the way the numerous structures worked within and with each other, through whole-of-government coordination and government-community partnerships. There is no argument on the need to deliver better outcomes to Indigenous Australians. The abolition of ATSIC
may infer the Commonwealth Government was focused on the primary Indigenous bureaucratic structure and insufficiently focused on the problems of the government bureaucratic structures. The Prime Minister was also vague on the Government’s reasons for the abolition of ATSIC.

JOURNALIST:

Why do you think ATSIC failed?

PRIME MINISTER:

I think there are a combination of reasons for that. I don’t think there is a lot of purpose in going into it. I do believe that it has become too preoccupied with what might loosely be called symbolic issues and too little concern with delivering real outcomes for indigenous people (Howard & Vanstone 2004, p. 8).

Prime Minister Howard continued by pointing to the lack of progress on reducing Indigenous disadvantage and implying that this was due to the presence of ATSIC. He neither provided supporting evidence that the lack of progress on Indigenous disadvantage was due to ATSIC. That successive Commonwealth Governments had had constitutional responsibility for Indigenous affairs for the past four decades, including seven years of the Howard administration, appears to have escaped accountability.

The abolition of ATSIC also impacted on the other key signatory to the ACT trial, the ACT Government. Four months into the ACT trial the Chief Minister Jon Stanhope, in the ACT Legislative Assembly, highlighted the impact of the decision to abolish ATSIC on both the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community and the ACT Government.

...the journey towards reconciliation has, I think we all agree, hit a road block. In fact, it is ironic that here in the ACT, at a time when my government has committed itself to working even more closely with the United Ngunnawal Elders Council and the Ministerial Council for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, the federal government has closed the
door on the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission. As if that was not bad enough, there has been no effort made to create a replacement body with elected representation. This denies the basic rights of the first people of this country to self-determination of their own affairs.

... It is also ironic that the ATSIC decision came on the very day of the signing of the historic COAG Shared Responsibility Agreement between ATSIC, the ACT government, the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community and the Commonwealth government. Despite ATSIC’s demise, my government will continue to embrace the spirit of the agreement we signed. This agreement will play a significant ongoing role in addressing the causes of social exclusion, disadvantage and community dysfunction. (Stanhope 2004, p. 4363)

In summary, while the trial’s framework agreement provided for two Government and three Indigenous partners, the implementation of this commitment was poor, and by the conclusion of the ACT trial, there were no Indigenous partners. The ATSICCC did not eventuate, ATSIC was effectively abolished on the same day that the ACT trial commenced, and the IWG expired on 30 September 2005.

FUNCTIONALITY – POOR

**Partnership agreement**

A formal partnership agreement, also referred to by this appraisal as the framework agreement, was successfully negotiated and signed by the partners to the Australian Capital Territory COAG trial (Kemp et al 2004).

The framework agreement outlined the trial’s guiding principles, the five objectives and three “key priorities”, namely; 1) Social and emotional well-being, 2) Culture and learning, and 3) Capacity building for all. It also provided for a commitment to performance measurement and evaluation including quarterly reviews of progress; data sharing; a dispute resolution process and an agreement termination process (Kemp et al 2004). The
framework agreement stipulated the five partners to the agreement: DEH; CMD-ACT; ATSICCC; IWG; and ATSIC Queanbeyan Regional Council, and the establishment of a steering committee with overall responsibility for the trial.

These features of the framework agreement represent many of the key characteristics, at least in form, that were recognised public-management standards at the time for multi-stakeholder arrangements of this nature (Australian National Audit Office Guidance Paper No. 7, July 2003 as cited in Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet and Australian National Audit Office 2006, pp. 14-15).

Not unexpectedly, there were teething problems on the way to concluding the framework agreement. A brief description is provided because it was signed two-years after COAG first announced the COAG Trials Project, which by any measure is too long. According to the evaluation, discussions between the Commonwealth and the ACT Governments to develop an ACT COAG trial site were “opened” in December 2002 with the “basis of negotiation being the themes of youth and education” (Morgan Disney et al 2006b, p. 10). The Commonwealth and ACT Governments’ decision to determine the themes for negotiation was inconsistent with the thrust of the COAG Trials Project, which posited the Indigenous community were to determine their priority needs. It resulted in significant delay to the commencement of the trial.

Three months later, in March 2003, representatives of the ATSIC Queanbeyan Regional Council met with representatives from the Commonwealth and ACT Governments. The meeting agreed to discard the themes of youth and education for a consultation process in which the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community would determine the themes of the ACT trial (Morgan Disney et al 2006b, p. 10). Essentially, the change in process meant

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17 Another source says the discussions first commenced in August 2002 (ACT Department of Education Family and Youth Services 2003).
the community would determine the priorities rather than the Governments. It also meant delays to the finalising of an agreement and commencement of implementation.

A “community/government meeting” was held two months later in May 2003 and was reportedly attended by “around 30 community representatives”. A new Indigenous Working Group was established at this meeting and the role of this Working Group was “to advise the Government on how best to consult with the Indigenous community of the ACT” (Morgan Disney et al 2006b, p. 10). The following month, the new Indigenous Working Group met with representatives of the two Government jurisdictions. The evaluation does not describe the agenda or the outcomes of this meeting, or which agencies and government officials attended.

A further three months later, a two-day “Community Leaders’ Workshop was convened” (29-30 September 2003). The evaluation does not describe who organised the workshop, who was invited, who attended or how many people attended. The detail about this meeting is relevant to the quality of its representative authority. It is reported in another source that forty Indigenous leaders and representatives from community organisations attended (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner 2004, p. 250). Significantly, the Workshop endorsed the establishment of an ACT COAG trial with five binding decisions:

1) To endorse the process to establish a trial in the ACT on behalf of the Indigenous community of the ACT (Morgan Disney et al 2006b, p. 10);

2) To establish a new community governance structure, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled Council which was intended to be a federation of the existing ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations (Minister for Environment and Heritage 2003 as quoted in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner 2004, p. 250);
3) To maintain the recently established Indigenous Working Group to act as the executive committee for the new federation, including representing the community interests in negotiating the Shared Responsibility Agreement (Minister for Environment and Heritage 2003 as quoted in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner 2005, p. 250).

4) To endorse the payment of a full-time position of the Chairperson of the Indigenous Working Group (Morgan Disney et al 2006b, p. 10);

5) To endorse a proposal that the new focus of the trial would be guided by a social framework developed by the Chairperson of the new Indigenous Working Group, Ros Brown, a senior Indigenous custodian of the ACT region, called *The Living Web: Keeping the Web Alive* (see Diagram 1) (Morgan Disney et al 2006b, p. 10).

In relation to the fifth condition, *The Living Web: Keeping the Web Alive* was fully incorporated into the framework agreement (see Figure 16a). It was described as “holistic”, “multifaceted” and “encompasses justice, employment, youth, culture, education, housing, health and aged care”. *The Living Web* social framework also stipulated three overarching themes for the trial, namely:

1) Social and emotional well-being;

2) Culture and learning; and

3) Capacity building for all (Chief Executive, ACT Chief Ministers Department, October 2003 as quoted in ATSI SJC 2004, p. 250)

The three overarching themes of *The Living Web* were represented in the framework agreement as the trial’s three “key priorities” (Council of Australian Governments 2004, p. 5). While *The Living Web* was directly incorporated into the framework agreement, the evaluation found:

There was no mention of ‘The Living Web’ by any interviewee except the Chairperson of the IWG (Morgan Disney et al 2006b, p. 16).
A further seven months after the two-day ‘Community Leaders Workshop’, the framework agreement was signed and announced at a joint media conference. This brief description highlights the two Governments’ early decision to determine youth and education as the basis for negotiation, presumably to start implementation as soon as possible, was undertaken without community input and it took a further eighteen months to rectify.
before implementation could start. It is suggested the delay was compounded because the pre-existing Government and community arrangements were not involved.

A satisfactory rating has been deemed because the partnership agreement provided a solid foundation for the trial’s government-community partnership, although the delays associated with the negotiations may have been avoided with better planning in the very early stages of discussions.

FUNCTIONALITY – SATISFACTORY

*Joint steering committee*

As demonstrated earlier, the trial’s framework agreement provided for the establishment of a joint steering committee with overall responsibility for the trial. The members were the Secretary of DEH, the Chief Executive of CMD-ACT, the Chair of ATSIC Queanbeyan Regional Council and the Chair of the new Indigenous Working Group (IWG). The evaluation reports that the ATSIC Chair rarely attended the meetings (Morgan Disney et al 2006b, p. 11) therefore in effect the only Indigenous member of the Steering Committee was the Chair of the IWG.

The evaluation reports that the Steering Committee met ten times following a monthly schedule in the first twelve months, and then twice more over the next six months, leading up to the commencement of the evaluation (Morgan Disney et al 2006b, p. 13). It is inferred from the evaluation that the Secretary of DEH and the Chief Executive of CMD-ACT was not present at most of these meetings but the Chair of the IWG was present at most.

A satisfactory rating has been deemed because a joint steering committee was established and appears to have functioned in this role though with limited effectiveness.

FUNCTIONALITY – SATISFACTORY
**Steering committee authority, vertically and horizontally**

Each member of the Steering Committee brought with them an individual authority commensurate with their position. The original members were:

- Secretary, Commonwealth Government Department of the Environment and Heritage; and
- Chief Executive, ACT Chief Minister’s Department;
- Chairperson, ATSIC Queanbeyan Regional Council; and
- Chairperson, Indigenous Working Group.

However, a rating of poor has been deemed because it soon became evident that the collective authority of the Steering Committee was ineffective. For example, the evaluation reports that DEH had difficulties in compelling the other Commonwealth Government departments to engage with the trial, and DCM-ACT also had similar difficulties with the other ACT Government departments (Morgan Disney et al 2006b, p. 5):

> Several stakeholders perceived a lack of commitment to the cross government partnership goals of the Trial at the Australian and ACT executive government level (Morgan Disney et al 2006b, p. 16).

Further, the authority of the only Indigenous member of the Steering Committee was undermined because her appointment was on the basis as the chair of the executive of the confederation of Indigenous organisations, the ATSICCC, which was abandoned soon after the trial commenced.

**FUNCTIONALITY – POOR**

**Respect for the partners’ value frameworks**

The evaluation of the trial surmised the level of understanding of Indigenous society in the ACT pre-existing the COAG Project:
The broader ACT community and both governments were perceived by some within the Indigenous community to have little understanding of the ACT Indigenous community. There were perceived assumptions within the governments and the broader community that Indigenous families were homogenous with the rest of the community and had assimilated totally to a non-Indigenous culture and lifestyle in the ACT (Morgan Disney et al 2006b, p. 9).

In light of this environment, the framework agreement contained an explicit expression of respect for the traditional owners of the trial region:

In forming this Agreement, the Partners recognise and respect the Ngunnawal people, the traditional owners of the land known as the Australian Capital Territory (Kemp et al 2004, p. 1).

The inclusion of the Indigenous-developed *Living Web: Keeping the Web Alive* framework (See Figure 15a) into the partnership agreement infers a further demonstration of the Governments’ respect for Indigenous values. The Community Leaders Workshop held in the preliminary stages of the ACT trial (September 2003) developed the *Living Web* social framework and it may be regarded as representing an Aboriginal world-view. The application of the *Living Web* to the trial appears to have been problematic because the evaluators reported that only one person they interviewed referred to it, Ros Brown, the Chair of IWG (Morgan Disney et al 2006b, p. 16). It demonstrates that the statement of principle was not implemented well.

There are some other indications that the early expressions of respect did not translate well into the implementation such as the non-fulfilment of the commitment to establish the ATSICC, the abolition of ATSIC on the same day that the ACT trial agreement was signed and the occurrence of only one IWG meeting during the trial. Further, the evaluation recommended the government officials involved in the trial undergo cultural awareness training:
Increased cultural awareness training across all levels within administrative government would assist in building on the lessons and achievements of this Trial (Morgan Disney et al 2006b, p. 6).

Despite these indicators of poor implementation, the evaluation found:

A high level of respect has developed amongst those who were involved in the governance processes (Morgan Disney et al 2006b, p. 22).

A rating of satisfactory has been deemed because the nature of a joint agreement and the incorporation of the Living Web Framework as a guiding principle for the trial indicates there was an early corresponding respect for each partners’ value frameworks. It is evident there were difficulties in translating the expressions of respect for differing values into the bureaucratic machinations, and there was some contradictory signals by the Commonwealth Government between its national politics and local-level policy.

FUNCTIONALITY – SATISFACTORY

**Trust and collaboration between governments and community**

The issue under consideration is whether the degree of trust and collaboration in the trial was of a kind necessary to underpin the intended government-community partnership. It is clear from the nature and content of the framework agreement that there was an early commitment by the government and community partners for the trial to involve trustful and collaborative relationships. For example, it states:

> The Agreement is made in a spirit of partnership and shared responsibility for the pursuit of agreed priorities and outcomes (Kemp et al 2004, p. 1).

There were numerous other statements in the framework agreement indicating the partners’ intent to work strategically together but it did not stipulate specific administrative mechanisms that would be employed to nurture a culture of trust and collaboration for the trial.
The evaluation does not use the word ‘trust’. This appears to be a reflection of the lack of specific attention to monitoring and nurturing trust during the trial, and is perhaps a consequence of the lack of specific attention to this by the framework agreement. The evaluation nevertheless made a number of findings in relation to the nature of the collaboration in the trial. It found:

There have been important lessons learned regarding what limits and what enhances collaboration (Morgan Disney et al 2006b, p. 17).

The evaluation pointed to the various structures established by the trial, including the joint steering committee, as vehicles for such learning. It stated:

Overall ... the structures are seen as having some success at building partnerships, improving the way governments work together, and involving and enabling the community to contribute to their own solutions (Morgan Disney et al 2006b, p. 14).

The evaluation found the quality of the relationships was negatively impacted by frequent changes in personnel:

There were constant changes in personnel in the two lead agencies but particularly so in the ACT Government officers across the three years. This meant that new staff needed to develop relationships and learn the issues. Indigenous leaders had to deal with the impact of these changes and became the corporate memory of the Trial (Morgan Disney et al 2006b, p. 20).

The evaluation also found some of the Indigenous representatives lacked a sense of collaboration at times:

It appears that at some stages in the Trial, the DEH officers were not always included in meetings with the community and this again appears to have undermined efforts at openness, shared work and collaborative decision making (Morgan Disney et al 2006b, p. 20).
There were also indications that there were some deficiencies in the collaboration between the various Indigenous stakeholder groups:

Varying perceptions of the success of the structures were reported across the stakeholders. For example, on the one hand, good relationships were built and the groups committed people from the community and both governments to work together; this was reported as a positive achievement by many. On the other hand, one of the focus groups argued that the education goals came from external groups, not from the IWG and that this created some tension (Morgan Disney et al 2006b, p. 15).

There was also a strong perception by a very small number of community and government stakeholders that if government was not satisfied with advice from the IWG, it would approach the United Ngunnawal Elders Group (Morgan Disney et al 2006b, p. 14).

One of the ways trust may be undermined is when partners do not fulfil the commitments they made. The evaluation dedicated a section to analysing whether the five commitments in the framework agreement were fulfilled. It found two of the five commitments were fulfilled, namely the service-mapping and that lessons were learnt (Morgan Disney et al 2006b, pp. 16-18). In relation to a third commitment, to establish partnerships and share responsibility, the evaluation found the structures created were partly effective in encouraging collaboration, but it also found:

Several stakeholders perceived a lack of commitment to the cross government partnership goals of the Trial at the Australian and ACT executive government level (Morgan Disney et al 2006b, pp. 16-18).

In relation to the fourth commitment, to support and strengthen local governance arrangements, the evaluation found some of the stakeholders regarded the abolition of ATSIC on the first day of the trial weakened the local arrangements and negatively impacted on the trial’s partnership (Morgan Disney et al 2006b, p. 17). ATSIC was two of the five signatories (40%) to the ACT trial. The evaluation reported:
There was community cynicism that this occurred on the same day as the SRA was signed, although most stakeholders acknowledged that this was an unfortunate coincidence (Morgan Disney et al 200b, p. 17).

Finally, the evaluation found “limited evidence” of the fifth commitment, to support and strengthen decision-making and accountability processes (Morgan Disney et al 2006b, p. 17). Despite the establishment and functioning of the partnership structures, the evaluation found there were deficiencies in the quality of the collaboration and recommended two strategies for the governments’ to adopt (Morgan Disney et al 2006b, p. 27):

- Being clear about what agencies of both governments need to be involved at the outset greatly assists collaborative efforts and avoids potential misunderstandings and leaving out key players (Morgan Disney et al 2006b, p. 27).

- Governments need to be clear with the community about the parameters and the limitations when it enters into community processes which build expectations of outcomes or specific funding. For example, issues related to the viability of an Indigenous school or a Healing Farm could have been explored jointly by both spheres of government and discussed more openly with the IWG (Morgan Disney et al 2006b, p. 20).

The findings of deficiencies in the quality of collaboration, despite the functioning of the partnership structures, corroborates with some of the literature at the time, which cautioned that establishing structures alone is unlikely to be sufficient to operationalise the desired trustful and collaborative relationships (for example see Shergold 2004, p. 3).

In summary, there are indications of some collaboration between three of the four members of the joint steering committee but the evaluation indicates that there was an overall lack of attention during the trial to monitoring and nurturing the degree of trust and collaboration between the partners. For these reasons, a rating of poor has been deemed.

FUNCTIONALITY – POOR
Protocols for shared decision-making power and dispute resolution

The framework agreement provided some broadly-described protocol for shared decision-making between government and community, specifically through the joint steering committee and also, through the recognition of the three separate structures for Indigenous input into the trial, namely the ATSICCC, the IWG and ATSIC Queanbeyan Regional Council.

The protocol included some statements of principle towards the promotion of shared decision-making. For example:

The Agreement is made in a spirit of partnership and shared responsibility for the pursuit of agreed priorities and outcomes.

...the Partners have agreed to work together to ... support and strengthen decision making and accountability processes which honour the spirit of shared responsibility (Kemp et al 2004, p. 1).

Despite the statements of principle, the framework agreement lacked important detail for shared decision-making protocol. For example, there is no evidence in the evaluation indicating decision-making protocols were prepared to stipulate how decisions would be made by the joint Steering Committee. Further, while the framework agreement provided for a dispute resolution process, its terms were vague and there is no evidence in the evaluation that it was employed. It stated:

A process for settling disputes will be determined by members of the Steering Committee on a case by case basis (Kemp et al 2004, p. 7).

While detailed protocol stipulating how the partners would share decision-making was not developed, the evaluation found, “Governments have a better understanding of how to work with Indigenous communities” (Morgan Disney et al 2006b, p. 4). It briefly described the reported improvements in understanding:

Both of the lead government agencies report that they have learned considerably about how to work with Indigenous communities including the
importance of allowing time to engage with communities in culturally relevant ways and the time and skills required to do this well. Government officers show a willingness to learn new ways of working which respect Indigenous cultural and community norms and familial and community relationships (Morgan Disney et al 2006b, pp. 4-5).

Essentially, the evaluation findings relate to communication skills and imply the traditional consultation model of engagement, which the public sector had been employing for several decades prior to the COAG Trials Project. The findings of improved understanding cannot be inferred as demonstrative of a ‘genuine partnership’ in decision-making for the holistic design and delivery of services for the trial region and therefore a poor rating has been deemed.

FUNCTIONALITY – POOR

**Shared objectives and desired outcomes**

The framework agreement outlined the agreed purpose of the trial, which emphasised administrative reform:

> The Agreement acknowledges that the purpose of this trial is to bring about reforms to existing programs and services so as to assist the members of the Community to more readily address issues and concerns and achieve their aspirations (Kemp et al 2004, p. 1).

The framework agreement also outlined four priority areas for the proposed administrative reforms but the evaluation found that the descriptions of each were too broad and consequently, the partners did not have a shared set of objectives and outcomes for the trial. It concluded:

> …working together on agreeing what outcomes communities and governments are seeking to achieve is a crucial first step in any future shared responsibility initiative. The four priority areas agreed for the Trial were seen as high priority but the proposed solutions were not agreed. Over time it became obvious that the outcomes each partner was seeking
had not been adequately discussed to ensure full agreement, and different views within the community were not adequately explored before the solutions were posed. At the time of writing there remain significantly different views about what outcomes the community and the governments both shared and, where there were different or opposing views, how these would be managed (Morgan Disney et al 2006b, p. 19).

This finding demonstrates that differences in views on the desired outcomes existed between governments, between community representatives, and between governments and community representatives. The evaluation pointed to several lessons learned from this failure. It found:

- The original agreement was “too ambitious” and resources were “very stretched”;
- There must be “agreed objectives, outcomes, performance indicators, and an on-going evaluation process from the outset”;
- Negotiating desired outcomes is “difficult”, must be “task-focused” and “requires full engagement from both levels of government across all their agencies”; and
- The shared understanding of an agreement needs to be “monitored and tested regularly” (Morgan Disney et al 2006b, p. 21).

In summary, while there was agreement between the partners on the general objectives of the trial there was a lack of agreement between the partners on a set of clearly stated outcomes, which remained a matter of dispute at the time of evaluation, therefore a rating of poor has been deemed.

FUNCTIONALITY – POOR

**Role clarity and early detailed planning**

The framework agreement provided some general description of the roles of the partners in the trial but the evaluation found:
A number of stakeholders expressed a view that perhaps the Trial was over-governed, with too many groups; this appears to have led to some confusion about the role of each group (Morgan Disney et al. 2006b, p. 14).

This indicates the trial failed to fulfil one of the goals of government-coordination, which is to eliminate confusion about the roles of the various stakeholders. The lack of agreement between the partners on the desired outcomes from the trial is likely to have contributed to inadequate role clarity and early detailed planning therefore a rating of poor has been deemed.

**FUNCTIONALITY – POOR**

**Sustained operation and membership of steering committee**

The framework agreement stipulated there were to be four members of the trial Steering Committee but following the abolition of ATSIC, the membership was reduced to three – David Borthwick, Secretary, DEH; Mike Harris, CEO, CMD-ATC and Ros Brown, Chair, IWG. In its first twelve months, the Steering Committee met ten times following a monthly schedule and then twice more over the next six months, leading up to the commencement of the evaluation (Morgan Disney et al. 2006b, p. 13). The evaluation indicates the last meeting of the Steering Committee was in August 2005, which was eighteen months before the formal cessation of the COAG Trials Project (Morgan Disney et al. 2006b, p. 35).

It is unclear if the Secretary of DEH and the CEO of CMD-ACT personally attended or were represented at the meetings. The evaluation found there were “constant changes in personnel in the two lead agencies” (Morgan Disney et al. 2006b, p. 20) “from the Secretary/Chief Executive level to the project officers in line agencies” (Morgan Disney et al. 2006b, p. 8). The evaluation found the “constant changes in personnel” affected the trial’s ability to fulfil its aims:
Some of the structures do seem to have suffered from constant changes of membership, limited power to make decisions and influence outcomes, and members with no status to change the system (Morgan Disney et al 2006b, p. 16).

The evaluation found the Indigenous partners bore the consequences of high turnover:

This meant that new staff needed to develop relationships and learn the issues. Indigenous leaders had to deal with the impact of these changes and became the corporate memory of the Trial (Morgan Disney et al 2006b, p. 20).

The personnel changes were so numerous that the reliability of the data collected for the evaluation was weakened:

Obtaining an accurate account of the Trial establishment phase has been challenging, as the only continuity of personnel was in the membership of the Indigenous Working Group (IWG). There have been significant changes in every government agency from the Secretary/Chief Executive level to the project officers in line agencies (Morgan Disney et al 2006b, p. 8).

The reduction in membership of the Steering Committee, the evidence that it did not meet in the final eighteen months of the trial and the impact of personnel changes on the implementation and evaluation of the trial warrants a poor rating for this key characteristic.

FUNCTIONALITY – POOR

**Shared responsibility for whole-of-government expenditure in the trial region**

The framework agreement essentially stated that there would not be any new government funding for the trial, which was in line with an early stated principle for the overall Project. It stated:

The Partners agree that as a first port of call (and wherever possible) resources for projects developed under the auspices of this trial will be provided from:
• within existing budgetary allocations; and/or

• through more judicious use of existing programs and services (Kemp et al 2004, p. 1).

Nevertheless, the Commonwealth and ACT Governments did incur expenditure for Indigenous-related services in the region over the period of the trial and therefore there was potential for a shared responsibility arrangement for holistic government expenditure. For example, in 2003, the ACT Government estimated the combined value of its Indigenous-specific funding at “up to $12 million per year” and comprising “in the order of 65 separate Indigenous-specific programs” (Stanhope 2003, p. 2). While this research did not locate any reports of Commonwealth expenditure incurred specifically for the trial, it is evident from the earlier background descriptions that there was.

The lead agencies did not develop an administrative arrangement involving a shared responsibility between the partners for total government expenditure in the trial region therefore a rating of poor has been deemed.

FUNCTIONALITY – POOR

Full access to information

The framework agreement contained a clause indicating an intention to share systematically information between the partners. It stated:

Data collected during, or as part of, an activity carried out under this Agreement will be made available to all partners (subject to the Privacy Act 1988 and other relevant legislation) (Kemp et al 2004, p. 6).

While the evaluation did not make any findings of whether this occurred, it recommended:

Both Governments have to engage with the community in an honest, open way and share information (Morgan Disney et al 2006b, p. 28).
A rating of poor has been deemed due to the lack of evidence that systematic information-sharing arrangements were developed for the trial.

**FUNCTIONALITY – POOR**

**Summary of analysis of government-community partnership**

The Australian Capital Territory trial’s progress towards a government-community partnership is given a satisfactory rating for four key characteristics and poor ratings for the remaining eight (see Table 26).

**Table 26: Ratings for the key characteristics of government-community partnership, Australian Capital Territory COAG trial**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>KEY CHARACTERISTIC</th>
<th>RATING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Right partners</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partnership agreement</td>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joint steering committee</td>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steering committee authority</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respect for partners’ values</td>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust and collaboration</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protocols for shared power</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared objectives and shared outcomes</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role clarity and early planning</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sustained operation and membership</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared responsibility for expenditure</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full access to information</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In relation to a government-community partnership, there were no reforms to traditional decision-making processes that enabled genuine Aboriginal involvement in the decisions of
government. The evaluation found a government-community partnership was not achieved however it concluded that it was a valid aim for the trial:

This Trial has affirmed the potential of partnerships to achieve better outcomes and more holistic approaches to issues for Indigenous communities, and opportunities for building on these lessons must not be lost (Morgan Disney et al 2006b, p. 6).
Part C. Quality of social and economic improvements

The evaluation report was dated April 2006, two years after the signing of the framework agreement for the Australian Capital Territory trial and four years after COAG first announced the overall Project. There is no evidence in the evaluation of social and economic improvements for the Indigenous population of the trial region that were measured to be a direct result of the trial. The evaluation found:

On the surface, it may seem as if little has been achieved in this Trial (Morgan Disney et al 2006b, p. 22).

The evaluation stated a careful analysis is necessary to identify the outcomes from the trial and it presented descriptions under five headings: General; Self-esteem and cultural identity; Substance abuse; and Education (Morgan Disney et al 2006b, pp. 23-24).

The broad outcomes achieved are that regular Elders’ camps have taken place (culture), an Indigenous Justice Centre has been established, working group members were funded to visit and investigate international and Australian healing farm models, and discussions on the feasibility of establishing an Indigenous school are on-going along with other improvements to schooling for Indigenous children and young people (Morgan Disney et al 2006b, p. 8).

A careful analysis of the descriptions under each of these headings reveals very little was achieved, and some stakeholders questioned whether the claimed achievements could be credibly attributed to the ACT trial. For example, the evaluation unequivocally reported in the executive summary and on page 23 that “one of the most significant outcomes of this Trial” is “the establishment of the Indigenous Justice Centre” (Morgan Disney et al 2006b, pp. 5 & 23). However, in the body of the report it noted that other government officials had questioned whether the Justice Centre was a product of the trial and rather, they believed the trial may have been a barrier:
There is a *minority view* from current incumbents in positions that the success of the Justice Centre is in spite of COAG and some perceptions that the COAG Trial may have wasted time in the process (Morgan Disney et al 2006b, p. 5) (*my emphasis*).

The evaluation then countered this “minority view” with a “strong majority view”:

However, as previously stated, there is a *strong majority view* from key and senior decision makers involved at the time in decision making about the Centre that the COAG Trial was the vehicle that drove the establishment of the Justice Centre (Morgan Disney et al 2006b, p. 5).

There is no indication that the evaluators sought to verify independently either view. It is concerning that the evaluation thought the number of people supporting a particular view was determinative.

There is another example where some government officials claimed certain projects were an outcome of the trial and others disagreed with the claim:

Elders camps have taken place regularly. It is not clear if this is a direct outcome of the Trial. It has been argued that the camps would have taken place without the Trial. However, it has been suggested that the presence of the Trial may have increased the level of communication among groups of Elders and encouraged them to engage more actively in the camps (Morgan Disney et al 2006b, p. 23).

Overall, the evaluation concluded:

There is some confusion and there are differences of opinion about the background to the Trial particularly which initiatives sat within the COAG Trial (Morgan Disney et al 2006b, p. 8).

At best, the reported outcomes are more akin to government outputs and there are no reported outcomes of socioeconomic improvements for the trial’s Indigenous population.
Conclusion – Australian Capital Territory

In relation to the achievement of a whole-of-government approach, there are satisfactory ratings for four key characteristics and poor ratings for the remaining eight. In relation to the achievement of a government-community partnership, there are satisfactory ratings for three key characteristics and poor ratings for the remaining nine. There is no evidence of socioeconomic improvements as a result of the conduct of the trial.
Conclusion

The aim of this analysis has been to appraise the quality of the public administration in implementing the COAG Communiqué of 5 April 2002, which announced the COAG Trials Project. It focused on how well the two aims of the COAG Project were implemented. It also described the socioeconomic outcomes from each trial as reported by the government-commissioned evaluation.

It found there was practically complete failure in all trial sites to successfully achieve the aims. It highlighted that trial sites with successfully negotiated framework agreements scored fractionally better. None of the evaluations presented any data demonstrating socioeconomic improvements for the Indigenous people of the trial region.

The degree of failure across the trial sites revealed by this analysis came as a surprise to the researcher. The COAG Trials Project has been referred to briefly in subsequent literature (APSC 2007; Auditor-General 2007; Edwards et al 2012), all of which reported there were important lessons arising from the trials. None had analysed the eight trial site evaluation reports but relied on the OIPC-commissioned Synopsis Review of the COAG Trials. Edwards et al 2012 described the Synopsis Review as an “official and independent evaluation of the trials” however it was produced by the same evaluation team that had conducted the evaluations of the Victorian and Australian Capital Territory trials. The Synopsis Review highlighted that socioeconomic outcomes were not achieved because it “requires long-term commitments of 10-20 years to be realised” (Morgan Disney et al 2006c, p. 4). This claim was later reiterated by the Australian Public Service Commission 2007, p. 23 and Edwards et al 2012, p. 166. The quality of public administration across the trial sites adds another part to the explanation of why there were such “limited outcomes” (Brough 2007).

This research concludes that the theories, of whole-of-government coordination or government-community partnerships, were not applied well and therefore were not given a
real opportunity to be tested. The critical question is whether the poor application is a reflection of the substantial barriers presented by each theory or simply poor public management. I would suggest the latter, in particular the capacity of the governance of the government to overcome the former. The Department of Finance and Deregulation found in its *Strategic Review of Indigenous Expenditure* dated February 2010:

> The key challenge from this point lies not so much in further policy development as in effective implementation and delivery (Department of Finance and Deregulation 2010, p. 11).

Further, Sullivan (2005) saw the focus of the governance of government in the Indigenous affairs system was on managing the politics and perceptions rather than producing outcomes. He stated:

> The problems on the Indigenous side of the development equation are immensely complex. Equally, they are well known, well-studied, and there is an increasing body of experience in dealing with them, not least among Indigenous organisations themselves. The problems on the non-Indigenous side, in contrast, are not well understood and have been little studied in Australia (but see Hunt 2005). Although they require urgent attention, they are subject to resistance by both politicians and managers because of the extreme sensitivity of Indigenous disadvantage in a country struggling to build its sense of national identity. This may prove an unsurmountable obstacle to the necessary introspection the Australian Public Service requires at this crucial juncture, and the innovations described in this paper are still in danger of being reinterpreted into business as usual, the application of failed procedures to a field seen to be intractable to progress, and which therefore concentrates itself on the management of public perceptions (Sullivan 2005, p. 17).
## Timeline: Implementation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DATE</th>
<th>EVENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3 Nov 2000</td>
<td>COAG <em>Communiqué</em> endorses ‘reconciliation framework’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Jun 2001</td>
<td>COAG <em>Communiqué</em> reiterates commitment to ‘reconciliation framework’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Apr 2002</td>
<td>COAG <em>Communiqué</em> announces a series of whole-of-government trials to be undertaken in partnership with Indigenous communities, with all trials to be announced by mid-2002.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 September 2002</td>
<td>Queensland trial announced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 2002</td>
<td>Commonwealth Government announces a review of ATSIC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19 November 2002</td>
<td>Northern Territory trial announced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 2003</td>
<td>The COAG Trials Project’s secretariat publishes a “Performance Monitoring and Evaluation’ Framework for the trials.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 February 2003</td>
<td>Minister Ruddock additionally directs the ATSIC Review Panel, “...to give particular attention to the structure of the relationship between the government and the Commission. This should include the adequacy of the Minister’s powers and the merits of a possible Ministerial veto power in relation to specific ATSIC decisions.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 April 2003</td>
<td>ATSIC’s financial decisions are reassigned to a new public service executive agency called Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Services (ATSIS). The Commonwealth Government described it, “as an interim measure pending the outcomes of the review of ATSIC” (ATSI SJC 2004, p. 2).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22 May 2003</td>
<td>South Australia trial announced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 July 2003</td>
<td>Western Australia trial announced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 July 2003</td>
<td>Victoria trial announced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28 August 2003</td>
<td>Tasmania trial announced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 September 2003</td>
<td>New South Wales trial announced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 April 2004</td>
<td>Australian Capital Territory trial announced</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Prime Minister John Howard and Senator Amanda Vanstone announce the abolition of ATSIC</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>30 June 2004</td>
<td>The COAG Trials Project secretariat the ICCT is terminated and responsibility for the trials is transferred to the new local Indigenous Coordination Centre. More than $1billion of former ATSIC/ATSIS programmes are transferred to mainstream Australian Government agencies and some 1300 staff commenced work in their new Departments.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 2004</td>
<td>The budget for the COAG Trials Project’s Flexible Funding Pool was increased in 2004-05 from $3 million to $17.8 million under new program guidelines by the new OIPC based in DIMIA.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26 Jan 2007</td>
<td>Dr Shergold awarded Companion of the Order of Australia for service to the community as a significant leader of changes and innovation in the public sector, particularly through the development and implementation of a whole of government approach to policy development and program delivery.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23 Feb 2007</td>
<td>Minister Brough ceases COAG Trials Project and publicly releases Synopsis Review and the evaluation reports of the eight trial sites.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 Jun 2007</td>
<td>Prime Minister Howard &amp; Minister Brough press conference announcing NT Intervention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 Oct 07</td>
<td>PM Howard announces date for next Commonwealth elections</td>
</tr>
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Quality in Qualitative Evaluation:  
A framework for assessing research evidence

A Quality Framework

Liz Spencer, Jane Ritchie, Jane Lewis and Lucy Dillon
National Centre for Social Research
The report was produced on behalf of the Cabinet Office by Liz Spencer, Jane Ritchie, Jane Lewis and Lucy Dillon, National Centre for Social Research. (www.natcen.ac.uk)

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This document presents a framework for appraising the quality of qualitative evaluations. It was developed with particular reference to evaluations concerned with the development and implementation of social policy, programmes and practice. The framework was devised as part of a programme of research conducted on behalf of the Cabinet Office.

The research on which the framework was built involved:

• a comprehensive review of the literature on qualitative research methods relating to standards in qualitative research;

• a review of qualitative research methods used in Government funded evaluation studies;

• a review of existing frameworks for assessing quality in qualitative research;

• exploratory interviews with a range of people who have an interest in quality assessment of qualitative research and/or policy-related evaluations. These included academics who have written about qualitative research from either a theoretical or empirical perspective; authors of existing frameworks; research practitioners; commissioners and funders; and policy-makers who have used qualitative research evidence in the development and evaluation of policies;

• a workshop, involving the above groups, to refine the framework initially developed;

• a trial application of the framework to a small number of studies.

All these strands of activity have heavily influenced the content of the framework and the premises that surround its operation.

A separate report on the study is available.1

The sections below describe the scope, application and coverage of the framework. Sections II and III provide important background information about the premises underpinning the framework and its intended usage. It is recommended that these sections are read by anyone using the framework for the first time. Those familiar with this background can move directly to Section IV where the content of the framework is presented.

The framework has been built on certain premises surrounding the nature of qualitative enquiry, how it can be used for evaluative purposes and how its quality can be assessed. These premises derive from extensive debate in the literature on qualitative research and evaluation. A brief summary is given here but full documentation can be found in the referenced sections of this report.

For the purposes of this framework, the quality of the qualitative research that generates the evidence for an evaluation is seen as lying at the heart of any assessment. This is because of a primary interest in evaluations based on empirical enquiry, which form the majority of government-based evaluative investigations. Qualitative research and qualitative evaluation are therefore seen as broadly synonymous in terms of the principles surrounding quality assessment. Because of this, the framework can also be used for qualitative research more generally, irrespective of whether it has an evaluative purpose.

Qualitative research

Qualitative research aims to provide an in-depth understanding of people’s experiences, perspectives and histories in the context of their personal circumstances or settings. Among many distinctive features, it is characterised by a concern with exploring phenomena from the perspective of those being studied; with the use of unstructured methods which are sensitive to the social context of the study; the capture of data which are detailed, rich and complex; a mainly inductive rather than deductive analytic process; developing explanations at the level of meaning or micro-social processes rather than context-free laws; and answering ‘what is’, ‘how’ and ‘why’ questions. It employs a variety of methods, including: exploratory interviews; focus groups; observation; conversation, discourse and narrative analysis; and documentary and video analysis.

Qualitative research is used in evaluation for a range of purposes. For evaluations of programmes, services or interventions, these include identifying the factors that contribute to successful or unsuccessful delivery; identifying outcomes (intended or unintended) and how they occur; examining the nature of requirements of different groups within the target population; exploring the contexts in which policies operate; and exploring organisational aspects of delivery. Qualitative research can also be used in advance of policy development or implementation, for example, to examine an issue or problem that is poorly understood or to inform the kind of intervention required. A further use is to help develop evaluative criteria where these are unclear or where alternative criteria are sought.
Quality standards in qualitative research

Despite many different approaches and traditions within qualitative and evaluative research, there are widespread concerns about quality. There is also shared interest in issues such as ‘rigour’; the need for principles of practice to be made manifest; the importance of sound or ‘robust’ qualitative research evidence; and in the relevance and utility of research.

The nature of quality assessment in qualitative research

There is debate in the literature about whether the concepts of quality used to assess qualitative research should be roughly the same as, parallel to, or quite different from those used to assess quantitative research. This framework is based on the view that the concerns which lie behind customary conceptions of quality have relevance for qualitative enquiry but need to be reformulated – and assessed quite differently – within the domain of qualitative research. In other words, qualitative research should be assessed on its ‘own terms’ within premises that are central to its purpose, nature and conduct.

The formalisation of quality standards

There is some debate about the extent to which quality assessment of qualitative inquiry can be formalised. Alongside this there have been increasing calls for guidance about quality assessment so that criteria appropriate to qualitative research (rather than those imported from other research traditions) are used. This, in turn, has led to the generation of a number of checklists, guidelines and lists of appraisal questions for assessing qualitative research.

This framework draws heavily on previously developed quality criteria, both from the general methodological literature and from pre-existing guidelines. However, it also takes heed of the persistent concern that formalised criteria should avoid being rigidly procedural or over-prescriptive. It has therefore been devised to aid informed judgement, not mechanistic rule-following.

Because there has been an opportunity to build on other frameworks, it is comparatively comprehensive in its coverage. It is also distinctive in making explicit the philosophical assumptions within which it operates; and in the level of specificity of the quality ‘indicators’ on which to base an assessment.

Philosophical assumptions

There are numerous approaches, paradigms, schools and movements encompassed within what is broadly termed ‘qualitative research’. They vary in terms of the ontological, epistemological and methodological assumptions on which they are based. The same issues arise in relation to different types of evaluation. A proliferation of approaches to evaluation exist, which, again, differ in terms of their philosophical, ideological and methodological premises. In both cases, the various traditions are often categorised under labelled movements or schools although their identities are not always consistently described.
It was not felt possible to design a single set of quality markers that would be appropriate for all the different qualitative and evaluative traditions that exist. The assumptions on which they are based are too diverse – in some cases contradictory – and the conception of what matters in terms of ‘quality’ can vary with these assumptions.

Instead, an ‘elemental’ approach has been used in which a range of premises about the nature of social reality and how the social world can be investigated have been identified and those which underpin the framework specified. It is thought that these assumptions are broadly those within which most government-funded qualitative inquiry operates. Taking this approach means that the framework will be relevant for a range of types of qualitative evaluations including practice evaluation, policy development and appraisal as well as evaluations of particular interventions, schemes or programmes. It will be the assumptions within which an evaluation operates, rather than the model of qualitative research or evaluation used, that will determine whether the framework will be of value to assess its quality.

Choice of appraisal items

There are numerous appraisal items that could have been included in the framework. Those selected were chosen on the basis that:

- they operate within the boundaries of the philosophical assumptions prescribed;
- they offer a series of readings on core principles concerning the contribution, defensibility, rigour and credibility of a qualitative study;
- they cover different stages and processes within qualitative enquiry;
- they are recurrently cited as markers of quality in the literature, in pre-existing frameworks and in the interviews conducted for this study.
The framework has been designed primarily to assess the outputs of qualitative inquiry – that is reports, papers and journal articles. This has inevitably affected both the items covered and, most crucially, how they can be demonstrated for assessment. There is, for example, heavy emphasis on the quality of the evidence and the analysis that has informed it and rather less on aspects of conduct that cannot be well judged from written output.

Some translation of the criteria included can be made to assess proposals. Guidance notes on this are given in Section IV. It is also hoped that the framework will have a wider educational function in the preparation of research protocols, the conduct and management of research and evaluation and in the training of social researchers, both within and outside government.

**Relevance for different qualitative methods**

The framework has been designed with a particular focus on the methods used most extensively in government-based evaluations, namely, interviews, focus groups, observation and documentary analysis. Nevertheless, the principles that have guided the design of the framework, and many of the questions suggested for appraisal, will have application to a wider range of qualitative methods (e.g. linguistic analysis, historical and archival analysis, multimedia methods etc.). However, quality indicators that are particularly relevant to other methods will need to be added.

**Use of multiple methods**

It is common to find that evaluations use a mix of methods to collect the required information. Sometimes these are a combination of qualitative methods but in other cases a mix of qualitative and quantitative approaches. Although some of the appraisal questions in the framework are method generic (e.g. Qs 1-3, 5, 6 etc.), others are specific to qualitative methods (e.g. Qs 11-13). It is therefore recommended that to assess any quantitative components of an evaluation, quality criteria that are specific to the method concerned will need to be added.

**Application to different policy domains**

The framework has been designed to assess qualitative evaluation across the spectrum of substantive fields covered by Government Departments. However, it could well be that assessment within a particular substantive area might need to address some additional questions. If so, these can be added to the framework as necessary.
The framework is built on a set of principles around which to frame and structure appraisal questions that might be asked of a piece of work in order to critically assess its quality. In each case, a set of quality indicators is listed – features that will help to form a judgement about how well the appraisal question has been addressed. Further questions might also be added depending on the purpose of the research and the approach it uses. It is then for the assessor to judge overall merit, based on the questions and indicators that are most relevant to the evaluation concerned.

Guiding principles

There are four central principles that underpin the content of the framework. All of these are based on themes that are highly recurrent in the literature and in the interviews conducted for the study. They advise that research should be:

- **contributory** in advancing wider knowledge or understanding about policy, practice, theory or a particular substantive field;
- **defensible in design** by providing a research strategy that can address the evaluative questions posed;
- **rigorous in conduct** through the systematic and transparent collection, analysis and interpretation of qualitative data;
- **credible in claim** through offering well-founded and plausible arguments about the significance of the evidence generated.

These principles are presented at a sufficiently high level of abstraction that they would apply to a diversity of qualitative approaches. Indeed, most of them are simply emblems of sound and logical enquiry, whatever its form or purpose.

**Appraisal questions**

The guiding principles have been used to identify 18 appraisal questions to aid an assessment. The questions are listed in column a) of the framework. Between them, they cover all of the key features and processes involved in qualitative enquiry. They begin with assessment of the findings, move through different stages of the research process (design, sampling, data collection, analysis and reporting) and end with some general features of research conduct (reflexivity and neutrality, ethics and auditability).

It is suggested that the findings of the enquiry are given attention first, even though this is not a logical procedural order. This is because the nature of the evidence presented will help in assessing features of the research process (for example, the quality of the data collected, the visibility and logic of the analytic process). However, if readers prefer
to look at research design and conduct before considering the evidence, they will need to return to Qs 6–18 before completing the assessment.

**Quality indicators**

Beside each question, there is a series of quality indicators (column b) which will help in answering the appraisal question. These provide pointers to the kinds of information needed to judge whether or not the quality feature concerned has been secured. They are not intended to be comprehensive and other indicators might well be added for specific studies. Equally, they are not intended to suggest essential requirements – it is highly unlikely that all these indicators will be present, or even relevant, in any one study.

Many of the quality indicators relate only to the methods specified in Section II (i.e. interviews, focus groups, observation and documentary analysis). For most appraisal questions, however, quality indicators that are relevant to other methods could be added.

**The need for professional judgement**

The assessment of a qualitative inquiry, using this framework, will require careful judgements on the part of the assessor. These, in turn, will require some knowledge of qualitative research and some expertise in using qualitative methods. Judgement will also be needed in deciding the weight to attach to particular indicators in order to assess its ‘fitness for purpose’ – that is, how well it addresses the objectives for which it was undertaken. For example, in a study carried out to evaluate the implementation of a new scheme, it may well be more important to have a detailed account of how practice has affected outcomes, or an accessibly written report, than to have a thorough literature review.

**Use for assessing proposals**

As was noted in Section III, the framework has been designed to assess outputs from qualitative inquiry. However, selected questions and indicators from the framework could be used to assess proposals for designing and conducting a qualitative evaluation (see particularly Qs 2, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10 and 16–18). This, of course, will require changing from past to present the tense within which questions are phrased. It is important to stress, however, that other questions not included in this framework, will also be relevant to proposals (for example, feasibility, timescale, resources, experience of research team). This framework is therefore not intended as a comprehensive aid for proposal assessment.
FRAMWORK FOR ASSESSING QUALITATIVE EVALUATIONS

Study being appraised: .................................................................

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>a) Appraisal questions</th>
<th>b) Quality indicators (possible features for consideration)</th>
<th>c) Notes on study being appraised</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 How credible are the findings?</td>
<td>Findings/conclusions are supported by data/study evidence (i.e. the reader can see how the researcher arrived at his/her conclusions; the ‘building blocks’ of analysis and interpretation are evident)</td>
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<td>Findings/conclusions ‘make sense’/have a coherent logic</td>
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<td>Findings/conclusions are resonant with other knowledge and experience (this might include peer or member review)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Use of corroborating evidence to support or refine findings (i.e. other data sources have been used to examine phenomena; other research evidence has been evaluated; see also Q14)</td>
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<tr>
<td>2 How has knowledge/understanding been extended by the research?</td>
<td>Literature review (where appropriate) summarising knowledge to date/key issues raised by previous research</td>
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<tr>
<td>Aims and design of study set in the context of existing knowledge/understanding; identifies new areas for investigation (for example, in relation to policy/practice/substantive theory)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Credible/clear discussion of how findings have contributed to knowledge and understanding (e.g. of the policy, programme or theory being reviewed); might be applied to new policy developments, practice or theory</td>
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<tr>
<td>Findings presented or conceptualised in a way that offers new insights/alternative ways of thinking</td>
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<tr>
<td>Discussion of limitations of evidence and what remains unknown/unclear or what further information/research is needed</td>
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3 For those wishing to read further about qualitative and evaluative research methods a short list of useful references can be found at the end.
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<tr>
<th>a) Appraisal questions</th>
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<th>c) Notes on study being appraised</th>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>How well does the evaluation address its original aims and purpose?</td>
<td>Clear statement of study aims and objectives; reasons for any changes in objectives</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Findings clearly linked to the purposes of the study – and to the initiative or policy being studied</td>
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<tr>
<td>FINDINGS</td>
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<td>Summary or conclusions directed towards aims of study</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Discussion of limitations of study in meeting aims (e.g. are there limitations because of restricted access to study settings or participants, gaps in the sample coverage, missed or unresolved areas of questioning; incomplete analysis; time constraints?)</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Scope for drawing wider inference – how well is this explained?</td>
<td>Discussion of what can be generalised to wider population from which sample is drawn/case selection has been made</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>Detailed description of the contexts in which the study was conducted to allow applicability to other settings/contextual generalities to be assessed</td>
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<td>Discussion of how hypotheses/propositions/findings may relate to wider theory; consideration of rival explanations</td>
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<td>Evidence supplied to support claims for wider inference (either from study or from corroborating sources)</td>
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<td>Discussion of limitations on drawing wider inference (e.g. re-examination of sample and any missing constituencies; analysis of restrictions of study settings for drawing wider inference)</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>How clear is the basis of evaluative appraisal?</td>
<td>Discussion of how assessments of effectiveness/evaluative judgements have been reached (i.e. whose judgements are they and on what basis have they been reached?)</td>
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<td>Description of any formalised appraisal criteria used, when generated and how and by whom they have been applied</td>
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<td>Discussion of the nature and source of any divergence in evaluative appraisals</td>
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<td>Discussion of any unintended consequences of intervention, their impact and why they arose</td>
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<td>a) Appraisal questions</td>
<td>b) Quality indicators (possible features for consideration)</td>
<td>c) Notes on study being appraised</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>6</strong> How defensible is the research design?</td>
<td>Discussion of how overall research strategy was designed to meet aims of study</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Discussion of rationale for study design</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Convincing argument for different features of research design (e.g. reasons given for different components or stages of research; purpose of particular methods or data sources, multiple methods, time frames etc.)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Use of different features of design/data sources evident in findings presented</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Discussion of limitations of research design and their implications for the study evidence</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>7</strong> How well defended is the sample design/ target selection of cases/documents?</td>
<td>Description of study locations/areas and how and why chosen</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Description of population of interest and how sample selection relates to it (e.g. typical, extreme case, diverse constituencies etc.)</td>
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<td>Rationale for basis of selection of target sample/settings/documents (e.g. characteristics/features of target sample/settings/documents, basis for inclusions and exclusions, discussion of sample size/number of cases/setting selected etc.)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Discussion of how sample/selections allowed required comparisons to be made</td>
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<td><strong>8</strong> Sample composition/case inclusion - how well is the eventual coverage described?</td>
<td>Detailed profile of achieved sample/case coverage</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Maximising inclusion (e.g. language matching or translation; specialised recruitment; organised transport for group attendance)</td>
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<td>Discussion of any missing coverage in achieved samples/cases and implications for study evidence (e.g. through comparison of target and achieved samples, comparison with population etc.)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Documentation of reasons for non-participation among sample approached/non-inclusion of selected cases/documents</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Discussion of access and methods of approach and how these might have affected participation/coverage</td>
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### DATA COLLECTION

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>a) Appraisal questions</th>
<th>b) Quality indicators (possible features for consideration)</th>
<th>c) Notes on study being appraised</th>
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| How well was the data collection carried out? | Discussion of:  
- who conducted data collection  
- procedures/documents used for collection/recording  
- checks on origin/status/authorship of documents  
Audio or video recording of interviews/discussions/conversations (if not recorded, were justifiable reasons given?)  
Description of conventions for taking fieldnotes (e.g. to identify what form of observations were required/to distinguish description from researcher commentary/analysis)  
Discussion of how fieldwork methods or settings may have influenced data collected  
Demonstration, through portrayal and use of data, that depth, detail and richness were achieved in collection | |
| How well has the approach to, and formulation of, the analysis been conveyed? | Description of form of original data (e.g. use of verbatim transcripts, observation or interview notes, documents, etc.)  
Clear rationale for choice of data management method/tool/package  
Evidence of how descriptive analytic categories, classes, labels etc. have been generated and used (i.e. either through explicit discussion or portrayal in the commentary)  
Discussion, with examples, of how any constructed analytic concepts/typologies etc. have been devised and applied | |
| Contexts of data sources – how well are they retained and portrayed? | Description of background or historical developments and social/organisational characteristics of study sites or settings  
Participants’ perspectives/observations placed in personal context (e.g. use of case studies/vignettes/individual profiles, textual extracts annotated with details of contributors)  
Explanation of origins/history of written documents  
Use of data management methods that preserve context (i.e. facilitate within case description and analysis) | |
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<tr>
<td><strong>12</strong> How well has diversity of perspective and content been explored?</td>
<td>Discussion of contribution of sample design/case selection in generating diversity&lt;br&gt;Description and illumination of diversity/multiple perspectives/alternative positions in the evidence displayed&lt;br&gt;Evidence of attention to negative cases, outliers or exceptions&lt;br&gt;Typologies/models of variation derived and discussed&lt;br&gt;Examination of origins/influences on opposing or differing positions&lt;br&gt;Identification of patterns of association/linkages with divergent positions/groups</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>13</strong> How well has detail, depth and complexity (i.e. richness) of the data been conveyed?</td>
<td>Use and exploration of contributors’ terms, concepts and meanings&lt;br&gt;Unpacking and portrayal of nuance/strtety/intricacy within data&lt;br&gt;Discussion of explicit and implicit explanations&lt;br&gt;Detection of underlying factors/influences&lt;br&gt;Identification and discussion of patterns of association/conceptual linkages within data&lt;br&gt;Presentation of illuminating textual extracts/observations</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>14</strong> How clear are the links between data, interpretation and conclusions - i.e. how well can the route to any conclusions be seen?</td>
<td>Clear conceptual links between analytic commentary and presentations of original data (i.e. commentary and cited data relate; there is an analytic context to cited data, not simply repeated description)&lt;br&gt;Discussion of how/why particular interpretation/significance is assigned to specific aspects of data - with illustrative extracts of original data&lt;br&gt;Discussion of how explanations/theories/conclusions were derived - and how they relate to interpretations and content of original data (i.e. how warranted); whether alternative explanations explored&lt;br&gt;Display of negative cases and how they lie outside main proposition/theory/hypothesis etc.; or how proposition etc. revised to include them</td>
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</table>
| 15 | How clear and coherent is the reporting? | Demonstrates link to aims of study/research questions  
| | | Provides a narrative/story or clearly constructed thematic account  
| | | Has structure and signposting that usefully guide reader through the commentary  
| | | Provides accessible information for intended target audience(s)  
| | | Key messages highlighted or summarised |

| 16 | How clear are the assumptions/theoretical perspectives/values that have shaped the form and output of the evaluation? | Discussion/evidence of the main assumptions/hypotheses/theoretical ideas on which the evaluation was based and how these affected the form, coverage or output of the evaluation (the assumption here is that no research is undertaken without some underlying assumptions or theoretical ideas)  
| | | Discussion/evidence of the ideological perspectives/values/philosophies of research team and their impact on the methodological or substantive content of the evaluation (again, may not be explicitly stated)  
| | | Evidence of openness to new/alternative ways of viewing subject/theories/assumptions (e.g. discussion of learning/concepts/constructions that have emerged from the data; refinement/restatement of hypotheses/theories in light of emergent findings; evidence that alternative claims have been examined)  
| | | Discussion of how error or bias may have arisen in design/data collection/analysis and how addressed, if at all  
<p>| | | Reflections on the impact of the researcher on the research process |</p>
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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>a) Appraisal questions</th>
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<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>What evidence is there of attention to ethical issues?</td>
<td>Evidence of thoughtfulness/sensitivity about research contexts and participants.</td>
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<td>Documentation of how research was presented in study settings/to participants (including, where relevant, any possible consequences of taking part).</td>
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<td>Documentation of consent procedures and information provided to participants</td>
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<td>Discussion of confidentiality of data and procedures for protecting</td>
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<td>Discussion of how anonymity of participants/sources was protected</td>
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<td>Discussion of any measures to offer information/advice/services etc. at end of study (i.e. where participation exposed the need for these)</td>
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<td>Discussion of potential harm or difficulty through participation, and how avoided</td>
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<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>How adequately has the research process been documented?</td>
<td>Discussion of strengths and weaknesses of data sources and methods</td>
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<td>Documentation of changes made to design and reasons; implications for study coverage</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Documentation and reasons for changes in sample coverage/data collection/analytic approach; implications</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Reproduction of main study documents (e.g. letters of approach, topic guides, observation templates, data management frameworks etc.)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
A bibliography of texts addressing quality in qualitative research is provided in the main report, but the following are suggested for those who wish to read further about the basic principles and nature of qualitative research and evaluation methods.


The Government Chief Social Researcher’s Office

The Government Chief Social Researcher’s Office (GCSRO) is based in the Prime Minister’s Strategy Unit and co-ordinates and promotes social research across Government. It encourages Departments to commission the right research at the right time in order to promote evidence-based policy making and the effective use of social research. It ensures that Government research is of the highest quality and uses the most appropriate and up-to-date methods and techniques. GCSRO helps ensure that the Government social research service has access to people with the right skills. The office maintains effective links with other professional groups within Government as well as with the academic community and those engaging in applied social policy research and evaluation outside Government. Sue Duncan, who is the Government’s Chief Social Researcher, heads GCSRO. Sue can be contacted by email at Sue.Duncan@cabinet-office.x.gsi.gov.uk.

A web version of the research can be found on Policy Hub (http://www.policyhub.gov.uk). Policy Hub is a web resource launched in March 2002 that aims to improve the way public policy is shaped and delivered. It provides many examples of initiatives, projects, tools and case studies that support better policy making and delivery and provides extensive guidance on the role of research and evidence in the evaluation of policy.
Report to OIPC and ACT Chief Minister’s Department

Re: ACT COAG Trial Evaluation

A Question of Time?

Morgan Disney & Associates Pty. Ltd
Tracey Whetnall Consulting
and
Ben Hodges (Wis Wei Consulting)

April 2006

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background
This evaluation of the ACT COAG Trial was undertaken between October and December 2005; it is one of eight Trials across Australia. The COAG Trials are important initiatives between governments and Indigenous communities working together to address issues of concern to Indigenous communities; the ACT Trial is the only metropolitan capital city based Trial. The lead agencies for this Trial are the ACT Chief Minister’s Department (CMD) and the Australian Government Department of the Environment and Heritage (DEH). These two agencies worked with an Indigenous Working Group (IWG) comprising eight members of the ACT Indigenous community.

The ACT COAG Shared Responsibility Agreement (SRA) says:
"As a starting point, and in response to issues raised at the Community Leaders Workshop… the Partners agree to work together and embark on comprehensive consultations with the community to identify and develop culturally appropriate strategies aimed at:

- assisting people to address trauma, regain confidence, build self-esteem and strengthen cultural identity;
- addressing the deleterious effects of substance abuse;
- addressing the many factors contributing to the over-representation of Indigenous people in the criminal justice system; and
- addressing the many factors contributing to the disparity between educational outcomes of Indigenous people (particularly children and youth), with those of the wider society."

This Agreement appears to have evolved into an agreement to progress four major initiatives to be undertaken as part of the Trial:

- strengthening cultural identity;
- investigating the feasibility of a healing farm;
- establishment of an Indigenous Justice Centre; and
- developing appropriate education options for Indigenous children and young people.

The emphasis of the Trials is on finding new ways of working, and the evaluations of the eight initiatives have a primary focus on establishing what has been learned from the Trials to date. The Trials required the establishment of structures and processes to facilitate and enable the building of partnerships and relationships. This evaluation found all partners in the Trial had learnt important lessons.

Lessons learned

Structures and how these worked
The key governance structures for the ACT Trial were:

- An Indigenous Working Group of eight members and a paid Chairperson, a decision to pay the Chairperson was made as a result of consultations with the Indigenous community early in the Trial.
- A Steering Committee comprising the Chairperson of the Indigenous Working Group, the Chairperson of the ATSIC Queanbeyan Regional Council, the Secretary of the Department of the Environment and Heritage, and the Chief Executive of the ACT Chief Minister’s Department.
• **Working Groups** to progress the four priority areas with members of the Indigenous community and government officers.

Other structures within the Trial included:

• **A Joint Partners Committee** comprising representatives of six Australian Government and four ACT Government agencies.

• **A Trial Project Officers Group** to provide a forum for the project teams from DEH and CMD to meet regularly to discuss on-going issues and plans.

• **A Commonwealth Officers Group** was also established to provide a forum for Australian Government agencies to share information and discuss issues.

All partners and participants agreed that they had learned a lot from the process of working jointly through the established structures. The Steering Committee, the IWG and the Working Groups reported the strongest positive outcomes. Senior executive members within government reported that they had developed a much better understanding of working with Indigenous leaders and communities. IWG members all reported a better understanding of the processes of government and acknowledged the learning which had occurred for senior government staff.

The IWG had the most consistent membership throughout the Trial, changes in personnel of most of the government members created a challenge for the Trial. This was one of the important lessons from this Trial; some continuity greatly assists in relationship building for partnerships.

**Outcomes**

There were some significant lessons learned, by all of the partners, from the outcomes of this Trial.

**The importance of the Indigenous community determining priorities:**

• The priority issues and solutions for the Trial were established by the Indigenous community through a facilitated community forum early in the Trial and the Indigenous participants valued this approach. All partners believe that the solutions proposed to the identified priority issues might have been better developed over time, and other alternative solutions explored, through a wider community engagement strategy.

**Indigenous participants are able to engage more effectively when they understand better how governments work:**

• Indigenous participants within the IWG have learned a lot about the way in which governments work and have worked actively to engage the local Indigenous community through working groups, Elders camps, community meetings and focusing on initiatives which the community perceives as important. With the right support and adequate knowledge, Indigenous participants demonstrate a high level of awareness of the constraints and opportunities of working with governments.

**Governments have a better understanding of how to work with Indigenous communities:**

• Both of the lead government agencies report that they have learned considerably about how to work with Indigenous communities including the importance of allowing time to engage with communities in culturally relevant ways and the time and skills required to do this well. Government officers show a willingness to learn new ways of working which respect
Indigenous cultural and community norms and familial and community relationships.

When desired outcomes are negotiated, agreed and shared at the outset, between all partners, progress is more likely and there is more clarity about assessing success:

- The establishment of the Indigenous Justice Centre is one of the most significant outcomes of this Trial and has wide support from both community and government stakeholders. This is attributed to the clarity of the shared outcomes by all partners at the outset, the strong leadership shown by all partners, and the potential to make a real difference for Indigenous people.

Other priority issues were slower to gain community support but both the education and health priorities are the subject of ongoing joint processes; agreeing on solutions is taking longer than did the justice priority. The Indigenous community is now highly engaged in progressing the education priority; progress on the health priority is less clear.

Playing the lead agency role is easier and likely to be more successful if this agency has a good understanding and experience in the priority area/s being addressed:

- Having a good understanding of the issues being addressed is important for the lead agency. It is more difficult to play a cross government lead agency role if the priorities being addressed are not part of the core business of the lead agency. In this Trial the lead Australian government agency experienced some difficulties in engaging the relevant Commonwealth agencies and the lead ACT Government central agency also took some time to gain the support of some of the line agencies. The ACT Government lead agency did have some capacity to influence other agencies over time.

Resourcing Indigenous participants is important and agreeing on the most effective ways of doing this requires careful consideration and negotiation:

- Resourcing Indigenous communities to engage actively with governments is an important element of successful partnerships. Ways of doing this need to take account of potential conflicts of interest and different approaches, and to have support from the community.

The limitations and/or parameters of governments are best articulated at the outset:

- In several projects, the limitations and/or parameters of governments, with respect to future resourcing or support for proposed options, could have been clearer at the outset. Articulating these early in the process may have assisted in reducing intra and cross government and community frustration and disappointment, and allowed for exploration of alternative solutions more quickly.

Leadership across all levels is important in building partnerships:

- Strong leadership from Ministers and CEOs and continuity of membership by government officers able to make decisions and commitments is an important element in successful partnership building and of building commitments at the various executive and administrative levels within governments. Mechanisms which support interagency dialogue have the capacity to build whole of government commitments.
Building on existing governance mechanisms and processes, where these exist, helps utilise existing resources and has the potential to build the capacity of communities and governments:

- Establishing new governance structures helped to build awareness of the new approach to Indigenous affairs and to test what worked. Having built some awareness of the goals of initiatives such as the Trials, moving to using and building on existing governance mechanisms and processes offers opportunities for the effective use of resources and for building the capacity of the community.

**Next steps**

There are mixed views within the stakeholders regarding the future of this Trial. New initiatives and mechanisms, such as the Office of Indigenous Policy Coordination (OIPC) and Indigenous Coordination Centre (ICC) within the Australian Government, and the current ACT Indigenous consultative body, have been implemented since this Trial commenced in September 2003; these new structures and mechanisms may be more appropriate for any future partnership initiatives in the ACT. Any future Indigenous representative arrangements could also be considered in future partnership initiatives.

There are at least three options:

1. Continuing the partnership as a COAG Trial with some negotiated new structures, a review of the priorities, and agreement on outcomes to be achieved;
2. Discontinuing the Trial and establishing some partnership approaches in the context of the current bi-lateral negotiations with a review of priorities, and negotiation on the best structures to progress agreed partnerships;
3. Working within mainstream government processes and mechanisms to progress partnerships and priority issues including the three remaining issues of Indigenous schooling, health and cultural identity. This option might include exploring the potential to address other priorities which have emerged since September 2003 which have the potential for a strong whole of government approach.

On the basis of the lessons learned in this phase we suggest that the Trial not continue in its current form in the ACT but that opportunities within the other two options be explored with the Indigenous community. Increased cultural awareness training across all levels within administrative government would assist in building on the lessons and achievements of this Trial. Exploring the potential for other partnership priorities on existing initiatives, such as family violence, could also be explored in this next phase, building on work undertaken during 2005, and potentially accessing existing and future funding from the various funding programs within both ACT and Australian Governments.

This Trial has affirmed the potential of partnerships to achieve better outcomes and more holistic approaches to issues for Indigenous communities, and opportunities for building on these lessons must not be lost.
**INTRODUCTION**

In November 2000 the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) agreed that all governments would work together to improve the social and economic well-being of Indigenous people and communities. The Council agreed on a reconciliation framework, and recognised that the significant commitment by the Australian and State and Territory Governments to Indigenous issues is spread across many departments and agencies, through multiple programs, and is therefore often uncoordinated.

COAG later agreed to trial working together with Indigenous communities in eight regions (including the ACT) to provide more flexible programs and services based on priorities agreed with communities; thus the COAG Trials were conceived. The expectation of COAG is that the lessons learned from this initiative regarding how to address issues together will be able to be applied more broadly. Governments agreed that they must work together better at all levels and across all departments and agencies. Indigenous communities and governments must work in partnership and share responsibility for achieving outcomes and for building the capacity of people in communities to manage their own affairs (COAG website).

This report is the outcome of the first evaluation of the ACT Trial and was conducted between October and December 2005.

**The ACT COAG Trial in summary**

The evaluators of the ACT COAG Trial, in the preparation of this report, interviewed stakeholders (Appendix One), conducted a brief literature search (Appendix Two), and examined the relevant files in the two key agencies, the Commonwealth Department of the Environment and Heritage (DEH) and the ACT Chief Minister’s Department (CMD). DEH was the lead Australian Government agency in this Trial; CMD was the lead ACT Government agency.

The ACT COAG Shared Responsibility Agreement (SRA) says:

"As a starting point, and in response to issues raised at the Community Leaders Workshop… the Partners agree to work together and embark on comprehensive consultations with the community to identify and develop culturally appropriate strategies aimed at:

- assisting people to address trauma, regain confidence, build self-esteem and strengthen cultural identity;
- addressing the deleterious effects of substance abuse;
- addressing the many factors contributing to the over-representation of Indigenous people in the criminal justice system; and
- addressing the many factors contributing to the disparity between educational outcomes of Indigenous people (particularly children and youth), with those of the wider society."

This Agreement appears to have evolved into an agreement to progress four major initiatives to be undertaken as part of the Trial:

- strengthening cultural identity;
- investigating the feasibility of a healing farm;
- establishing an Indigenous Justice Centre; and
- developing appropriate education options for Indigenous children and young people.
Working groups were established and took part in a service mapping exercise. This exercise included identifying the services available, the amount of funding from both levels of government, possible new initiatives, and potential areas for re-engineering and revising existing programs.

The broad outcomes achieved are that regular Elders’ camps have taken place (culture), an Indigenous Justice Centre has been established, working group members were funded to visit and investigate international and Australian healing farm models, and discussions on the feasibility of establishing an Indigenous school are on-going along with other improvements to schooling for Indigenous children and young people.

Setting the Scene (The History)

Obtaining an accurate account of the Trial establishment phase has been challenging, as the only continuity of personnel was in the membership of the Indigenous Working Group (IWG). There have been significant changes in every government agency from the Secretary/Chief Executive level to the project officers in line agencies.

The evaluators have examined the available documents, interviewed community members, members of Steering Committee, the IWG, and other government officials, and have thus drawn together the background to the Trial.

There is some confusion and there are differences of opinion about the background to the Trial particularly which initiatives sat within the COAG Trial. We attribute some of this confusion to the changes within government staffing positions and to the evolution of initiatives over three years; some of the history has been lost or is interpreted differently by current incumbents.

a) A broad overview of the conditions and challenges at the start of the Trial.

The evaluation team has been unable to identify any specific documentation of the conditions and challenges at the start of the Trial. However, from interviews, focus groups, research and reading of files, the following can be assumed to be the most relevant conditions, perceptions, and challenges at that time:

- The ACT Indigenous community is a diverse community consisting of; family groups who are the traditional custodians; a large percentage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who have moved to the ACT for work in the public service; and other Indigenous people who have settled in the Territory for work or family reasons. The 2001 Census figures show that 3,576 people identify as Indigenous in the ACT, around 1.2% of the population.
- The movement of Indigenous people and families in and out of the ACT is different to other communities, such as Cape York, where community members are easily identifiable and there are relatively few changes in the population.
- Indigenous people in Queanbeyan, part of New South Wales, also access services in the ACT.
- Community members had an extensive ‘wishlist’ of needs, and were quite aware of governments introducing new initiatives in Indigenous affairs. Some people were and still are cynical about the whole of government approach, while others were and still are optimistic.
- At the commencement of the Trial, communication between government departments within the ACT was perceived by many stakeholders including
the community, as inconsistent and unclear and as poor between the two levels of government.

- ATSIC and ATSIS were about to be disbanded, with the introduction of a new structure through Indigenous Coordination Centres (ICCs). This announcement was in fact made on the same day as the signing of the ACT COAG Trial Shared Responsibility Agreement (SRA).
- The broader ACT community and both governments were perceived by some within the Indigenous community to have little understanding of the ACT Indigenous community. There were perceived assumptions within the governments and the broader community that Indigenous families were homogenous with the rest of the community and had assimilated totally to a non-Indigenous culture and lifestyle in the ACT.
- Canberra is known to be the most expensive city in Australia to live in, with the average income being higher than other cities. Within this context of a higher average income, the poverty of many Indigenous people was perceived to be masked by the large number of high paid jobs that have mainly gone to non-Indigenous people. A small proportion of Indigenous people occupy well-paid jobs.
- The COAG Trial was perceived by some Indigenous families and individuals as a very positive step, by others as yet another initiative they did not fully understand. Similar views appear to have existed within the ACT and Australian Government agencies involved, in that there are different views regarding the potential benefits and outcomes of the Trial.

At the time of the evaluation, however, nobody disputes that the Trial has assisted in important lessons being learned about working together.

b) The history of the Trial – key dates, agreements, significant events, specific initiatives, the establishment of governance and partnership arrangements.

In November 2000, a meeting of the COAG agreed to a framework to advance reconciliation, and identified community leadership, and reviewing and re-engineering programs and services to achieve better outcomes for Indigenous people, as two of the priority areas for action.

In April 2002, the ACT was nominated by the COAG as one of eight Trial sites with a proposal to focus on young people. This proposal included a special educational facility to be developed in consultation with the local Indigenous community. It was proposed that this facility would be located within an existing government school, focus on young people, and would provide a centre at which other services such as primary health care and family support could be supplied.

In May 2002, the United Ngunnawal Elders’ Council (UNEC) was formed. It agreed to meet quarterly and to give priority to a holistic ‘rural’ program.

In June 2002, the ACT Cabinet agreed to the establishment of a Working Group to improve service delivery mechanisms to the Indigenous community in the ACT. This group included:

- the Chairperson of ATSIC Queanbeyan Regional Council,
- the Chief Executives of four ACT Government Departments; and
- the Chairs of the Indigenous Education Consultative Body, the Aboriginal Justice Advisory Committee, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Forum, and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Consultative Council.
This Working Group was to consult with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and organisations to identify service delivery priorities.

In undertaking this work the Working Group was to:

a) inform the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community of the range and scale of current programs and obtain their support for the re-examination of these programs;
b) involve key Departments in this re-examination process;
c) take account of consultations, policies and plans already in place within agencies; and
d) ensure that proposals have a sufficient level of detail to enable them to be established without extensive further development work.

The Working Group met twice in 2002 but did not meet its objectives.

In December 2002, the ACT and Australian Governments opened COAG negotiations in ACT with the basis of negotiation being the themes of youth and education.

In March 2003, the ACT and Australian Governments met with the ATSIC Regional Council and agreed to have the community decide the themes.

In May 2003, a community/government meeting was held and attended by around 30 community representatives. An Indigenous Working Group was formed at this meeting to advise the Government on how best to consult with the Indigenous community of the ACT.

In June 2003, the Indigenous Working Group met with the ACT and Australian Governments.

In September 2003, a Community Leaders’ Workshop was convened. At this workshop there was agreement that the Trial should progress, an agreement was made to establish a new governance structure (the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled Council), the Indigenous Working Group was established, and it was agreed that the focus would be “The Living Web: Keeping the Web Alive”. The themes of the Web were social and emotional well-being, culture and learning, and capacity building for all. This meeting also supported the payment of the Chairperson of the IWG to undertake the community facilitation role.

On April 15th 2004, an SRA was signed at the Great Hall, Parliament House, between the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community of the ACT, the Australian Government, the ACT Government, and ATSIC. The Australian Government lead agency was the Department of the Environment and Heritage, and the ACT Government lead agency was the Chief Minister’s Department. It was agreed that the guiding principle for the Trial would be ‘The Living Web’.

Between the signing of the SRA and the official ending date of the IWG members’ term of office, numerous meetings and events occurred. We have not attempted to include all of these in this section. A summary of the significant meetings, which were recorded in government files, and significant events are included in a table in Appendix Three.

September 30th 2005 was the official ending date for the IWG members’ term of office. Some stakeholders have assumed that this meant the end of the Trial. It is not clear how or what was actually negotiated in regard to the status of the Trial post September 30th given a lack of current agreement between the two governments and
the Indigenous community. There is a strong view within the two governments that the Trial is ongoing until a decision is taken to disband the Trial. The Shared Responsibility Agreement had no articulated ending date.

At December 2005:
The evaluation team notes that:

- The Commonwealth and ACT Departments of Education are now meeting regularly to address Indigenous Education. In this process they are talking to the ACT Indigenous Education Consultative Committee. Communication between the two Departments has improved significantly over the past few months and there has been good progress on this initiative. A joint committee has been established with membership from:
  - the ACT Government - Department of Education and Training (DET) & Chief Minister’s Department (CMD);
  - the Australian Government - DEH & Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST);
  - from the community Indigenous Education Community Board (IECB), the ATSI Community Consultative Council, and former IWG education sub-group members.

This committee is meeting regularly to progress a range of education issues.

- A meeting was reportedly to be held by ACT Health before the end of 2005 to discuss the future of the ‘healing farm’. At the time of finalising this report it is not clear what is happening with this priority.

- The Justice Centre has been incorporated and is going through an establishment phase.

- The CMD is progressing plans for future Indigenous representative arrangements in the ACT.

c) Any commitments made by governments and the community.
The SRA was signed on 15th April 2004 and documented the commitments made by the Governments and the community.

Partners agreed that the guiding principle for the Trial was to be ‘The Living Web’ which had been developed at the September 2003 Community Leaders’ Workshop. The primary objective of the Trial was to keep the Web alive by striving to build a healthy, vibrant community.

Partners agreed to work together to:

- establish partnerships and share responsibility for achieving measurable and sustainable improvements for people living in the community;
- support and strengthen local governance arrangements within and between the community, ATSIC, the ACT Government and the Australian Government;
- support and strengthen decision making and accountability processes which honour the spirit of shared responsibility;
- examine existing programs, services and modes of delivery and to take whatever actions deemed necessary in order to streamline and improve services to the community; and
- learn from a shared responsibility approach – identify what works and what does not and to apply these lessons in future approaches to ensure that the strategies developed to address community issues are both holistic and sustainable.
The four partners also agreed to embark on comprehensive consultations with the community to identify and develop culturally appropriate strategies aimed at:

- assisting people to address trauma, regain confidence, build self-esteem and strengthen cultural identity;
- addressing the deleterious effects of substance abuse;
- addressing the many factors contributing to the over representation of Indigenous people in the criminal justice system; and
- addressing the many factors contributing to the disparity between the educational outcomes of Indigenous people (particularly children and youth), with those of the wider society.

Responsibility for progressing the objectives was located with the Steering Committee. This Committee was made up of the Chairperson of the Indigenous Working Group, the Chairperson of ATSIC Queanbeyan Regional Council, the Secretary of the Australian Government Department of the Environment and Heritage, and the Chief Executive of the ACT Chief Minister’s Department.

d) The extent of involvement of the community in setting the objectives and priorities for the Trial.

In the early stages of the Trial, the ACT Government proposed that youth and education be the theme for the Trial. However there was no agreement by the community leaders that this was a priority. At the facilitated community workshop in September 2003, The Living Web was agreed as the framework for the ACT.

The four priority areas of culture, substance abuse, criminal justice and education were identified at that time and became priority areas for the SRA.

Community leaders agreed that the Trial should be progressed, and that there should be four parties to the agreement – the ACT and Australian Governments, ATSIC, and the Indigenous community in the ACT.

The Resolution passed by the leaders was, “we as the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community support the establishment of a COAG Shared Responsibility Agreement Initiative within the ACT. Our focus is ‘THE LIVING WEB: Keeping the Web Alive’. Our three themes are:

1. Social and Emotional Well-Being
2. Culture and Learning
3. Capacity Building for all”.

Working together (The process)

A major commitment of the Trial was for the community and the two levels of government to find ways of working together and therefore to learn from the shared responsibility approach. Structures were established to meet that commitment and to meet the other commitments made in the SRA. Early in the evaluation a number of informants stated that they believed the Trial was over-governed. This was explored further during the evaluation. This section briefly describes the structures and processes for working together, and what has been learned about the structures required to build partnerships.
a) **What structures were put in place for community and government to work together?**

An **Indigenous Working Group** was established as the primary point of community contact to: represent community interests to the governments; assist government to undertake consultations with community organisations, families, and individuals about proposed projects and improvement; assist in the setting up of the Community Controlled Council; and provide regular feedback to them. The IWG became an active participant in the Trial process. The IWG Chairperson also played the community facilitation role on the advice and decision of the community.

A **Steering Committee** was established to oversee the Trial. Members were the Chairperson of the Indigenous Working Group, the Chairperson of the ATSIC Queanbeyan Regional Council, the Secretary of the Department of the Environment and Heritage, and the Chief Executive of the ACT Chief Minister’s Department. Meetings were to be held monthly, with the first being held in June 2004. Several meetings of this Committee were held monthly and it was subsequently decided to hold them less frequently. The Chairperson of the ATSIC Regional Council did not attend many of these meetings.

**Working Groups** to progress the four priority areas were established in July 2004. Existing consultative committees formed the basis of each group. Officers from the two governments joined them.

- **Self esteem and cultural identity** work was undertaken through the Community Consultative Committee, which has twelve community members. Four Australian Government agencies and four ACT Government agencies were also represented on the working group.

- **Substance abuse priority work** was undertaken through the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) Health Forum. This Forum has four Indigenous members; two of who work for government departments - one Australian Government and one ACT Government. Three Australian and two ACT Government agencies were represented on this group.

  Aboriginal Justice Advisory Committee (AJAC) was the basis of the **Justice priority working group**. AJAC has eleven Indigenous members. Two Australian and four ACT Government agencies took part in this working group.

  **Education priority work** was undertaken through the Indigenous Education Community Board (IECB), which has three Indigenous members. Four Australian and four ACT Government agencies were represented; staff members of two universities were also part of this working group.

  Through meetings and research by government departments, each group went through a service mapping exercise, which included a review of current programs and services in each area, funding provided through each level of government, possible new initiatives and potential areas for re-engineering and revising existing programs.

  Each group was to report back to the Steering Committee, the Joint Partners Group and the Advisory Groups’ forum by the end of 2004.
b) **What structures were put in place for governments to work together?**

The two lead agencies identified earlier met as members of the Steering Committee. The two Departments were represented on the Steering Committee by the Secretary of DEH and the CEO of Chief Minister’s Department.

A **Joint Partners’ Committee** was established, which was a monthly meeting of representatives of six Australian and four ACT agencies. This group was set up in about July 2004.

A **Trial Project Officers Group** was also established to provide a forum for the project teams from DEH and CMD to meet regularly to discuss on-going issues and plans. This group often met weekly, and at times included the IWG Chairperson and the Queanbeyan ICC Manager. The group stopped meeting at the end of September 2005.

A **Commonwealth Officers Group** was also established to provide a forum for Australian Government agencies to share information and discuss issues. This group was set up in June 2003 and met regularly for the first twelve months then less regularly once the Joint Partners’ Committee was established.

c) **How successful have these structures been?**

A number of stakeholders expressed a view that perhaps the Trial was over-governed, with too many groups; this appears to have led to some confusion about the role of each group. Overall, however, the structures are seen as having some success at building partnerships, improving the way governments work together, and involving and enabling the community to contribute to their own solutions.

The **Indigenous Working Group (IWG)** met regularly and was supported by the Chairperson playing the community facilitation role. Funding for the position of Chairperson came through the flexible funding pool managed by OIPC. Funding was also provided for an administrative assistant. The membership of the IWG involved the same group of Indigenous people who are actively involved in many community structures and processes, and it was therefore difficult to find suitable times to meet. There was also a strong perception by a very small number of community and government stakeholders that if government was not satisfied with advice from the IWG, it would approach the United Ngunawal Elders Group. We have been unable to substantiate this claim and to the contrary, the evaluation team was advised, firmly, by other key stakeholders (both Indigenous and non-Indigenous) that this was definitely not the case.

The **Steering Committee** met monthly; three of the members highlighted that the working relationships that developed were excellent and that respect was developed for each others’ roles and tasks.
The ATSIC Regional Chairperson was a member of the Committee until the end of June 2005, when the Regional Councils formally came to a close. Unfortunately we were unable to locate this member of the Steering Committee despite several efforts to do so through several leads.

Each of the four Working Groups undertook a service mapping exercise, which involved the respective lead agencies identifying the Indigenous services that each level of government funded, and the amount of funding. This information was taken to the working groups to consider what worked and what did not work, identify possible priorities for the possible re-direction of some programmes, and look at how this might be achieved. Each group was chaired by a community representative who was part of the relevant advisory group. The groups all met at least once, with two of the groups meeting four times. There were different views expressed regarding how this work was to have been progressed. After a one-day workshop hosted by the IWG no further analysis appears to have been undertaken. The evaluation team was advised by government officers that this work now forms an information base for the current (and any future) workshop discussions examining the four priority areas.

Varying perceptions of the success of the structures were reported across the stakeholders. For example, on the one hand, good relationships were built and the groups committed people from the community and both governments to work together; this was reported as a positive achievement by many. On the other hand, one of the focus groups argued that the education goals came from external groups, not from the IWG and that this created some tension.

The Joint Partners’ Committee met regularly. Decisions were reportedly sometimes difficult to make as people who were sent as representatives had limited decision-making power and were often very junior in the departments represented. It was also reported that decisions and agreements were sometimes made external to the agency involved and the agency was then informed of the decision and hence had no ownership of the issue or the decision. There were also changes in membership and several examples of new officers having no briefing, history or handover.

The Trial Project Officers’ Group met regularly especially in early stages. These meetings were reported as having built respect and understanding of the roles and challenges facing the respective agencies. Improved information exchange at officer level was also reported through this group.

The Commonwealth Officers’ Group (COG) met every six weeks at first and then on a needs basis. This group was set up by DEH as a way of communicating information about the ACT Trial to other Australian Government agencies, a task it handled effectively. This Group observed at the time that information was not filtering through to the other agencies. When blockages occurred it was necessary to use ‘Secretary to Secretary’ communication to remove the blockages. One focus group suggested that the COG might have been used more strategically in influencing other agencies.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled Council did not develop as other processes were agreed to be more appropriate. The agreement in the SRA was to work towards setting up this body. The IWG spent a lot of time in working out how this group might be formed. The appointment of the Community Controlled Council was delayed due to the proposed reforms in Indigenous representation within the ACT. In an effort to reduce duplication with existing structures, the establishment of a Community Controlled Council under the COAG Trial was put on hold whilst this was addressed through other processes. This work is progressing and a community consultation is now in train.
What can be concluded?
A number of stakeholders reported that they have developed a much better understanding of both government processes and the Indigenous community, as an outcome of being involved in these structures. The Steering Committee and the IWG appear to have worked best at building relationships, listening to each other and improving understandings of how to work together. On the question of whether the Trial was over-governed, an alternative view is that while it looks like there were too many groups in the structure, only three – the Steering Committee, the IWG and the Commonwealth Officers Group - were in place for most of the Trial. The other groups were slightly more informal and were set up to move issues forward.

There is some evidence that the other structures have assisted in building awareness of how important it is to work together. There is ongoing work occurring on education through a joint ACT and Australian Government process with a community consultation process in train.

The two lead agencies both report significant improvements in awareness of issues and of the need to work together more constructively.

Some of the structures do seem to have suffered from constant changes of membership, limited power to make decisions and influence outcomes, and members with no status to change the system.

d) Were community and governments’ commitments met? If not, why not?
It is not clear that either level of government fully met their commitments although progress has been made on most issues and all of the partners are still talking and working together on three of the priority issues. All partners are participating in other processes which have emerged since the Trial commenced.

The first commitment in the SRA was that “the guiding principle for the Trial was ‘The Living Web’”. There was no mention of ‘The Living Web’ by any interviewee except the Chairperson of the IWG.

The next commitment was that partners agreed to work on a number of processes, as outlined in the Setting the Scene section of this report. These are addressed in the following paragraphs:

Establishing partnerships and sharing responsibility for achieving measurable and sustainable improvements for people living in the community
We found evidence that the structures put into place did establish relationships between:
- Community members and government officials;
- Australian Government agency officers across agencies;
- ACT Government agency officers across agencies; and
- Australian and ACT Government officers.

Several stakeholders perceived a lack of commitment to the cross government partnership goals of the Trial at the Australian and ACT executive government level. It was difficult to establish how accurate this perception was as stakeholders were largely unable to give explicit examples about how this manifests and how it prevented partnerships. There was an equally valid view expressed that giving too much
credence to such perceptions, without clear evidence, distracts attention from getting on with the partnerships which do exist and the progress which has been made during the Trial. This may be something both levels of government need to address in any future partnership efforts; joint public statements might help counter those perceptions.

Through the Trial processes, partnerships were built which assisted in sharing responsibility for initiatives which the community believed would make a difference. The most significant example of this was the establishment of the Justice Centre, which has the potential to deliver sustainable benefits for the Indigenous community. The key partners who were involved in the early decisions around the Centre were quite clear that this justice initiative was greatly assisted by the Trial and the partners’ joint work around the Centre. A minority of stakeholders argued that these achievements would have been made irrespective of the Trial.

Supporting and strengthening local governance arrangements within and between the community, ATSIC, the ACT Government and the Australian Government.
Local governance arrangements within the community were seen by some stakeholders to have weakened with the dismantling of ATSIC at the commencement of the Trial. There was community cynicism that this occurred on the same day as the SRA was signed, although most stakeholders acknowledged that this was an unfortunate coincidence. The ATSIC Chairperson was reportedly supportive of the initiative; however he could not be contacted to seek his independent view. Both the ICC and ACT Government acknowledge the need to further develop the whole-of-government partnership.

Supporting and strengthening decision making and accountability processes which honour the spirit of shared responsibility.
We found limited evidence of this across government, however the two lead agencies and the IWG did work hard at trying to find ways of doing this. There is evidence that the two lead agencies are continuing to address this in the current initiatives being led by or involving their agencies. The education initiative is also engaging both governments in a partnership with the community. This spirit is not so evident across other portfolios in either level of government although we observed a genuine desire for this to be improved in the future.

Examining existing programs, and to take whatever actions were deemed necessary in order to streamline and improve services to the community.
The service mapping exercise undertaken by the working groups examined existing programs and was reported as an important source of data regarding what is being allocated from both governments. The service mapping exercise is now the basis for current discussions about streamlining and improving services.

Learn from a shared responsibility approach – identify what works and what does not and how to apply these lessons in future approaches to ensure that the strategies developed to address community issues are both holistic and sustainable.
This evaluation has given stakeholders the opportunity to reflect on the structures and processes that work, and what lessons have been learnt from the Trial. There have been important lessons learned regarding what limits and what enhances collaboration and what is possible into the future. There have been many strategies for improvements suggested; these will be reflected in the Next Steps section of this report.
At the commencement of the Trial, commitments were also made on four specific issues:

i) Assisting people to address trauma, regain confidence, build self-esteem and strengthen cultural identity;

ii) Addressing the deleterious effects of substance abuse;

iii) Addressing the many factors contributing to the over representation of Indigenous people in the criminal justice system; and

iv) Addressing the many factors contributing to the disparity between the educational outcomes of Indigenous people (particularly children and youth), with those of the wider society.

Each of these issues was addressed through the formation of working groups, which undertook the service mapping exercise. More detail will be provided later in the report on the outcomes for each issue.
LESSONS LEARNED (INTERIM OUTCOMES)

a) What new ways of working together better have been identified through the Trial?

Interviews and focus groups have identified the following new ways of working together better:

- That through listening to the community, both Australian and ACT Government officers have learned a significant amount about working with Indigenous families and communities. This was reported as a significant lesson by very senior government officers from both levels of government and as an enduring lesson. The building of good relationships has committed them to work together to build on these lessons and to do government business for Indigenous communities differently.

- That Indigenous leaders develop greater skills, awareness and objectivity, and exercise great wisdom, when working in partnerships within the structures of government when given the opportunity.

- That in trialing new ways of working, it is important to develop clear agreement about the issues, and possible outcomes, before deciding on the best solutions or making rapid judgements about solutions or ‘quick fixes’.

- That the working relationship between government officers at all levels can be improved through the establishment of effective governance mechanisms. The lessons learned have laid the possible foundation for a better Bi-lateral agreement in the ACT.

- That it is critical to have a mechanism within each level of government which enables the lead agency to engage other CEOs or Ministers with the process. Whilst within the two lead agencies in the ACT Trial, there has been a high level of commitment and effort, it is more difficult to achieve sustained change without a whole of government approach across both levels.

- That there needs to be an appropriate mechanism for supporting community members and that this needs resourcing in a way which the community supports. The Task Force, which existed prior to the signing of the SRA, reportedly gave good support to the community.

- That working together on agreeing what outcomes communities and governments are seeking to achieve is a crucial first step in any future shared responsibility initiative. The four priority areas agreed for the Trial were seen as high priority but the proposed solutions were not agreed. Over time it became obvious that the outcomes each partner was seeking had not been adequately discussed to ensure full agreement, and different views within the community were not adequately explored before the solutions were posed. At the time of writing there remain significantly different views about what outcomes the community and the governments both shared and, where there were different or opposing views, how these would be managed.

b) What have been some of the limitations of the Trial, and what are examples of things that work well?

Limitations

The identified limitations of the Trial were relatively common across stakeholder groups with important lessons for governments and community.
The important issues about government processes identified are:

- Governments need to be clear with the community about the parameters and the limitations when it enters into community processes which build expectations of outcomes or specific funding. For example, issues related to the viability of an Indigenous school or a Healing Farm could have been explored jointly by both spheres of government and discussed more openly with the IWG.

- Despite the best intentions and efforts of the lead agencies in this Trial, one of the most senior members found it difficult to engage other agencies and to impact on the priorities identified. The issues were all human services issues for which the Commonwealth Department of the Environment and Heritage had neither the experience, nor the funding, nor the level of knowledge to be able to adequately understand or influence what emerged.

- Some continuity and consistency in the personnel involved is an important element in building relationships and sustainable outcomes and focus. There were constant changes in personnel in the two lead agencies but particularly so in the ACT Government officers across the three years. This meant that new staff needed to develop relationships and learn the issues. Indigenous leaders had to deal with the impact of these changes and became the corporate memory of the Trial.

- Government agencies must be open with the lead agencies about the issues related to resource allocation for initiatives which impact on Shared Responsibility Agreements.

- Significant policy changes can have an adverse impact on partnerships. The new arrangements for Indigenous affairs with the establishment of the Office of Indigenous Policy Coordination and the Indigenous Coordination Centres meant the loss of a significant partner (ATSIC) to the agreement. If on the other hand another level of government does not fully accept the new arrangements or initiatives this can complicate and undermine potential new partnerships and opportunities. Indigenous communities can then feel caught between governments and their agencies.

- Both levels of government must be represented at the table in meetings with the community. It appears that at some stages in the Trial, the DEH officers were not always included in meetings with the community and this again appears to have undermined efforts at openness, shared work and collaborative decision making. More recent reports of active engagement of DEH officers support how important this is to working more effectively together.

- The community facilitation process had mixed experiences, with the early workshops receiving good support. The community and the IWG decided very early in the Trial that the Chairperson should be funded to fulfil that community facilitation role although there seem to have been some different views within the IWG about the extent of resourcing required to fulfil the role. The Chairperson spent a lot of time in the first year visiting organisations, meeting with the community, and working very closely with the key agencies involved. It became increasingly difficult for the Chairperson to do both as the Trial progressed.

- The management of the funds for the community facilitation and administrative support to the Chairperson was contracted to the University of Canberra. This arrangement has raised some important lessons for the future. Firstly, combining the Chairing and community facilitation role was not an easy task and at times the Chairperson was caught between a commitment to the Trial and the concerns of the community. Secondly the University of Canberra played no role in decision making and was simply
the auspice. In any future arrangement it would be an advantage if the auspice played a stronger role in supporting the community facilitation process and assessing progress in community understandings and engagement.

- Government officers who are also Indigenous community members sometimes felt torn between their communities and their employer agency. They may experience a conflict of interest, finding it difficult to separate their own personal views from the wider interest of the community.

There have been lessons learned about the role of community:

- Community members who became members of the IWG were also involved in positions of responsibility with other Indigenous community organisations. There needs to be an acknowledgement that people may need mentoring support to undertake the extra responsibilities of shared responsibility for partnership processes.

- Community members do not agree on all issues and this would not be expected in non-Indigenous communities. For example, the decision on broad priorities was made at one community workshop with thirty representatives, and many members of the community subsequently disagreed with how these priorities should be addressed. The need for an Indigenous school and for the Healing Farm were the subject of a wide range of opinions. The need to test and discuss ideas for addressing priority issues before agreeing on final solutions is essential; a good process and allowing sufficient time to do this well is more likely to build that agreement.

- Clarity and unambiguous support from all levels of political and administrative leadership are essential in building and supporting community ownership. Differences need to be openly addressed and resolved in the interests of the wider Indigenous community.

- The politics of the Indigenous community meant that some community members were not always supportive of IWG members. This undermines the efforts of leaders to engage in important partnership initiatives. The Indigenous community needs to address how it can and will deal with differences and support leaders who tackle difficult issues in their communities and who attempt innovative approaches to shared problem solving.

There have been some important lessons about the processes of the Trial:

- Any future SRA needs to be manageable in scale and scope. The resources of both the community and governments were seen as being very stretched; trying to understand and progress four priorities in the whole of the ACT was considered too ambitious.

- There must be agreed objectives, outcomes, performance indicators, and an on-going evaluation process from the outset and spending time on reaching such agreements is an important lesson.

- Future working groups must have a shared view on the desired outcomes and these need to be developed and negotiated with the community in a constructive and task-focused process. This is a difficult process and requires full engagement from both levels of government across all their agencies.

- All partners need to have a shared understanding of the agreement and what it means for community and for governments, including what is part of an agreement process and what is not. This could be monitored and tested regularly.
Things that work well
On the surface, it may seem as if little has been achieved in this Trial. The evaluation reveals there have been important achievements which might not be apparent unless there is a careful and considered analysis. Learning is a crucial goal of the Trials; not blaming partners for limitations or perceived failures is an important element of cultural change being implemented in the new arrangements. The Trial set out to test new ways of working. It was almost certain to have some successes and some failures; it was bound to confront significant community and intra and inter-government issues. Changing life opportunities of Indigenous families and communities requires a high level of commitment to do things differently, to try new ideas and to allow time to do this well.

On the other hand it is vitally important that the lessons learned are well used in any future agreements or shared responsibility initiatives. Indigenous communities have huge issues confronting them. Seeing improved outcomes for their families is vital and must be a responsibility which is both shared and mutual; blame and recriminations do little to achieve better outcomes and, on the contrary, set the scene for ongoing battles which distract time and energy from more positive approaches.

c) What have been the achievements?

- A high level of respect has developed amongst those who were involved in the governance processes.
- Members of the IWG know a lot more about the COAG and government processes generally and have a strong investment in future outcomes and approaches.
- The two heads of the lead agencies have developed very good understandings of how to work better with Indigenous communities and about working together across the two levels of government.
- Officers in the Chief Minister’s Department have developed a good relationship between the community and CMD more generally.
- There have been important learnings about how to work together and what does not work well or what limits intergovernmental processes.
- The lessons appear to be being used well in current initiatives in some agencies, within both governments, to progress some of the community’s issues.
- Members of the IWG remained committed for the duration of the Trial, despite considerable questioning and challenging by the community.
- Projects and processes were worked on in a partnership involving community members, ACT Government and Australian Government officers.
- Issues related to Indigenous schooling and substance use remain high on the agenda of the relevant government agencies and the ACT Education Department is jointly progressing the options for improved schooling in conjunction with CMD.
- The establishment of the Justice Centre and attention to improved justice system responses are seen by many as major achievements which were assisted through the Trial.
- Important lessons about how to resource communities and Indigenous leaders to engage their community in partnerships have been learned.
The COAG Trials have largely been located in rural or regional areas where the idea and definition of community may be easier to identify and comprehend although diverse views are also likely to exist in these communities. The ACT is an urban setting with a very complex set of circumstances, including being the national capital with a very diverse Indigenous community. Comparing the outcomes of this Trial with the other seven sites may be difficult in this context. This context must be acknowledged in any comparisons of outcomes. The advent of SRAs across Australia represents a broader range of agreements and this may create more opportunities to test the relevance of community agreements and partnership processes in urban settings.

d) What have been the outcomes of the Trial?

General
Working Groups were established for each of the agreed priority areas. The service mapping exercise undertaken by those groups developed baseline data of what is currently available, as well as developing targets for action. This data included identifying the services available, the amount of funding from both levels of government, possible new initiatives and potential areas for re-engineering and revising existing programs. Whilst this data does not appear to have been used as well as it might have during the Trial, it is now being used to progress some work within the ACT Government and in the ongoing initiatives.

Self esteem and cultural identity
Elders camps have taken place regularly. It is not clear if this is a direct outcome of the Trial. It has been argued that the camps would have taken place without the Trial. However, it has been suggested that the presence of the Trial may have increased the level of communication among groups of Elders and encouraged them to engage more actively in the camps.

Each of the other priority areas has a component of self esteem and cultural identity built in as part of their strategy.

Substance abuse
The ACT Government funded a feasibility study for the Healing Farm. There were different opinions expressed about whether or not the Healing Farm was a COAG initiative. However, it seems clear from the documentation that visits to Canada, the USA and various sites around Australia to examine models for Indigenous rehabilitation programs were part of the COAG Trial and involved IWG members and agencies reportedly participating in the Trial.

Investigation of the Healing Farm concept is still current. The IWG Chairperson reported that sites for the Healing Farm are also under investigation. There is some confusion around the status of this work and what the outcomes have been of funded trips to assess similar international and national initiatives. One opinion is that this area has suffered from there being two distinct views, either strongly for or strongly against the Healing Farm. This has made it difficult for those who shared neither view to get any sort of rational evaluation of how such ‘farms’ might work. It is not clear how this is being progressed.

Justice
The Justice Centre is established. There is a minority view from current incumbents in positions that the success of the Justice Centre is in spite of COAG and some perceptions that the COAG Trial may have wasted time in the process. However, as
previously stated, there is a strong majority view from key and senior decision makers involved at the time in decision making about the Centre that the COAG Trial was the vehicle that drove the establishment of the Justice Centre.

**Education**

The working group established seven concurrent targets:

- **Cementing the Indigenous Education Partnership.**
- **Conceptualising a clear and comprehensive Indigenous education and training policy.**
- **Government resourcing of cluster and/or local school communities in engaging with and involving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in decision making, in systematically developing and implementing localised shared responsibility initiatives and sharing good practice and supporting these activities with interagency cooperation and training.**
- **An Indigenous school in the ACT.**
- **Indigenous cultural studies in the school curriculum and involvement of Indigenous people in development and delivery.**
- **Indigenous education network.**
- **Vocational pathways through ACT Indigenous VET Committee.**

A feasibility study for an Indigenous school is currently being undertaken. All targets are being discussed at regular meetings. There was a reasonable level of frustration re this priority because, over the 18 months of the Trial, progress was limited. However, it is still on the agenda and recent progress on this issue has been very well received by the community. The same argument regarding different views within the community in relation to the Healing Farm was expressed regarding the benefits or otherwise of the separate Indigenous school.
The evaluation team heard many opinions about whether or not to progress the Trial as a COAG Trial: some for and some against. The main function of the Trial was testing processes and policy which improved outcomes for Indigenous communities and families and built better inter-governmental work.

The introduction of the Office of Indigenous Policy Coordination (OIPC) and the Indigenous Coordination Centre (ICC) structure, on the day that the SRA was signed, meant that a new way of working was being undertaken. The ICC role is about improved coordination within the Australian Government.

Many stakeholders argued that the future shared responsibility initiatives in the ACT should be progressed through the Bi-lateral agreement process currently being negotiated between the Commonwealth and the States/Territories, or through other partnership approaches. This was seen as a more viable and sustainable way of progressing the ongoing priorities for Indigenous communities related to schooling and substance use, and other priorities. For example, family violence was not identified as a potential priority in the original Trial negotiations. However, the community and both levels of government have an active interest in this issue, multiple funding programs exist within the Commonwealth, and there is a current focus for the ACT Government on addressing family violence.

There is some merit in the view that the Trial not continue as a COAG Trial but that it should move into the mainstream processes. Relationships within government agencies have been established and the bi-lateral process is underway. Whole of government commitments are in place to enable lessons learned in the Trial to be implemented via other processes.

There has also been a view put forward that the proposed new ACT Indigenous representative body be an advisory body to both the Australian and ACT Government in the ACT in the context of any future Shared Responsibility Agreement. There has been an argument put that with this new body in existence there would be no need for a body such as the IWG. There is no reason why the ICC could not also work with any new representative body. However, if that body does not eventuate, we would suggest continuing the IWG in some form.

The Chairperson and other IWG members remain deeply committed to the concepts and principles of joint work and several members have been strong leaders and voices for change. Agreement has already been reached for the work of the IWG to be subsumed within the current ATSI Community Consultative Council (CCC), with agreement that the former Chairperson of the IWG and the Chairperson of the CCC will continue on the Steering Committee. This arrangement could be tested with the wider community in the next phase.

a) What suggestions are there for further progressing the Trial?

While this evaluation has suggested that the Trial not proceed, there have been options suggested that could apply to a continuation of either the Trial or to the success of future government processes, such as SRAs and initiatives through whatever partnership arrangements are eventually agreed.
Governments
Options that might be considered in the next phase include the following:

- There be an in-principle commitment to continue with some form of shared responsibility initiative but that this happen in the context of the bi-lateral agreement. Issues needing consideration are:
  - the ICC might be the lead agency for the Commonwealth, as it’s role is coordination at that level;
  - CMD could maintain a strong role at the ACT Government agency level and other CEOs be required to make a similar leadership commitment at the line agency level.
  - Some negotiation regarding the principles of how these roles are implemented might assist both the ICC and CMD.

- An alternative option would be to agree to establish a number of smaller scale partnerships to progress the education and health initiatives for example, and to agree on the best structures and processes based on lessons learned from this Trial. Small scale partnerships might also be explored in other areas where there is strong cross government responsibility and community interest; this might include family violence, or services for women, or early intervention services. The role of the ICC would then be considered in the context of the issues chosen.

- The active and resourced involvement of Indigenous families and the community be considered as an essential element of any successful partnership initiative. How this is achieved needs to be negotiated and agreed as quickly as possible with the community, taking account of the lessons learned from the Trial.

- Financial incentives and more flexible funding options could be included in any future initiatives.

- Both levels of government maintaining an active commitment to keep talking to each other with a view to reaching agreement on priorities for joint action on common priorities, for example, family violence.

- In any future process, there be agreement on broad priorities, with solutions subject to a more considered and resourced discussion process involving the broader Indigenous community.

- Any future initiative needs to find the balance between spending time on building community ownership and the need for a strong focus on achieving agreed and negotiated outcomes.

- Both levels of government must be open about any parameters that may limit options for action, lest the time and goodwill of the community be wasted.

Community
The role and needs of the community are critical to a successful partnership. Specific suggestions for the community are:

- Any partnership needs to highlight the problems Indigenous people have in accessing mainstream services and address the consequences of mainstreaming; both positive and potentially negative.

- Any partnership could highlight where there is inadequate understanding about Indigenous people in the ACT. For example, disadvantage is obvious in remote communities, but in the ACT there needs to be more work undertaken to explain the challenges and issues that Indigenous people experience living in the ACT.

- The Indigenous community does need to be adequately resourced to engage in partnership processes. This may include support for well
facilitated community meetings and public discussions or more focused consultation.

- Being respectful of the different views and experiences of Indigenous families and communities is essential for both governments and for the community themselves. It is accepted there will be a variety of views in the non-indigenous community on many community issues. The same acceptance needs to apply with respect to Indigenous communities.

**b) What improvements can be made?**

Improvements were suggested in three major areas – community, government and the process. The following ideas are presented for consideration.

**Community**

People in the community need to have information about any future agreements, what outcomes can be expected across the community, and how they can participate. There needs to be a strategic approach developed to inform members of the community about all aspects of shared responsibility initiatives and how it will benefit the whole community.

It is essential to build the capacity of any representative body. Strategies to be implemented might include the payment of sitting fees and the allocation of a portfolio to each representative. This raises some dilemmas as there are different views within the Indigenous community about payment of sitting fees. Learning from the lessons of this Trial would assist in addressing this in the future.

There will be no easy solution to this challenge and creative ways of capacity building the community will need to be negotiated and explored.

**Governments**

The following suggestions apply for governments:

- The capacity of government needs to be improved in such areas as cross-cultural awareness, how to implement whole of government strategies and how to work with Indigenous communities.
- The Australian Government lead agency could be OIPC through the ICC. It is the function of OIPC to provide the coordination and leadership necessary across all levels of government. There is some support within both governments and the community for this to occur.
- Cross-cultural training for senior people in leadership positions within both governments is widely supported. One of the community members suggested that the training should be three or four days in the bush to raise consciousness. “If you are the leaders we would like you to understand. This is the problem; this is how we see it.”
- Being clear about what agencies of both governments need to be involved at the outset greatly assists collaborative efforts and avoids potential misunderstandings and leaving out key players.
- Clarity at the outset regarding partnership resourcing parameters assists communities to engage more openly and to understand what is possible.

**Process**

There are strong views that the focus of any future partnership initiatives in the ACT needs to change. There is a suggestion that unmet need is where the focus should be thus addressing fundamental problems within the community - for example, the lack of early intervention services and the lack of services for Indigenous women. Focussing on unmet need might in fact limit the range and creativity of options considered. It can
sometimes be more productive to agree on a positive vision for the community in order to identify actions needed to achieve that vision.

Agreeing on how to manage the existing priorities and whether they are still priorities within the agreed positive vision is an important next step. The suggestions regarding processes in relation to the existing priorities are as follows:

- Potential outcomes need to be identified and agreed during the early stages of the initiative and evaluation meetings should be an on-going part of any partnership effort.
- Both Governments have to engage with the community in an honest, open way and share information; partnership is about a journey, not a static destination.
- There needs to be a clear understanding by all partners about desired outcomes and goals, this should be negotiated and developed carefully and through a resourced process, whatever the priorities.
- Leaders, both within the community and within government, need team building skills and attitudes. Partnerships require team approaches at all levels. Opportunities to develop these must continue to be part of initiatives and all officers involved should be required to demonstrate team building skills in their daily work.

c) What structures, processes and support would be needed?

Structures
The most appropriate structures will depend on the nature of the partnerships agreed in the ACT. Formalising some processes appears to be important to giving focus to the partnership effort.

As already identified, OIPC is now the lead Australian Government agency on Indigenous policy; this agency might play a lead agency role for the Australian Government in the ACT through the ICC.

Indigenous representative arrangements in the ACT are currently being negotiated and when resolved could provide the forum for community input. This could take the place of the IWG. Recognising and incorporating new structures into any new agreements will need to be explored in the next phase. There may be more than one Indigenous structure which needs to be included.

Some form of partnership forum which brings the decision makers and leaders together could be negotiated and established with clear terms of reference and adequate secretarial support.

Processes
A community information strategy, including meetings, presentations and publicity needs to be developed.

A key part of the process is to identify the issue and then investigate how partners can work together to solve it, rather than have the solution presented at the outset.

Base line data, objectives and performance indicators need to be developed with input from key agencies and the Indigenous community.
Support
The Indigenous representative body needs support, including secretarial support. Strategies need to be agreed and implemented on the best way to support representatives.

Any future initiative needs to provide appropriate resourcing for the key people in the community and in government. Increased cultural understanding within governments will assist in supporting government efforts and ensure all staff understand how to work with Indigenous communities.

It is also urgent that Indigenous leaders address tensions within the community and for governments to support and foster processes and strategies to achieve this.

d) Suggest possible approaches to ensure that governments and the ACT Indigenous community are well placed for further evaluation of the Trial site in 2008

If this Trial continues, or other forms of partnership agreements are pursued, then an improved evaluation strategy needs to be established at the outset. The key steps include:

- A process for establishing the evaluation framework needs to be implemented early in the agreement and this must include strong community input.
- The evaluation framework might include joint setting of agreed objectives, outcomes and performance indicators, with continuous evaluation built in.
- Allowing adequate time for an engagement process in the evaluation strategy is essential, creating a timely process is a major challenge. Using the lessons from this Trial will assist this.
- Baseline indicators for current partnership behaviours and for progress in the initiative must be agreed at the outset. Changes in the indicators must be measurable so that progress can be assessed. There are now some excellent evaluation frameworks in existence for evaluating partnership initiatives.
- Any performance indicators must be realistic and take account of the timeframe.
- Trying to reach unanimous agreement on objectives, outcomes or performance indicators would not be achievable within any community in Australia. It would be unrealistic to expect this of the Trial or any other form of partnership agreement in the ACT and if sought could well paralyse the process within the community and across government.
- The level of political leadership from both levels of government and from the community needs to be one of the elements assessed in the evaluation.
Conclusion

Whatever the next step in the ACT, all partners need to build on the important lessons that have been learned in this Trial.


“I have noticed an air of enthusiasm and optimism among government departments about the potential of the Trials. Government departments are embracing the challenge to re-learn how to interact with and deliver services to Indigenous peoples. There are no illusions among government departments that the Trials are as much about building the capacity of governments as they are about building the capacity of Indigenous communities.

Through the active involvement of Ministers and secretaries of federal departments in the Trials, a clear message is being sent through mainstream federal departments that these Trials matter and that government is serious about improving outcomes for Indigenous peoples. Even at this preliminary stage, this is a significant achievement for the Trials, ATSIC have stated that to date ‘there has been clear success through improved relationships across governments at Trial sites’

Governments have not turned up in Indigenous communities with pre-determined priorities and approaches… the initial stages have involved building up trust between governments and Indigenous peoples. This has in turn had an impact on relationships within Indigenous communities in some of the Trial sites, with an increased focus from Indigenous communities on organising themselves in ways that facilitate dialogue with governments” (2003) (p 72/3).

The lessons learned in this Trial strongly affirm the observations of the Commissioner.
ATTACHMENTS

Appendix 1: Who Was Consulted

IWG members

Ros Brown
Musepah Banu
Terry Williams
Dale Sutherland
Jo Schnieder
Agnes Shea (Ngunnawal elder)
Paul Brandy
Sharon Payne
Caroline Hughes

Community Organisations

Winnunga Nimityjah

Task Force

Geoff Richardson

Steering Committee

Mike Harris, CEO, CMD
David Borthwick, Secretary, DEH

ACT Government

CMD Focus Group (JACS, Health, OCYFS, CMD, Education)
Benny Mills
Nick Manikis

Australian Government

DEH Focus Group (4 DEH, 1 Department of Employment and Workplace Relations)

Queanbeyan ICC

Helen Board (Manager)
Gail Byron
Appendix 2: References

Reports and research papers


Arabena, Kerry (2005), Not Fit for Modern Australian Society: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and the new arrangements for the administration of Indigenous affairs: Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, Canberra.

Bulis, Helen and Stehlik, Daniela (2005) Expanding the boundaries of health – a ‘whole of government’ case study, Department of Health and Ageing Adelaide


The Eureka Project (2005), Measuring Success: Sharing power and accountability with Shepparton’s Aboriginal people, The Eureka Project, Melbourne.

Web Sites

ABC - [www.abc.net.au/message]
ATSIC Commissioner SA Zone Newsletter


Australian National University - [www.anu.edu.au/caepr]

COAG - [www.indigenous.gov.au/coag]
Towards Better Outcomes for Indigenous Australians

Office of Indigenous Policy Coordination - [www.oipc.gov.au]
Indigenous Communities Task Force Shared Responsibility Shared Future the COAG initiative

The Eureka Project - [www.eurekaoz.com]
Take it or leave it - how the COAG trial is failing Shepparton’s Aboriginal people
Melbourne 2004

10th November 2005 The wheels are falling off Government’s Quiet Revolution

Files examined

Indigenous Policy and Coordination Section, Parks Australia Division, Department of the Environment and Heritage
Office of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Chief Minister’s Department
### Appendix 3: Table Of Significant Dates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DATE</th>
<th>COAG INITIATIVE</th>
<th>OTHER INDIGENOUS INITIATIVES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>November 2000</td>
<td>COAG agrees to framework to advance reconciliation.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>April 2002</td>
<td>Nomination of eight Trial sites, including ACT</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Commissioning of Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision to produce a regular report against key indicators of Indigenous disadvantage</td>
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<tr>
<td>May 2002</td>
<td></td>
<td>United Ngunnawal Elders’ Council formed</td>
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<tr>
<td>June 2002</td>
<td></td>
<td>ACT Government establishes working group to improve service delivery mechanisms to the Indigenous community in the ACT</td>
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<tr>
<td>October 2002</td>
<td>COAG circulates paper setting out a set of proposed headline and strategic indicators of Indigenous disadvantage</td>
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<tr>
<td>November 2002</td>
<td></td>
<td>Request to ACT Chief Minister from the Chief Executive to seek agreement for OATSIA to conduct a consultancy into the development of an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education facility in the ACT</td>
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<tr>
<td>December 2002</td>
<td>Government open COAG negotiations in ACT on the basis that youth and education are the themes.</td>
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<tr>
<td>March 2003</td>
<td>Government meets with ATSIC Regional Council and agreed to have community decide themes</td>
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<tr>
<td>June 2003</td>
<td>Interim IWG and ACT government meeting</td>
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<tr>
<td>August 2003</td>
<td>Community meetings to find out issues of concern – Belconnen and Tuggeranong</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Joint Officers meeting</td>
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<tr>
<td>September 2003</td>
<td>Community Leaders Workshop</td>
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<td>DATE</td>
<td>COAG INITIATIVE</td>
<td>OTHER INDIGENOUS INITIATIVES</td>
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<tr>
<td>November 2003</td>
<td>Chief Minister agreed to and signed proposal for progressing Trial.</td>
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<tr>
<td>15th April 2004</td>
<td>SRA signed.</td>
<td>ATSIC disbanded. Announcement of new arrangements, including establishment of the OIPC and ICCs</td>
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<tr>
<td>May 2004</td>
<td>ACT Government funds a feasibility study into Indigenous Healing Rehabilitation Farm.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Joint Officers meeting</td>
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<tr>
<td>June 2004</td>
<td>COAG endorses a National Framework of principles for government service delivery to Indigenous Australians</td>
<td>Craig Ritchie and Fred Monaghan visit USA and Canada to examine models for Indigenous rehabilitation programs.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Plan for Aboriginal Healing Farm provided by IWG Chairperson to Steering Committee and Joint Partners Committee</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Steering Committee meeting - Announcement of $1.4 million over four years to establish Aboriginal Justice Centre</td>
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<tr>
<td>July 2004</td>
<td>COAG Trial meeting – attended by ACT Health, Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services, OCYFS, AJAC, and Education</td>
<td>Establishment of Working Groups</td>
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<td>Joint Officers meeting</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Steering Committee meeting</td>
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<tr>
<td>August 2004</td>
<td>Steering Committee meeting - CMD agreed to match Commonwealth contribution for IWG Secretariat</td>
<td>Self Esteem and Culture Working Group meeting</td>
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<td>2 Education Working Grp meetings</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Joint Officers meeting</td>
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<tr>
<td>September 2004</td>
<td>Steering Committee meeting</td>
<td>Self Esteem and Culture Working Group meeting</td>
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<td>Health Working Group meeting</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Joint Officers meeting</td>
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<tr>
<td>October 2004</td>
<td>Steering Committee meeting</td>
<td>Self Esteem and Culture Working Group meeting</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Health Working Group meeting</td>
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April 2006
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<th>DATE</th>
<th>COAG INITIATIVE</th>
<th>OTHER INDIGENOUS INITIATIVES</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>November 2004</td>
<td>Joint Officers meeting</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Steering Committee meeting</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Self Esteem and Culture Working Group meeting</td>
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<td>Health Working Group meeting</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Justice Working Group meeting</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Education Working Group meeting</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Joint Officers meeting</td>
<td>Consultation workshops with Ngunnawal Elders on Indigenous Healing Rehabilitation Farm.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 2004</td>
<td>Steering Committee meeting</td>
<td>Education Working Group workshop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Working Groups finish – service mapping completed and recommendations made.</td>
<td>Submission drafted for funding from Australian Government Flexible Funding Pool for Indigenous Healing Rehabilitation Farm.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 2005</td>
<td>Steering Committee meeting</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 2005</td>
<td>Start of interstate visits by Convenor (ACT Government), IWG members and Fred Monaghan re Indigenous Healing Rehabilitation Farm.</td>
<td>Meeting between Helen Board (ICC) and DEH and CMD regarding ACT COAG issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 2005</td>
<td>Steering Committee meeting</td>
<td>Scoping Meeting Justice SRAs. Present – Aboriginal Justice Centre, CMD, ICC, DEH. Agreed that education programs which target children and youth before they enter the criminal justice system should be the focus of new program development and SRAs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 2005</td>
<td>First report of IWG to Steering Committee</td>
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<tr>
<td>May 2005</td>
<td></td>
<td>OIPC hold Australian and ACT Indigenous Governments Bilateral discussions</td>
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<tr>
<td>June 2005</td>
<td>Steering Committee meeting</td>
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<tr>
<td>August 2005</td>
<td>Steering Committee meeting</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>October 2005</td>
<td></td>
<td>Indigenous Education Forum. Present – 5 COAG Trial members, IECB, DET, CMD, DEST</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Appendix 4: Glossary Of Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AJAC</td>
<td>Aboriginal Justice Advisory Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>ATSIC</td>
<td>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission</td>
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<tr>
<td>ATSIS</td>
<td>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CMD</td>
<td>Chief Minister’s Department</td>
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<tr>
<td>COAG</td>
<td>Council of Australian Governments</td>
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<tr>
<td>COG</td>
<td>Commonwealth Officers’ Group</td>
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<tr>
<td>DEH</td>
<td>Department of the Environment and Heritage</td>
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<tr>
<td>DEST</td>
<td>Department of Education Science and Training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DET</td>
<td>Department of Education and Training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICC</td>
<td>Indigenous Coordination Centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IECB</td>
<td>Indigenous Education Community Board</td>
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<tr>
<td>IWG</td>
<td>Indigenous Working Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OCYFS</td>
<td>Office of Children Youth and Family Support</td>
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<tr>
<td>OIPC</td>
<td>Office of Indigenous Policy Coordination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SRA</td>
<td>Shared Responsibility Agreement</td>
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<td>UNEC</td>
<td>United Ngunnawal Elders Council</td>
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Evaluation of the Murdi Paaki COAG Trial

Prepared for: Office of Indigenous Policy Coordination

Final Report 26 October 2006

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Background

This is a formative evaluation of the COAG Trial in the Murdi Paaki region of north-west New South Wales. It has been prepared by Urbis Keys Young on behalf of the Office of Indigenous Policy Coordination (OIPC) and the Murdi Paaki Steering Committee. The evaluation builds on a review of community governance in the Murdi Paaki region in 2005, also undertaken by Urbis Keys Young.

The Murdi Paaki COAG Trial is one of eight Trials being carried out around Australia, with the aim of improving coordination of government services for Indigenous people based on priorities agreed with communities. Each Trial is led by one Australian Government and one State/Territory Government agency – the ‘lead agencies’.

The Murdi Paaki Trial site corresponds to the region served by the former Murdi Paaki ATSIC Regional Council, and includes sixteen major Aboriginal communities. The main goals of the Trial are set out in a Shared Responsibility Agreement signed on 22 August 2003 by the Department of Education, Science and Training (on behalf of the Australian Government), the Department of Education and Training (on behalf of the NSW Government) and the Murdi Paaki Regional Council. They are:

- Improving the health and wellbeing of children and young people
- Improving educational attainment and school retention
- Helping families to raise healthy children
- Strengthening community and regional governance structures.

To date activity under the Trial has focussed mainly on building the governance capacity of Indigenous communities and developing structures and strategies for addressing priorities identified by communities at local and regional levels.

Features of the Murdi Paaki COAG Trial

Key features of the Murdi Paaki COAG Trial have included the following:

- The Trial has involved broadening the membership and the role of the pre-existing Indigenous Community Working Parties (CWPs) in each community, to enable them to function as the key point of contact between government and the local Indigenous community. Administrative/secretarial assistance has been provided to assist the Community Working Parties in playing this role.

- With support from external consultants, each Community Working Party has developed a Community Action Plan (CAP) that identifies local service needs and priorities and aims to assist in ensuring a better coordinated approach to service planning and delivery by both State and Australian Government agencies.

- At regional level the voice of the Indigenous community has been represented first by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) Regional Council and subsequently (since the abolition of ATSIC in June 2005) by the new Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly.

- The Australian and NSW Government lead agencies have established a small Action Team, based at Dubbo, which includes full-time representatives of both agencies, engages directly with each Community Working Party, and serves as a new channel of communication between communities and government,
To further assist in promoting communication among State and Federal agencies and between these agencies and the people of the region, two structures have been created. The Murdi Paaki Steering Committee provides overall direction for the Trial, with particular responsibility for strategic planning, communication strategies, and monitoring and evaluation. The Murdi Paaki Regional Group consists of regional managers from key Commonwealth and State agencies, and is responsible for the implementation of Community Action Plans (CAPs).

Findings

- Both DEST and DET have demonstrated a strong commitment to the Murdi Paaki COAG Trial and to promoting positive change in government and communities. Representatives of both lead agencies have developed strong relationships in communities and have established a visible presence in the region. Among stakeholders familiar with the COAG Trials elsewhere in Australia, Murdi Paaki is regarded as the most advanced Trial site in terms of community capacity and governance.

- Consultations undertaken in six communities in the Murdi Paaki region in 2005 indicated strong support for various elements of the Trial – in particular the ‘refreshed’ Community Working Parties, Community Action Plans, and the work of the Action Team. Despite some concerns about the slow pace of change, Aboriginal communities in the region generally support the objectives of the Trial and the principles underlying it.

- While working towards the Trial’s objectives is clearly a long-term project, substantial progress has been made in enhancing the capacity of both governments and communities to work with each other. Structures to promote coordination between government agencies working in Murdi Paaki have been established. The governance capacity of communities has improved, and many communities appear better able to articulate their priorities to government in constructive fashion. These developments can be expected to contribute significantly to achieving the objectives and priorities articulated at the Trial’s commencement.

- Although it has taken a long time to complete, the CAP process was regarded in a positive light by the majority of stakeholders. There was strong support for the CAPs, which are regarded as an accurate reflection of community priorities. Delays in finalising CAPs have held up the progress of the Trial overall, to the frustration of both community and government stakeholders. However, the development of CAPs was seen as an important step in building community support for CWPs and the Trial generally, and has also contributed to the level of cohesion and goodwill in individual communities.

- Apart from the lead agencies, the involvement of Australian and State Government departments in the Trial has varied. Stakeholders stressed that non-lead agencies in particular must learn to work with other government departments and with CWPs if service delivery and government/community relations are to improve.

- Feedback from stakeholders indicated strong support for the work of the Action Team, which was regarded as central to the progress under the Trial to date. The Action Team has focussed on building relationships with CWPs and coordinating whole of government responses to community priorities. The continuity of Action Team personnel – who have come to represent the ‘faces of government’ in communities – has been important in building trust between government representatives and CWP members.

- Some uncertainty was evident in the region about the respective roles of DEST and OIPC following the introduction of the new national arrangements in Indigenous affairs. While Commonwealth lead agency responsibilities in Murdi Paaki remain with DEST, OIPC now plays an active role in the ‘suite’ of Trials around the country. OIPC has, among other things, strongly promoted the use of Shared Responsibility Agreements between government and community. Numbers of those consulted
believed there was a need for better communication with government officials on the ground about the functions of each agency in the context of the Trial and the new arrangements.

- Seventeen Shared Responsibility Agreements have been signed in the Murdi Paaki region since the inception of the Trial – some before and some after the new Indigenous affairs arrangements came into effect. People consulted during the study raised a number of issues relating to SRAs; for example, some of the early SRAs were regarded as dealing in considerable detail with relatively small matters. (This is consistent with early SRA approaches around the country, where SRAs were being used as a means of bringing community/governments together to work in partnership.)

- Analysis of the content of CAPs has recently been undertaken in order to generate a comprehensive regional overview of community needs. The Steering Committee and Regional Group plan to use this information to guide the development of services in a way that is in keeping with community priorities, and an implementation plan based on identified community needs is currently in development.

- Government representatives emphasised the importance of developing concrete initiatives to respond to the major priorities identified in CAPs. The last phase of the Trial, during which a range of such initiatives are to be implemented, may provide evidence on whether the trial arrangements in Murdi Paaki have in fact been successful in promoting better coordinated government service delivery, and help predict whether they are likely to lead to improvements in key areas of governance, health, education and employment. It would be unrealistic, within the timelines of the trial, to expect measurable improvements in the region across a range of social and economic indicators. Such changes would reasonably be expected to take longer to manifest as a result of governments working more effectively in partnership with Indigenous people, on Indigenous community priorities.

**Next Steps**

- The majority of stakeholders believe that government needs to continue to support key elements of the Murdi Paaki Trial – CWPs, CAPs and simpler working arrangements between communities and government – if community support for the Trial is to be maintained.

- There is some community uncertainty about what arrangements will be carried forward after 2007. If government intends to maintain the status of CWPs as a central feature of government/community interaction into the future, it should communicate this to communities as a matter of priority.

- Stakeholders consistently emphasised that the challenges that the Trial is designed to address are complex and long-term, and that the commitments of community and government to achieving the Trial’s objectives need to be sustained. Substantially improving outcomes in key areas like education and employment is likely to take decades rather than years. A five-year ‘Trial’, then, can be expected to lay the groundwork for positive change, rather than bring about major improvements on the ground.

- Progress made under the Trial to date indicates that the existing arrangements should be maintained at least until the Trial officially lapses in 2007. It is worthwhile at this stage for the Steering Committee to consider what arrangements need to be put in place beyond 2007 to ensure momentum built under the Trial is not lost. However, it is acknowledged that any final decision about the future of the Trial rests with the Council of Australian Governments.
## Abbreviations

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<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>AGs</td>
<td>Attorney-General’s Department (Australian and New South Wales Government)</td>
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<td>ATSIC</td>
<td>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission</td>
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<td>ATSIS</td>
<td>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Services</td>
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<td>CAP</td>
<td>Community Action Plan</td>
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<td>CDEP</td>
<td>Community Development Employment Program</td>
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<td>COAG</td>
<td>Council of Australian Governments</td>
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<td>CWP</td>
<td>Community Working Party</td>
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<td>DAA</td>
<td>New South Wales Government Department of Aboriginal Affairs</td>
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<tr>
<td>DEST</td>
<td>Australian Government Department of Education, Science and Training</td>
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<tr>
<td>DET</td>
<td>New South Wales Government Department of Education and Training</td>
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<tr>
<td>DEWR</td>
<td>Australian Government Department of Employment and Workplace Relations</td>
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<td>DoHA</td>
<td>Australian Government Department of Health Ageing</td>
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<tr>
<td>FaCS</td>
<td>Australian Government Department of Family and Community Services (prior to January 2006)</td>
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<td>FaCSIA</td>
<td>Australian Government Department of Family and Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (from January 2006 onwards)</td>
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<td>MPPP</td>
<td>Murdi Paaki Partnership Project</td>
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<td>MPRRA</td>
<td>Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly</td>
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<td>ICC</td>
<td>Indigenous Coordination Centre</td>
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<td>OIPC</td>
<td>Office of Indigenous Policy Coordination</td>
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<td>SRA</td>
<td>Shared Responsibility Agreement</td>
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## Study Team

John Schwartzkoff  **Director, Urbis Keys Young**  
Josh Fear  **Senior Social Researcher, Urbis Keys Young**  
Deborah Corrigall  **Senior Social Researcher, Urbis Keys Young**

## Acknowledgements

The study team would like thank all the people who contributed their time and goodwill to assist this evaluation. In particular, we thank the members of the Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly, Chairs and members of Community Working Parties in the region, members of the Murdi Paaki Steering Committee, and other government representatives who participated in interviews. We would also like to acknowledge the contribution of the Murdi Paaki Action Team, whose experience and expertise were invaluable in consulting with communities and in preparing this report.

A full list of individuals and organisations consulted for the evaluation are provided at Appendix A.
1 Introduction

In early 2006 the Office of Indigenous Policy Coordination (OIPC), in partnership with the Murdi Paaki Steering Committee, commissioned Urbis Keys Young (UKY) to undertake a formative evaluation of the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) Trial in the Murdi Paaki region of New South Wales. This report presents the evaluation findings in line with OIPC’s evaluation terms of reference.

This evaluation complements an earlier review of community governance in the Murdi Paaki region, commissioned by DEST and DET, and carried out by Urbis Keys Young in early 2005.

1.1 The Murdi Paaki COAG Trial

In November 2000, the COAG agreed that all governments would work together to improve the social and economic wellbeing of Indigenous people and communities. The COAG decision recognised that the commitment by Commonwealth and State/Territory Governments to Indigenous issues is spread across many agencies and programs, with the result that activity is often fragmented.

COAG later agreed, in April 2002, to trial new ways of working together with Indigenous communities in up to ten regions across Australia. It agreed that both outcomes and management approaches needed to be improved, and that two approaches were necessary:

- Governments must work together better at all levels and across all departments and agencies
- Indigenous communities and governments must work in partnership and share responsibility for achieving outcomes and for building the capacity of people in communities to manage their own affairs.

One of the trial sites selected was the Murdi Paaki region in north-western New South Wales. The Murdi Paaki region includes the major Indigenous communities of Bourke, Brewarrina, Broken Hill, Cobar, Collarenebri, Coonamble, Dareton, Enngonia, Goodooga, Gulargambone, Ivanhoe, Lightning Ridge, Menindee, Walgett, Weilmoringle and Wilcannia. Murdi Paaki corresponds to the former Bourke ATSIC region, and covers the traditional lands of a number of Aboriginal nations or language groups. These include the Paakantji, Ngiyampaa, Wangaaybuwa, Ngemba, Wayilwan, Murrawari, Wangkumara, Muti Muti, Ualroi, Baranbinja, Malayangapa and Gamilaroi nations.

At the time of the 2001 Census, there were 7,542 Indigenous people living in the Murdi Paaki region, or some fourteen per cent of the total population. Communities with the largest Indigenous populations (in absolute terms) are Broken Hill, Bourke, Brewarrina, Coonamble, Walgett and Wilcannia.

Government involvement in each of the COAG Trials around Australia is coordinated by one Australian Government agency and one State/Territory Government agency. The ‘lead agencies’ in Murdi Paaki are the Australian Government Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) and the NSW Department of Education and Training (DET).

From the community side, the COAG Trial is being progressed by the Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly (at the regional level) and by Community Working Parties (CWPs) in each of the sixteen Indigenous communities in the region. Together, these two structures constitute the primary mechanisms for Indigenous community governance in the Trial site. The distinctive features of the Murdi Paaki COAG Trial (including the work of the lead agencies and of CWPs) are described in more detail in Chapter 2 of this report.

In July 2004 the Australian Government put in place new arrangements for Indigenous affairs. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) was abolished, and the Office of Indigenous Policy Coordination now has responsibility for coordinating a whole of government approach to
Indigenous affairs. The Australian Government has also established Indigenous Coordination Centres (ICCs) in a number of regional locations across Australia (usually locations where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Services (ATSIS) offices were previously based). In north-western New South Wales there are ICCs in Bourke and Dubbo. The role of the OIPC and the ICCs in the Murdi Paaki COAG Trial is discussed later in this report.

1.2 This evaluation

The Australian Government has decided to commission independent evaluations of all of the COAG Trial sites; OIPC is managing the evaluation process in relation to each Trial. A two-stage evaluation process is planned, with the first stage concentrating on learning from the Trials and contributing to their future development, and the second stage (scheduled for 2007-8) involving a more comprehensive assessment of the outcomes and achievements of each Trial.

This report represents a first-stage or ‘formative’ evaluation of the Murdi Paaki COAG Trial. It is based on consultations carried out with community and government representatives during the first half of 2006. The report also builds on consultations with communities and CWPs in six locations in the region conducted by Urbis Keys Young in 2005 on behalf of DEST and DET. The present evaluation involved the following research tasks:

- face-to-face and telephone interviews with representatives of key Australian and NSW Government departments
- telephone interviews with representatives of non-government organisations in the region
- consultation with the Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly (Bourke)
- consultation with the Murdi Paaki Steering Committee (Sydney)
- review of key documents and literature relating to the Murdi Paaki COAG Trial.

A full list of stakeholders consulted is provided in Appendix A, and a copy of the interview guide used in these discussions is reproduced in Appendix B. OIPC’s evaluation terms of reference can be found in Appendix C.

As mentioned above, Urbis Keys Young undertook community consultations in the Murdi Paaki region in 2005 on behalf of DEST and DET. These were designed to provide objective information relating to community governance in the region, and to identify any areas for potential improvement. A report on these consultations, Community Governance in the Murdi Paaki Region, was produced for the Murdi Paaki Steering Committee in mid-2005. While the involvement of the Murdi Paaki Action Team was crucial to the success of that project, there was relatively little input from government into the 2005 research.

The current evaluation focused on seeking information and feedback from government representatives, with community input being sought from the Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly rather than at the community level. Findings from the 2005 community consultations have been integrated into this report where appropriate, in order to achieve a balance between community and government input into the evaluation of the COAG Trial.
2 History and Features of the Murdi Paaki COAG Trial

2.1 Overview

This chapter presents information on the features of the COAG Trial in the Murdi Paaki region. After outlining the conditions and challenges at the start of the Trial, each of the key elements of the Trial is described; the extent of the community’s involvement in setting the objectives and priorities for the Trial is also discussed. A summary of key dates and events in the Trial’s history is provided at the conclusion of the chapter.

2.2 Initial challenges

2.2.1 The Indigenous population of Murdi Paaki

The Murdi Paaki Indicators Report (collated in October 2005) provides some information on the nature of the Indigenous population and the challenges facing the region at the start of the Trial. The indicators reported below are drawn from data collated by DAA for the first Two Ways Together Indicator Report, and are based on the six former ATSIC regions of New South Wales (Murdi Paaki, Binaal Billa, Kamilaroi, Queanbeyan, Many Rivers and Sydney).

- There were 7,542 Indigenous people in Murdi Paaki in 2001, representing some 13% of the total population of the region. The median age of the Indigenous population was 21 years, compared with 40 years for the non-Indigenous population.

- In 2003 the percentage of non-Indigenous students in Murdi Paaki in the two highest bands for literacy and numeracy in Year 3 was three times that of Indigenous students. The situation was similar for literacy and numeracy in Year 5.

- The Year 7-10 apparent retention rate for Indigenous students was considerably lower in Murdi Paaki (66%) than in NSW overall (80%) in 2002. The Year 7-12 apparent retention rate was also much lower in Murdi Paaki (21%) than NSW overall (30%).

- The unemployment rate for Indigenous people in Murdi Paaki was 23.9% in 2001, compared with 9.8% for the total Murdi Paaki population and 23.1% for the Indigenous population of NSW.

- In 2002, the rate of imprisonment of Indigenous people across NSW was highest in Sydney and in Murdi Paaki. Just over 1% of the Indigenous population of each region was in prison at that time; this compares with 0.2% of the total population of Murdi Paaki which was in prison.

- In 2002, the victimisation rate for domestic violence for Indigenous children and young people was higher in Murdi Paaki (27 per 1,000 population) than for any other region of NSW.

- In 2001-2, the Murdi Paaki region had the highest rate in NSW (37 Indigenous children per 1,000 population) of Indigenous children and young people involved in reports where assessment determined abuse/neglect issues.

- The Binaal Billa (87%) and Murdi Paaki (86%) regions had the highest proportion of Indigenous children and young people placed with Aboriginal families or in kinship care in 2001-2.

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There is relatively little useful statistical information relating to the health of the Indigenous population in Murdi Paaki in this report. Although such information can be found in a report on Health in the Murdi Paaki Region (produced by the Far West Area Health Service), this report was not available to the study team.
In 2001, 11.2% of the Indigenous households in social housing in Murdi Paaki were overcrowded, compared to 2.2% of the total population of the region. Murdi Paaki had the highest proportion of overcrowding in Indigenous social housing households of any region in NSW.

2.2.2 Regional priorities

On 22 August 2003, the Murdi Paaki Regional Council, DEST and DET signed a Shared Responsibility Agreement setting out the four regional priorities for the Trial. These were:

- Improving the health and wellbeing of children and young people
- Improving educational attainment and school retention
- Helping families to raise healthy children
- Strengthening community and regional governance structures.

These four priorities represent the aims of the Trial as agreed by governments and communities in the region, and reflect the conditions and challenges as perceived at the start of the Trial. They are generally consistent with more recent feedback of communities, who identified the following broad areas of need in their subsequent Community Action Plans:

- **Community** (eg community engagement, identity, safety and security, empowerment)
- **Employment** (eg skills training and assessment, business development, employment opportunities, CDEP)
- **Health** (eg access to services, drug and alcohol education, access to facilities, health education)
- **Culture** (eg education and support, cultural preservation, sensitivity and awareness, access to traditional lands)
- **Community Working Party Governance** (eg processes, representativeness, accountability, education of CWP members)
- **Education** (eg student support, school policy and curriculum development, improvement in education attainment).

Additional information on the Community Action Plans is provided in Section 2.3 (below).

2.3 Key Elements of the Trial

2.3.1 Community Working Parties

Community Working Parties (CWPs) play a central role in the Murdi Paaki COAG Trial, and are the primary mechanism for representation and consultation at the community level.

CWPs were originally established in the region in the mid 1990s, on the initiative of the Murdi Paaki Regional Council. Their purpose was originally to provide community liaison relating to the planning and provision of housing under the Aboriginal Community Development Program. Membership of the Working Parties was ‘refreshed’, however, at the commencement of the COAG Trial, and they now have responsibilities for dealing with a wide range of issues affecting the community and its relationships with government bodies – specifically issues related to the planning and delivery of government services. In the present context, the role of CWPs centres on community governance rather than the day-to-day coordination of the delivery of services to each community. At the start of the Trial, government and Murdi Paaki Regional Council representatives worked together to
Encourage a process whereby Working Party membership was broadened, with individuals being nominated or elected to reflect a range of community organisations and interests.

The CWPs are unincorporated bodies, do not employ staff and do not manage funds. The current basis for the make-up of CWP membership appears to be broadly similar in each community. Some people have come onto the CWP as representatives of local Aboriginal organisations, or possibly as Aboriginal representatives of key government agencies; other individuals have become members of the CWP as community elders or through representing particular interests within the community – for instance, women’s issues.

The size of the CWP varies from one community to another, from about 15 people up to about 45. Non-members can attend CWP meetings, but it seems that this is not generally common – despite CWP efforts in several communities to encourage broader participation.

2.3.2 Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly

The Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly (MPRA) is the peak regional Indigenous community body in the Murdi Paaki region, and is recognised by governments as the primary point of Indigenous community contact, coordination and input at the regional level. The MPRA is in some senses the successor to the Murdi Paaki Regional Council (the operation of Regional Councils having ceased as part of the abolition of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission), although its membership, structure, powers and responsibilities differ from those of the Regional Council. Until 2005 (when it was acknowledged as taking over from the Murdi Paaki Regional Council), the MPRA was officially known as the ‘CWP Chairs Forum’.

The MPRA is chaired by Mr Sam Jeffries, former Chair of the Murdi Paaki Regional Council; Mr Jeffries is an independent Chair popularly elected by the Assembly. Membership of the Regional Assembly consists of the Chairs of each of the sixteen Community Working Parties in the Murdi Paaki region. Like the CWPs themselves, the Regional Assembly is unincorporated, does not employ staff, and does not manage funds directly. However, the Regional Assembly is a crucial source of community input into service delivery across the region, including the allocation of government funds. The MPRA’s responsibilities include advocacy, strategic planning, the development of service agreements, and lobbying government. Its operation is guided by a Governance Charter endorsed by members of the Assembly.

A Shared Responsibility Agreement sets out the roles and responsibilities of the Regional Assembly, as well as the government’s commitments in supporting its work. This SRA (originally signed 22 August 2003 but amended 1 August 2005 to take account of the abolition of ATSIC) also provides for secretariat support for CWPs through the funding of CDEP places and the provision of appropriate training for people in secretariat positions. An additional SRA (signed 3 December 2004) provides for further funding to support CWPs, including for secretariat and administrative support and IT infrastructure.

2.3.3 Community Action Plans

Each of the sixteen Indigenous communities in the Murdi Paaki region was asked to develop a Community Action Plan (CAP) to identify key local priorities. Development of the CAPs was overseen by the Community Working Parties, in consultation with community members and Aboriginal community organisations. A facilitator/consultant was employed in each case to support the CAP development and documentation.

Although the methodology for developing CAPs was not prescriptive and varied from one community to another, a majority of plans include a profile of the community in question, vision statement(s), goals, aims and strategic actions for achieving those goals and aims.
In early 2006, FCSIA undertook a detailed analysis of the content of the thirteen CAPs completed at the time, to identify priorities for government action from a region-wide perspective. Through that analysis, ten themes areas were identified, capturing the various actions documented in the CAPs; these were (in no particular order):

- Education
- Culture and wellbeing
- Health
- Employment and enterprise development
- Economic development
- Children and young people
- Families
- Law and Justice
- Housing and Infrastructure
- Community Governance.

Of all the actions presented in the CAPs, the most frequent topics or themes were ‘community’ (the most mentioned), ‘employment’ and ‘health’. The outcomes of FCSIA’s analysis were presented to the Murdi Paaki Steering Committee and the Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly, and will be used to guide government activity in the region (including the work of the COAG Trial) in the future.

As of May 2006, all sixteen communities have a completed Community Action Plan. FCSIA plans to integrate the most recent CAPs into its analysis of region-wide priorities.

2.3.4 Shared Responsibility Agreements

As part of the new arrangements in Indigenous affairs which came into effect 1 July 2004, the Australian Government is encouraging Indigenous communities to enter into Shared Responsibility Agreements (SRAs). SRAs spell out what communities, governments (at all levels) and others will contribute to achieve long-term changes in Indigenous communities. SRAs often relate to funding that governments provide through additional programs, projects and services for Indigenous communities; they are not designed to modify or supplant governments’ core business with communities.

In the Murdi Paaki region, seventeen SRAs have been signed to date. Some of these are region-wide, addressing governance structures, priorities and commitments from the regional perspective. Other SRAs have been signed with individual communities, identifying each partner’s responsibilities in relation to projects specific to those communities.

Of particular interest in the context of the COAG Trial are six regional SRAs which have been signed in Murdi Paaki. These agreements establish regional priorities and recognise the Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly and the Community Working Parties as the primary structures for community representation and consultation (signed August 2003, August 2005 and December 2005). Regional SRAs have also ensured that CWPs have the IT, secretariat, technical and professional support they require for continued operation.
On 6 April 2005 a regional SRA was entered into to trial evaporative air cooling in the region through the retrospective installation of evaporative air cooling units in community owned Indigenous housing in selected communities. This regional SRA has now seen the three local communities of Ivanhoe, Lightning Ridge and Collarenebri negotiate local Air Cooling SRAs which fall under the umbrella of the Regional Air Cooling SRA.

A further nine local SRAs have been entered into by governments and individual communities in Murdi Paaki. Each of these local SRAs differs in location and content. In Bourke, three local SRAs have been signed to date and focus on the establishment of a Community Assistance Night Patrol (CAP), the development of an education and training project specifically focused on Bourke, and support for the Bourke Yaamma Cultural Festival.

Similarly, the community of Brewarrina (through the Ngemba CWP), has entered into four local SRAs. These focus on a variety of community projects, including one targeting disengaged youth and a homemakers initiative. The community has also entered into two SRAs pertaining to the purchase of a bus for Community use and the establishment and maintenance of community parks.

In addition, the community of Enngonia has signed one SRA to establish a distance education initiative within the community.

Further details on the government and community responsibilities outlined in the various SRAs signed in Murdi Paaki can be found in Section 3.5.

2.3.5 Community Governance Workshops

A key focus of the Murdi Paaki COAG trial to date has been an emphasis on developing trust, building relationships, and strengthening governance. To advance these principles, two Community Working Party (CWP) Governance Workshops have been held each year in the Murdi Paaki region since March 2004.

To date five Workshops have been held in the region, and a sixth is being planned for late 2006. Information on the focus of each of the workshops which have been held to date is provided below.

First Workshop (8-10 March 2004)

The first CWP Governance Workshop was held in Cobar on 8-10 March 2004. The workshop focused on strengthening community and regional governance structures, a key priority identified under the Murdi Paaki regional Shared Responsibility Agreement (SRA) signed in August 2003.

Second Workshop (21-23 September 2004)

As a consequence of the positive feedback received from the community about this first workshop, a second CWP Governance Workshop was subsequently held in Cobar. This second workshop built on the first, and encouraged robust discussions about the progress of the trial, emerging issues and the future of community governance in the region.

Third Workshop (5-7 April 2005)

The third workshop was held under the them Practical Partnerships Towards Shared Responsibility, and was aimed at developing a common understanding between communities and government of the concept of ‘shared responsibility,’ a key principle underpinning the COAG Trials. The workshop was designed to build momentum in the development of local SRAs with each of the 16 communities in the region. Other objectives of the workshop included:
opportunities for CWP members to discuss how to improve the attendance, retention and achievement of school children in the Murdi Paaki region

- introducing CWP members to employment brokers in the Murdi Paaki region
- building on the skills of community leaders to participate in the development of SRAs.

The Minister for Education, Science, and Training, Dr Brendan Nelson, attended this workshop.

Fourth Workshop (25-27 October 2005)

This workshop focused on employment and economic issues in the Murdi Paaki region with a view to enhancing the economic capacity of the Murdi Paaki region and its population. Key workshop activities included:

- discussing the issues inhibiting economic development in the Murdi Paaki region
- sharing stories of best practice, areas of need, and potential solutions
- meeting key employment service providers in the Murdi Paaki region.

The NSW Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Mr Milton Orkopoulos, attended this workshop.

Fifth Workshop (2-4 May 2006)

At the request of community members, the fifth Governance Workshop held in the Murdi Paaki region focused on health issues faced by Indigenous communities. As a part of this workshop participants, including community members and government representatives, had the opportunity to share their experiences and important information relating to health of Indigenous communities in Murdi Paaki.

The Minister for Education, Science, and Training, Julie Bishop, attended this workshop.

2.3.6 Murdi Paaki Partnership Project

Indigenous communities in the Murdi Paaki region identified the lack of suitable locally-based technical and professional support as a significant barrier to their ability to interact and liaise with governments and negotiate agreements to improve services. The Murdi Paaki Partnership Project (MPPP) is designed to strengthen the operation of Community Working Parties through the provision of such support by eight Community Facilitators (or one for every two CWPs in the region). A Shared Responsibility Agreement establishing the MPPP was signed by the Regional Assembly and the Australian and NSW Governments on 26 October 2005.

At the local level, Community Facilitators are employed by local host organisations, with support from a local reference group comprised of CWP members and representatives of the community, business and government (including local government where possible). Employment of Facilitators is triggered once communities have a completed Community Action Plan in place, and is subject to the approval of the CWP. At the time of writing the majority of Facilitator positions had been filled by suitably qualified individuals.

2.3.7 COAG Trial Action Team

The COAG Trial Action Team consists of representatives of DEST and DET (based in Dubbo), DAA (based in Bourke) and the Bourke Indigenous Coordination Centre. The Action Team can be said to represent the ‘face of government’ for Community Working Parties, providing a link between communities and the government sector. Action Team members attend monthly CWP meetings, relay community feedback and concerns to various government agencies (including the lead agencies), and coordinate whole-of-government responses to priorities identified by CWPs.
The Action Team originally consisted of one officer from each of the two lead agencies and the Bourke ATSIS Office. Membership of the Action Team was expanded in 2005 to include representation from the NSW Department of Aboriginal Affairs.

2.3.8 Government structures

In addition to the Action Team, a number of government structures have been put in place to support the COAG Trial. The most important of these are the Murdi Paaki COAG Trial Steering Committee and the Murdi Paaki COAG Trial Regional Group.

The Steering Committee provides overall direction for the Trial, with particular responsibility for strategic planning, communication strategies, monitoring and evaluation, and the implementation of Community Action Plans. Membership of the Steering Committee includes senior representatives of DEST and DET (co-chairs), the Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly, OIPC and DAA.

The Regional Group consists of regional managers from key Commonwealth and State agencies, and is responsible for the implementation of Community Action Plans through core business, Shared Responsibility Agreements or other processes. The Regional Group was restructured in early 2006 to reflect the key regional priorities identified through analysis of CAPs. The Regional Group will now focus on four key portfolio areas:

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

In addition to these formal interagency structures, the lead agencies have each committed resources to support the Trial, in addition to their involvement in the Action Team. For example, DEST and DET have actively engaged numbers of their respective senior executives in the Trial, through visits to communities in Murdi Paaki, and each has dedicated full time officers to the work of the Trial.

2.3.9 Monitoring and evaluation

There have been a number of initiatives which relate to the monitoring and evaluation of the Murdi Paaki COAG Trial:

- In 2003 the Murdi Paaki Steering Committee developed a Monitoring and Evaluation Framework to guide the evaluation of the Trial. The Framework was designed to provide information in three areas:
  - Progress in implementing the Trial
  - Community Perspectives on the Trial
  - Outcomes in key priority areas.
- In 2005 DEST and DET commissioned an independent review of community governance in the Murdi Paaki region. This involved consultation with six communities across the region to assess community governance issues in the context of the Trial.
- In 2006, as previously explained, OIPC commissioned the present study as the first part of a two-stage evaluation of the Trial. The information and feedback collected through this evaluation will represent a ‘baseline’ for comparison when the Murdi Paaki and other COAG Trials are comprehensively evaluated in 2007/8.
Strategic indicators have been developed to monitor progress under the Trial. These indicators relate to the strategic areas for action set out in the COAG Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage Reporting Framework and the regional priorities for the Murdi Paaki COAG Trial. Data is expected to be gathered at both regional and community level. Regional level data is available through the Two Ways Together Murdi Paaki Indicators Report, produced in October 2005 and based on data mainly from 2002-3.

2.4 Community involvement in setting the Trial’s objectives and priorities

During the initial phase, community involvement in setting the Trial’s objectives and priorities largely took the form of the Murdi Paaki Regional Council’s input into the initial SRA with the two lead agencies. This SRA (signed in August 2003) set out the four priority areas for the Trial (see Section 3.5 of this report).

As the Trial has progressed, community involvement in planning and decision-making has grown, particularly once CWP membership was broadened and governance processes began to work more smoothly. More recently, community input into priority-setting has taken several forms, including:

- The development of Community Action Plans by every Indigenous community in the region
- Negotiation between CWPs and government around the substance of various local SRAs
- Ongoing consultation with CWPs by members of the Action Team
- Attendance by CWP Chairs at meetings of the Steering Committee and the Regional Group
- Regular governance workshops attended by both community representatives and senior government officials
- Representation of the Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly on the Steering Committee.

Consultations with communities undertaken in 2005 indicated broad support for the core ideas behind the COAG Trial, including making it simpler for communities to deal with government and promoting a whole of government response to the needs identified by Indigenous communities. Although the term ‘COAG Trial’ is not necessarily well understood across the broad Indigenous community, the key elements of the Trial – including the CWPs, the MPRA, and the Action Team – are perceived positively by both CWP members and other community members.

2.5 Timeline

The following summary of key dates and events includes some significant related developments as well as matters directly associated with the Murdi Paaki COAG Trial. It is based on various documents provided to the evaluation team as well as information gleaned from interviews with stakeholders.

2002

- The Council of Australian Governments decides to undertake a series of Trials around Australia to promote whole-of-government approaches to meeting the needs of Indigenous communities. Murdi Paaki is chosen as a Trial site, with DEST and DET to represent the Australian and New South Wales Governments respectively.

2003
The Murdi Paaki Action Team is established. The Action Team initially consists of one officer from each of the two lead agencies based in Dubbo and an officer from the ATSIS Bourke office (later the Bourke Indigenous Coordination Centre).

Membership of Community Working Parties is refreshed to take account of their expanded role in the context of the COAG Trial.

The Murdi Paaki Steering Committee and the Murdi Paaki Regional Group are established to guide the direction and implementation of the Trial.

The Murdi Paaki Steering Committee develops and endorses a Monitoring and Evaluation Framework for the Trial. Implementation of the Framework becomes the responsibility of the Murdi Paaki Data Working Group.

The Commonwealth Government, NSW Government and the Murdi Paaki Regional Council sign a Shared Responsibility Agreement (dated 22 August) to set the groundwork for the Murdi Paaki COAG Trial. Key elements of the SRA include: recognising the Murdi Paaki Regional Council as the peak regional body and the primary point of Indigenous community contact; the acknowledgement of Community Working Parties as the peak community bodies and the primary points of Indigenous community contact in each community across the region; and identifying key regional priorities for the COAG Trial. Consistent with the expressed needs of communities, the SRA also provides for a secretariat position to support each of the sixteen Community Working Parties in the region.

2004

The inaugural Community Working Party Governance Workshop is held in March, bringing together for the first time representatives of the sixteen CWPs, as well Australian and State Government representatives, to progress the Trial.

On 1 July the Australian Government's new arrangements in Indigenous affairs come into effect. Key features include: the abolition of ATSIC and ATSIS; the establishment of the Office of Indigenous Policy Coordination (within the Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs) as the primary Commonwealth coordinating body on Indigenous matters; the establishment of 22 Indigenous Coordination Centres (with a Centre in Bourke, then also in Dubbo from late 2005) to coordinate Australian Government service provision on the ground; and the promotion of Shared Responsibility Agreements between Indigenous communities and governments as a mechanism for achieving long-term changes at the community level.

DEST and DET engage consultants to assist Community Working Parties in the development of Community Action Plans, which are aimed at identifying key priorities for each community.

The Commonwealth Government, NSW Government and the Murdi Paaki Regional Council sign a Shared Responsibility Agreement (dated 3 December 2004) which provides for further funding to support CWPs, including for secretariat and administrative support and IT infrastructure.

2005

The NSW Government launches its ten-year plan aimed at tackling the social and economic problems facing Aboriginal people, Two Ways Together. The funding package associated with the plan targets five areas for action: reducing incarceration and family violence; improving the literacy and numeracy rates of Aboriginal students in years 3 and 5 and improving school retention rates; reducing Otitis Media infections; increasing Aboriginal employment, and improving living conditions.
- The lead agencies commission an independent review of community governance arrangements, based on consultation with six communities in the Murdi Paaki region. The findings are used to inform the Steering Committee of progress to date and possible future directions.

- Membership of the Murdi Paaki Action Team is enhanced to include a representative of the NSW Department of Aboriginal Affairs.

- The Murdi Paaki Steering Committee endorses the Murdi Paaki Strategic Plan. The Strategic Plan sets out principles and information to assist Trial partners in planning, coordinating and implementing the Trial.

- The Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly is formally recognised as the successor to the Murdi Paaki Regional Council as the primary structure representing the Indigenous community at the regional level; this recognition takes the form of an amendment to a pre-existing Shared Responsibility Agreement (signed 1 August 2005).

- The Australian Government, the NSW Government and the Regional Assembly sign a Shared Responsibility Agreement establishing the Murdi Paaki Partnership Project on 26 October. This initiative is designed to strengthen the operation of Community Working Parties through the provision of local-based technical and professional support by eight Community Facilitators.

- OIPC creates a new ICC in Dubbo, which shares responsibility for the Murdi Paaki region with the Bourke ICC, and DEST and DET as lead agencies.

2006

- Community Action Plans (CAPs) are completed for each of the sixteen Indigenous communities in Murdi Paaki. FCSIA undertakes analysis of the CAPs to identify key region-wide priorities for government.

- The Murdi Paaki Regional Group is restructured to focus on four key priority areas: education, training, employment and economic development; health, housing, families and young people; law and justice; and environment, culture and heritage.

- OIPC commissions a formative evaluation of the Murdi Paaki COAG Trial, to incorporate the findings of research with communities undertaken in 2005.

- The Australian and NSW Governments sign a bilateral agreement on Aboriginal affairs for the period 2005-10.
3 Processes

This chapter presents evaluation findings relating to the processes established through the Murdi Paaki COAG Trial. These are based on consultations with representatives of government and community, as well as analysis of key documents and literature. The key features of the Trial are summarised below, and are described in more detail in Chapter 2.

- The Trial has involved broadening the membership and the role of the pre-existing Community Working Parties in each of those communities, to enable them to function as the key point of contact between government and the local community. Some administrative/secretarial assistance has been provided to assist the Community Working Parties in playing this role.

- With support from external consultants, each Community Working Party has developed a Community Action Plan that identifies local service needs and priorities and aims to assist in ensuring a better coordinated approach to service planning and delivery by both State and Australian Government agencies.

- At regional level the voice of the Aboriginal community has been represented first by the ATSIC Regional Council and subsequently (since the abolition of ATSIC) by the new Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly.

- The Australian and NSW Government lead agencies have established a small Action Team, based at Dubbo, which includes full-time representatives of both agencies, which engages directly with each Community Working Party and serves as a new channel of communication between communities and government.

- To further assist in promoting communication among government agencies and between government and community, two structures have been created. The Murdi Paaki Steering Committee provides overall direction for the Trial, with particular responsibility for strategic planning, communication strategies, and monitoring and evaluation. The Murdi Paaki Regional Group consists of regional managers from key Commonwealth and State agencies, and is responsible for the implementation of Community Action Plans.

3.1 Role of the lead agencies

By all accounts both DEST and DET have demonstrated a strong commitment to the Murdi Paaki COAG Trial and to promoting positive change in government and communities. Both lead agencies have developed strong relationships in communities and have established a visible presence in the region.

The progress made by the lead agencies in Murdi Paaki was ascribed to several factors. First, the involvement of senior bureaucrats since the Trial's commencement meant that Trial-related initiatives have had agency-wide support. Second, the allocation of resources to the Trial resulted in departmental positions specifically dedicated to the Trial. Third (and perhaps most significantly), the work of the Murdi Paaki Action Team has been crucial in maintaining relationships at the community level and in mobilising government resources within and outside the lead agencies. Continuity of personnel within the Action Team has been particularly important in building positive government/community relations.

As a number of people saw it, there appears to be some contrast between the involvement of the two lead agencies over the Trial's history. While DEST was said to be actively involved from the very beginning, it took some time for the NSW Government to fully recognise DET's lead role in the Trial. There now appears to be much stronger recognition of DET's position as the primary State Government agency in Murdi Paaki.
The relationships between DEST and DET developed through the Trial were said to have had positive implications for those agencies’ work in other regions and also on non-Indigenous issues. For example, cross-jurisdictional relationships between senior bureaucrats have benefited from contact through the Trial.

Stakeholders also mentioned the level of integration between the Action Team and the local ICC(s) as a problem while the new arrangements were being put in place. Although the Bourke ICC has officially been part of the Action Team since the ICC’s establishment, the Bourke ICC manager position was vacant for some time, which reportedly affected the level of integration between the work of the ICC and that of the Action Team. This position was filled in early 2006.

### 3.2 Role of other agencies

Stakeholder comment was gathered on the roles of other agencies in the Murdi Paaki COAG Trial.

The involvement of DAA has increased substantially since it joined the Action Team in 2005. Since that time DAA was said to have improved the ability to mobilise resources and support from non-lead agencies at State level. The engagement of senior DAA personnel in the Trial appears to have been especially important in this regard.

Feedback on the role of OIPC in the Trial was more complex. While some stakeholders welcomed the additional funding for Trial-related initiatives (and especially for SRA-based projects) made available through OIPC, concerns were expressed that OIPC (and the local ICC) has devoted too much attention to the development of SRAs, perhaps at the expense of the working relationships between government and community built up through the Trial outside of the SRA context. Further feedback on OIPC is reported in Section 4.4; comments on the SRA process are presented in Section 3.7.

A number of Australian and NSW State Government agencies are involved directly in the trial through their provision of resources to support SRAs, and/or through their participation in trial governance structures, such as the Regional Group, Steering Committee, State Managers’ Forum (Australian Government), Regional Coordination Management Group (NSW Government), and regular community governance workshops, facilitated by the lead agencies.

### 3.3 Coordination within and between governments

The Murdi Paaki Action Team is the primary mechanism in place to improve day-to-day coordination between and within governments. At present representatives of four agencies comprise the Action Team: DEST, DET, DAA and the Bourke ICC.

At the strategic level, there are several mechanisms to guide the work of the Trial. These include the Murdi Paaki Steering Committee, the Murdi Paaki Regional Group, the Western Regional Coordination Management Group and the CEOs Group on Aboriginal Affairs (the latter two being State Government structures not specific to the Murdi Paaki COAG Trial). The Action Team, Steering Committee and Regional Group have been described in Chapter 2.

Feedback from stakeholders indicated strong support for the work of the Action Team, which was regarded as central to the progress under the Trial to date. Members of the Action Team were reported to have established strong relationships in communities as well as across government agencies.

Feedback relating to the roles of the Steering Committee and the Regional Group was more mixed. While certainly important in building senior agency commitment to the Trial, both structures were seen as too large to respond quickly to emerging issues. Officials familiar with the Regional Group’s purpose were optimistic that its recent restructure — into four sub-groups with responsibility for different portfolio areas — will facilitate more positive results in the future.
While substantial improvements were noted in communication/collaboration between governments, government stakeholders acknowledged that these gains were yet to translate into more sustained, flexible, whole of government approaches leading to improved service delivery, of the type envisaged by the COAG mandate in the establishment of the trials.

Member agencies of the Regional Coordination Management Group (ie all NSW Government agencies active in Murdi Paaki) have developed an agreement outlining the nature of future whole of government working arrangements. Once endorsed the agreement will set out specific strategies for acting in coordinated fashion with other agencies. The recently signed Bilateral Agreement between the Australian and NSW Governments also incorporates principles for intergovernmental and interagency coordination. A number of government stakeholders consulted for this evaluation regarded these formal arrangements as an important step towards improved government services for Indigenous people in the Murdi Paaki region.

3.4 Interaction between the Trial and other government agencies and programs

While it is not within the scope of this evaluation to comment on the new arrangements in Indigenous affairs as such, many stakeholders provided feedback on how they thought the new arrangements had affected the COAG Trial. A number of those interviewed – including both government and community representatives – questioned the value of OIPC’s involvement in the Trial. They believed that OIPC did not always adhere to processes established through the Trial, and that financial resources have been difficult to access since the introduction of the new arrangements.

Under the new arrangements, much of the funding previously managed by ATSIC has been distributed to ‘mainstream’ agencies, which (according to those consulted for this evaluation) do not always have the knowledge or relationships to work effectively with Indigenous communities. While ICCs – through which Commonwealth programs can be accessed through the one ‘shop front’ – are designed to help communities access government programs and services, it was said that the ICCs in Murdi Paaki had not yet established trusting relationships with communities in the region. According to some stakeholders, this has meant that Aboriginal organisations and individuals have found it difficult to source funding for worthwhile initiatives since the new arrangements came into effect. There appears to be a perception among some community members that the new arrangements have to date meant more bureaucracy rather than less.

Further, the Action Team and other people working in the region have needed to spend time and energy helping communities understand and work with the new arrangements. Although the principles behind the Trial and the new arrangements are complementary in some respects, the complexities associated with an entirely new system of government service provision has to some extent diverted the lead agencies (and other Australian Government departments) from their commitments under the Trial.

3.5 Local government

The involvement of local government in the Trial or Trial-related initiatives appears to have been limited to date. Although there are a small number of projects which included local government input or participation (see Section 4.5), Councils were said to regard the COAG Trial as a ‘creature of the Commonwealth and the State,’ and as a result do not regularly engage with Community Working Parties or the Action Team. However, community representatives did mention the Central Darling Shire Council as having taken a positive approach to working with Indigenous communities in its jurisdiction.

When asked how local government might be encouraged to take a more active role in the Trial (for example by communicating regularly with CWPs), stakeholders noted that Councils operate on very
tight budgets, and that additional resources would promote more regular community liaison and contact with the Action Team.

3.6 Working relationships between government and community

Working relationships between government and community exist in two contexts: through Community Working Parties (at the local level) and through the Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly (at the regional level).

The Action Team has focussed on building relationships with CWPs and informing CWP members of their roles and responsibilities. Although there has been slow progress in some communities, there appears to be a much greater capacity among CWPs to work with government in constructive fashion than there was at the Trial’s outset. The continuity of Action Team personnel – who have come to represent the ‘faces of government’ in communities – has been important in building trust between government representatives and CWP members.

There was some stakeholder discussion of the circumstances in which government might work with individuals and families rather than with communities through CWPs. Many of those consulted emphasised the need to work through CWPs where possible (in keeping with the principles of the Trial); however, it was acknowledged that in some circumstances – such as where poor governance arrangements exists or where there is a high degree of interfamily conflict – it will be necessary to work directly with community members rather than with CWPs or other community bodies. Nevertheless, some people saw some inconsistency between the Australian Government’s desire to work with individuals and families and the role of CWPs as ‘gatekeepers’ in the Murdi Paaki Trial.

The consultations undertaken in 2005 indicated community concerns about the level of access that CWPs enjoyed to senior officials within government. CWPs expressed their desire to work with the ‘decision-makers’, rather than only with comparatively junior personnel on the ground. This feedback resulted in a concerted effort by senior bureaucrats to engage with communities directly, through (for example) six-monthly Community Governance Workshops and through Steering Committee meetings in the region. More recently, CWP Chairs have been invited to attend meetings of the Steering Committee in Sydney. Both government and community representatives were positive about these developments.

3.7 Shared responsibility and SRAs

3.7.1 Signed SRAs

As noted in Chapter 2, seventeen Shared Responsibility Agreements have been signed in the Murdi Paaki region since the inception of the Trial – some before and some after the new Indigenous affairs arrangements came into effect. People consulted during the study raised a number of issues relating to SRAs – for example:

- Some of the early SRAs were regarded as dealing in considerable detail with relatively small matters.
- While the Australian Government has made it very clear that SRAs have no relevance to core government responsibilities and services in health, education and training, law enforcement, employment services and the like, there can in practice be disagreement about what matters can and cannot be appropriately included in an SRA.
- In the specific case of the Murdi Paaki COAG Trial, some stakeholders see SRAs as having been ‘grafted on’ to planning and decision-making that was already well advanced through the CAP process. There was some frustration over the length of time it has taken to negotiate and finalise certain SRAs and receive associated funding.
Such issues are further discussed in Section 3.5.2.

- Copies of all the SRAs signed to date were available to the evaluation team. Analysis of their content indicates that the bulk of signed SRAs are in keeping with the four principal objectives of the COAG Trial. The regional SRAs (ie those signed by the Regional Council/Regional Assembly) are designed to improve community governance, while the local SRAs (ie those signed by individual CWPs) relate to such areas as environmental health, community/family wellbeing, the engagement of young people in community life and education, and crime prevention.

Of the sixteen communities in the Murdi Paaki region, six have to date been party to an SRA. The recent finalisation of CAPs and the planned development of tailored initiatives to meet the needs of individual communities may lead to additional SRAs being negotiated.

**Regional SRAs**

As noted above, the Murdi Paaki Regional Council and its ‘successor’, the Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly, are signatories to six SRAs.

- Four of these (dated 22 August 2003, 3 December 2004 (two agreements), and 1 August 2005) relate to the provision of administrative and secretarial support to the sixteen Community Working Parties. The shared responsibilities under these three SRAs are wide ranging, reflecting their regional nature. The administrative support specified in one agreement (3 December 2004) includes the provision of computers and related items, such as internet access and IT training.

- Another SRA involving the Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly (26 October 2005), the Murdi Paaki Partnership Project, provides for locally-based professional and technical support to strengthen the operation of the sixteen CWPs through the appointment of eight Community Facilitators. The Australian and NSW Governments have each agreed to contribute up to $1 million over 2 years to support the MPPP. The MPRA’s responsibilities under the agreement include providing local level organisation, guidance and monitoring of the project. Additional information on the MPPP can be found in Section 2.4.6.

- The final SRA signed at the regional level (6 April 2005) relates to the expansion of the Climate Control Project through the installation of evaporation cooling units. The Climate Control Project commenced in Weilmoringle in 2003; under the SRA with the Regional Assembly an additional seven communities in the Murdi Paaki region with community-owned housing will have cooling units installed. This will take place on a priority basis, subject to the availability of local resources. SRAs are to be negotiated with each community that receives the air cooling units, with community responsibilities tailored to the circumstance in each community.

**Local SRAs**

- An SRA signed on 3 December 2005 with the Ngemba CWP relates to the re-engagement of Indigenous youth. Other SRAs involving the Brewarrina community relate to establishing a Ngemba Women of Brewarrina Homemakers/Healing Program (signed 6 April 2005), establishing two garden parks (signed September 2005) and purchasing a small bus for community use (also signed September 2005).

- Three SRAs signed with the Bourke CWP are intended to improve educational outcomes for children and young people and provide opportunities in the area for re-engagement in learning (signed 3 December 2004); to establish a ‘Community Assistance Patrol’ to reduce opportunities for community members to become involved in illegal activity or behaviour that may have lasting adverse effects on themselves or others (signed 3 December 2004); and to make possible a cultural festival that took place in 2005 (signed 2 Nov 2005).
The Ivanhoe CWP signed an SRA on 26 October 2005 for the installation of evaporative air-cooling units in up to twenty designated community controlled housing assets in Ivanhoe that do not currently have air-cooling, and for some additional replacement units.

The SRA involving the Enngonia CWP (signed 6 April 2005) provides for an distance/outreach education program for students who would not otherwise be able to access education facilities.

SRAs relating to installation and maintenance of evaporative cooling were signed on 19 April 2006 with the Collarenebri and Lightning Ridge communities.

At the time of writing a number of other local SRAs were under development or close to being finalised.

3.7.2 Government commitments through SRAs

While DET and DEST are contractual partners to all SRAs, other Australian and NSW government departments are also committed through a number of these. For example:

- DEWR has committed to providing sixteen CDEP places for secretariat positions to support CWPs and to providing up to $176,000 per annum to support employment in those positions (SRA signed 3 December 2004)
- FaCS/FCSIA has committed to providing up to $334,000 to support the Murdi Paaki Partnership Project (SRA dated 26 October 2005)
- TAFE NSW is to provide relevant accredited training for the Ngemba Aboriginal Women’s Homemaker/Healing Program (SRA dated 6 April 2005)
- The Yamma Festival in Bourke (SRA dated 2 November 2005) is supported either financially or in-kind by the following government agencies: DEST, OIPC, DEWR, DCITA and AGs (Commonwealth); DET, State and Regional Development, Premiers, DAA, and NSW Police (State); and the Bourke Shire Council.

Stakeholder feedback on government commitments through the COAG Trial (beyond specific commitments made through SRAs) is discussed in Section 3.8.

3.7.3 Community commitments through SRAs

The community responsibilities specified in SRAs at the regional level are naturally of a different order to those set out in local-level SRAs. Community commitments in regional SRAs generally fall to the MPRA (ie CWP Chairs) or to CWPs in each location. For example, CWPs are expected to represent without favour the interests of their communities to government.

At the local level, SRAs specify both community and family/individual commitments. Community commitments are generally made at the organisational level – CWPs, local community bodies and so forth – while family/individual commitments set expectations on ‘ordinary’ community members to contribute in certain ways to achieving the objectives of the SRA.

In most cases there is an intuitive connection between the community/family/individual commitments in the local SRAs and the project or issue that is the subject of each SRA. However, there exist a number of commitments where no natural links between community responsibilities and the issue being addressed seem to apply. (For example, an SRA devoted to a homemakers/healing program in Brewarrina includes the expectation that community members will ensure young people attend school.) Some stakeholders observed that it is difficult to encourage (or enforce) adherence to these kinds of commitments, since there is no clear link in the minds of community members between the project and what is expected of them. In fact, in some circumstances individuals in the community may...
not even be aware of these ‘obligations’, making the notion of ‘shared responsibility’ a problematic one. Section 3.7.5 (below) discusses these and related issues further.

Since this current study involved relatively little consultation on the community side (concentrating instead on the feedback of government stakeholders), it was not possible to explore in detail progress under each of the local SRAs signed in Murdi Paaki. Community representatives provided more general feedback on SRAs and the SRA process, and mostly from a region-wide perspective.

It is nonetheless worth noting that not all of the local SRAs specify performance indicators for assessing whether the SRA is working – with some of the performance indicators appearing to draw a rather tenuous connection between a given project and proposed measures of performance. This situation is consistent with government feedback that it has sometimes been difficult to monitor the extent to which community commitments are being met and the effect this has had on progress under each SRA.

3.7.4 Stakeholder feedback on SRAs

Many comments were received about the content of SRAs and the process for their development and negotiation.

Some of the SRAs signed in Murdi Paaki at the community level were considered to be overly specific or fine-grained, with government and community responsibilities set out in relation to what some stakeholders saw as relatively minor projects. Local SRAs of this kind were thought to encourage project-based, ‘stop-start’ funding rather than long-term investment in communities and partnerships. By contrast, the several regional SRAs signed to date – including one setting out the overall objectives of the COAG Trial and another formally recognising the legitimacy of the Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly – were considered to be appropriate and worthwhile.

Government stakeholders frequently mentioned a preference for ‘comprehensive’ SRAs, which would be broader in scope and which could evolve to incorporate a number of separate initiatives targeting key issues and incorporating multiple approaches to addressing them. SRAs of this kind were regarded as the likely next step for communities in the Murdi Paaki region; the more specific SRAs signed to date were considered to be part of the process leading towards more meaningful SRAs addressing multiple issues in each community. One advantage of comprehensive SRAs would be in avoiding the need for communities to commit to the same undertakings (for example, taking children to school) in multiple agreements.

In similar vein, some of those interviewed foreshadowed the development of a Regional Partnership Agreement in Murdi Paaki, which would (among other things) provide for suitable resourcing of the Regional Assembly. It is understood that to date only one Regional Partnership Agreement has been signed (in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands in Western Australia), although the Commonwealth is encouraging their development more widely. A Regional Partnership Agreement (or additional SRAs at the regional level) was regarded by some stakeholders as potentially useful in establishing a framework for interaction between government and community in a way that will be recognised as legitimate by communities and community members.

Numbers of those consulted during the study argued that since the introduction of the new Indigenous affairs arrangements there had been an inclination to over-use of SRAs, as well as misunderstandings over the circumstances in which their development is appropriate (for example, in relation to special or additional initiatives that are distinct from general service planning and delivery). Some believed that there had been a tendency to regard the sheer number of SRAs signed as an end in itself, almost regardless of the nature or value of the initiatives concerned.

In the particular context of the Murdi Paaki COAG Trial, both government and community stakeholders claimed, a requirement to develop and sign an SRA had in some cases been imposed onto a process
that was already well advanced through a Community Action Plan. As people on the ground saw it, this had tended to mean frustration and long delays in consulting and negotiating with a series of government agencies ('You can go around in circles 300 times negotiating an SRA').

Many comments were received by the study team about the most appropriate types of commitments that should be built into SRAs. There appear to be different understandings among government officials about when SRAs need to be signed and when they are not required. While some government officials believed that SRAs are to apply only to additional or extra initiatives that are not part of existing programs or services, in practice it was said to be difficult to determine exactly what constitutes government’s ‘core business’. There appear to be conflicting messages coming from different Commonwealth agencies about when SRAs need to be developed, and some government representatives interviewed for this evaluation admitted being confused about what the situation is under the new arrangements.

Many government representatives believed that comprehensive SRAs may represent a solution to some of the problems described above. Nevertheless, the extent to which every community in the region will tolerate another round of SRA-negotiation (on top of those SRAs signed to date and the development of CAPs) is open to question – although the employment of Community Facilitators to assist in negotiating and developing future SRAs should make this process easier.

3.7.5 Stakeholder feedback on ‘shared responsibility’

Along with specific comments about the SRA process, there was feedback on the concept of ‘shared responsibility’ in relation to the Murdi Paaki COAG Trial.

Some government representatives expressed concern about a perceived conflation between ‘shared responsibility’ and ‘mutual obligation’ on the part of individuals and families. They believed that it is not appropriate to assign ‘responsibilities’ at the individual level in every case (especially where an SRA moves beyond issues specific to particular communities or localities, or where there is no clear relationship between the issue the SRA is designed to address and any community obligations), and that there needs to be an education process among the bureaucracy and in communities about reasonable expectations regarding SRA and other commitments. ‘We need to be more subtle and broad about articulating communities' responsibilities,’ said one official.

Other government representatives, on the other hand, emphasised the need for behavioural change in communities to improve outcomes in education, employment, housing and other areas. The emphasis on individual responsibility and behavioural change was particularly apparent in discussion with OIPC officers, whereas representatives of the lead agencies and other government representatives particularly emphasised the responsibilities of government in supporting community capacity and in delivering services.

Community feedback indicates concern that responsibility has been given to CWP s to identify needs and priorities without ensuring that they have the support and expertise needed to do so effectively and in representative fashion. It was observed that some community members (in particular CWP members) have dedicated an enormous amount of time and energy to the Trial process, without these efforts being properly recognised. While such problems were particularly pressing in the early stages of the Trial, they were said to remain in some communities.

3.8 Government commitments under the Trial

Clearly the major government commitment to date in relation to the Murdi Paaki COAG Trial has been on the part of the lead agencies. In general terms, both DEST and DET have delivered on their commitment to support the Trial through personnel on the ground, with the Action Team establishing solid working relationships with CWP s and other government officials. Other significant commitments
made by government include the provision of secretariat support and the funding of Community Facilitators positions to support the operation of CWP.

Some feedback gathered by the study team suggests that non-lead Australian Government agencies have generally been more active around their responsibilities under the Trial than State agencies. The reasons for this were said to be twofold: first, because Commonwealth departments enjoy a much greater degree of discretion than State agencies in the allocation of funding (particularly at the regional and local level); and second, because State Government employees have a larger role in direct service provision, and that consequently greater organisational changes are required if State agencies are to properly address the needs of Indigenous people through improved service delivery.

From the community perspective, a number of those who spoke with the study team were not convinced that government is as committed to the success of the COAG Trial as the CWP. In some instances government agencies were said to be unresponsive to community priorities as expressed through CWP and CAP. Such issues were not seen to be uniform across the government sector; rather, certain agencies (and levels of government) were seen as ‘repeat offenders,’ having ways of operating which do not fit well with the COAG Trial or the role of CWP.

The perception of many community members who were consulted in 2005 was that while government agencies might talk about consultation and coordination, little had actually changed at that stage in the way they went about their business. In this sense it was suggested that government was not fulfilling its part of the COAG agreement. For example, in smaller communities it appeared that shortcomings in agency co-ordination has sometimes led to an under-supply of services; in larger centres there was in some situations a duplication of services or functions resulting from a lack of effective inter-agency co-operation.

3.9 Community commitments under the Trial

Indigenous communities and governments clearly have very different capacities to contribute to the Trial process. Policy makers therefore need to be realistic about what can be reasonably expected of communities and community members through the Trial and through SRAs.

There are a number of ways in which communities have delivered on their commitments in relation to the Murdi Paaki COAG Trial. For example:

- Membership of Community Working Parties was refreshed at the outset of the Trial, and the role of CWP was expanded to include a much greater range of issues relating to government services. CWP are in many cases viewed by their communities as legitimate and representative structures for identifying community priorities and liaising with government.

- Community Action Plans setting out the needs and aspirations of communities have been developed by each of the sixteen Indigenous communities in the region.

- CWP members (and especially CWP Chairs) have dedicated much time and energy to building community cohesion and governance capacity. Their work includes preparing for and attending CWP meetings, attending regular Community Governance Workshops, and attending meetings of the Murdi Paaki Regional Council and Regional Assembly. In line with the non-incorporated status of CWP, CWP members have not been financially rewarded for these activities.

When community consultations were undertaken in 2005, it appeared that some CWP (although not all) had not been able to successfully communicate their role to community members and to promote the CWP as a means for community input into government service provision. We note that at the time
some CWPs did not enjoy the resources and support (such as secretariat workers and IT infrastructure) that was required to do this effectively.

3.10 Changes over the course of the Trial

3.10.1 Changes in government structures and processes

One of the major changes over the course of the Trial has been the introduction in mid-2004 of the Australian Government’s new arrangements in Indigenous affairs. The role of the OIPC is a relatively new one in Murdi Paaki (as elsewhere); ICCs have also been established in Bourke and (more recently) in Dubbo.

3.10.2 Changes at the community level

The work of the Trial is not confined to governments and service providers, with considerable activity on the community side. As a result of this work, governance capacity in communities has greatly improved since the Trial’s commencement, and community members are now better able to articulate their needs and preferences through CWPs. CWPs are also a focus of community attention and have contributed to social cohesion in some locations. Section 3.10 provides further discussion of community skills, leadership and governance capacity.

3.11 Support among the broader Indigenous community

Community feedback indicates that community sentiments are generally in line with the underlying aims and objectives of the Trial. Although the concept of the Trial is not necessarily well understood in the broader community, the core idea of making it simpler for communities to deal with government is seen as important and positive by many people, even those who have little contact with CWP business. Indeed, the overall success of the ‘refreshed’ CWPs, which meet regularly and are regarded (by both communities and government) as legitimate and representative structures for community consultation, is a clear indication of community support for and ownership of the Trial.

Both community and government representatives expressed the view that governments must continue to support the key elements of the Trial – CWPs, CAPs, Community Facilitators and simpler working arrangements between communities and government – if community support for the Trial is to be maintained.

3.12 Community skills, leadership and governance capacity

Building community governance capacity through Community Working Parties has proved a slow process in some locations, while in other communities (particularly where local organisations were already operating with broad community support) CWPs have been better able to work effectively with government. One particular problem in this regard has been ensuring that CWP members understand the responsibilities of CWPs and their role in providing input into the provision of government services.

In addition, CWPs struggled early on to find administrative and professional support to assist them in their work. This appears to have been a major issue where the resources of local organisations (whether government agencies or Aboriginal organisations) have not been available to support CWP business. The need for secretariat and other support for CWPs has been recognised by government through the signing of SRAs providing for secretariat positions in each community and, more recently, the employment of eight Community Facilitators to work with CWPs.

Despite early problems, governance capacity has evidently improved since the Trial’s commencement. Communities are said to be much better able to engage with government in positive and constructive fashion. Community participation in the process of developing CAPs has apparently been a major step in building leadership skills and partnerships at the community level. CWP members also understand their roles much better as a result of the CAP process.
Community consultations revealed that CWP members and other community members consider the present CWPs to be a significant advance on the governance arrangements in place in the past. The working parties that existed before membership was ‘refreshed’ through the COAG Trial were described as generally less representative and less effective – even taking into account their limited focus on housing and environmental health matters. Nor were other organisations such as Land Councils generally regarded as an effective forum for community debate and decision-making. The typical comment heard during community consultations was that the CWPs – with membership drawn from various community organisations, elders and other groups such as women and young people – are in a better position to serve the interests of the community as a whole. Many stakeholders believe that CWPs will eventually be able to fulfil their intended role, which was described as ‘keeping governments accountable.’

The leadership of CWP Chairs (who also sit on the MPRA) is another significant factor affecting governance capacity in each community. Community consultations indicated that the effectiveness of Chairpersons – their ability to promote positive change for the community – is in many ways dependent on the Chair’s own personality and background. Some Chairs appear to enjoy strong backing across their community, while for others such support is more difficult to come by. Being a strong leader was not the only attribute that community members desired from the CWP Chair: it was also emphasised that these representatives need to regularly communicate CWP activities to the local community, and to convey to ‘ordinary’ people that the CWP is acting in the interests of the whole community.

Limited secretariat support has meant that CWP Chairpersons (and sometimes other CWP members) have often needed to perform tasks that could be handled by suitable support staff – for instance, preparing documents for CWP consideration, drafting minutes, notifying members of forthcoming meetings and the like. The time pressures that these activities have placed on Chairpersons – particularly those individuals with existing full-time responsibilities – has led some to suggest that Chairs be financially compensated for their work in this regard.

CWP members in the various locations covered by the 2005 study had different perspectives on the issue of whether they had had appropriate training to assist them in their role. CWP Chairpersons may learn quite a lot about the COAG Trial and related matters through attending six-monthly Community Governance Workshops. Attendance at these Workshops also helps inform the Chairs about what other CWPs are doing. This kind of learning, however, does not necessarily flow on to all CWP members.

At the regional level, the abolition of ATSIC and the subsequent devolution of the Murdi Paaki Regional Council was seen as having resulted in a major gap in Aboriginal community input at the regional level. The Regional Council’s notional successor, the MPRA, was said to have much less power and discretion under the new arrangements, and to lack proper support to operate effectively and persuasively. Both government and community stakeholders expressed concern that the Commonwealth’s focus on working with communities, families and individuals would come at the expense of regional community input. The MPRA was said to have great potential as a constructive Aboriginal voice in the region, so long as resources are dedicated to supporting its work.
4 Progress to Date and Lessons Learnt

This chapter discusses progress to date under the Murdi Paaki COAG Trial and the lessons learnt, as informed by stakeholders consulted for the evaluation.

4.1 Identifying and addressing community needs

The primary structures for identifying the needs and aspirations of community through the Murdi Paaki COAG Trial are the sixteen Community Working Parties in the region. All sixteen CWPs have developed Community Action Plans identifying priorities for each community.

Community feedback indicates strong support for the CAPs, which are regarded as an accurate reflection of community sentiment. They are also regarded by some as ‘living documents’ which will evolve over time as community needs change. It has taken much longer than anticipated to complete all sixteen CAPs, due to a range of factors outside government’s control. The nature of planning for the Trial was such that the majority of CAPs needed to be completed before comprehensive regional planning could take place to respond to community priorities. Delays in finalising CAPs held up the progress of the Trial overall, to the frustration of both community and government stakeholders. However, as noted elsewhere in this report, the development of CAPs was an important step in building community support for CWPs and the Trial generally, and also contributed to the level of cohesion and goodwill in individual communities. Apart from the lengthy period over which it took place, the CAP process was regarded in a positive light by the majority of stakeholders.

Late in 2005, the Regional Group collated all action items from completed CAPs into a regional ‘matrix’ that clustered these under Two Ways Together themes. Early in 2006, Australian and/or State Government agencies were identified as ‘lead’ agencies for each action item. The Regional Group was also restructured to reflect the different areas of responsibility in implementing action items. The ‘matrix’ will continue to guide the work of the Regional Group and its member agencies.

FCSIA recently completed an analysis of the content of the CAPs in order to generate a comprehensive regional overview of community needs. The Steering Committee and Regional Group plan to use this information to guide the development of services in a way that is in keeping with community priorities. The analysis provides a region-wide perspective on the challenges that the Steering Committee must address during the last stage of the Trial and beyond, and government representatives emphasised the importance of developing concrete initiatives to respond to the major priorities identified through FCSIA’s analysis.

4.2 Ongoing community support

We have noted that the following four key regional priorities were identified at the start of the Trial, and built into a regional SRA:

- Improving the health and wellbeing of children and young people
- Improving educational attainment and school retention
- Helping families to raise healthy children
- Strengthening community and regional governance structures.

Broadly speaking, communities continue to support the objectives and priorities agreed at the start of the Trial. In particular, communities are supportive of the need to build up the capacity for community governance through CWPs and the MPRA.
The sixteen CAPs subsequently developed allow government to identify community priorities in more detail and to examine which are most pressing from a regional perspective. (Further information on the substance of CAPs is provided in Chapter 2.)

4.3 Positives and negatives from a community perspective

The 2005 consultations indicated that, among community members with a good understanding of the purpose of the COAG Trial and the mission of the CWPs, there is a good deal of optimism and support for the current arrangements. It was generally agreed that the Trial, the CWPs and Community Action Plans are good mechanisms for seeking better coordination of government services based on community priorities. CWP members in various locations pointed to specific initiatives that had received CWP endorsement and had brought about benefits for the community. They also looked forward to more such examples once the various CAPs were implemented.

Across most of the communities consulted in 2005, the message was that the operation of the CWP was contributing to the flow of information within the community and had helped to create better links and greater cooperation amongst existing organisations. The CWPs were said to have created a useful avenue for contact and communication among various groups, contributing to an increased level of community consensus. This was seen as a significant achievement. The fact that the CWPs are unincorporated and do not control funds was said to help make them acceptable to other community organisations, since they was less likely to be seen as a competitor or rival.

According to community representatives, one limitation on CWP effectiveness was the perceived unwillingness of some government agencies to embrace the new CWPs and the COAG Trial as a way of working with communities as a whole and acting on their priorities. While some government agencies or personnel seemed happy to work with the CWP arrangement and to act on CWP decisions, it was said, others remained unresponsive.

Some CWP members also believed that not enough direction had been provided to the CWPs at the commencement of the Trial to enable them to understand their roles and how decisions were to be made. This meant – at least in the eyes of some – that CWPs had struggled on their own to work within a system they didn’t fully understand. In addition, an acknowledgement of the considerable contribution that CWP members (and CWP Chairs in particular) are making to the Trial was regarded as appropriate. While the issue of compensating CWP members/Chairs financially is contentious, some recognition of their work is supported. In the words of one Chair: ‘We need the respect and recognition for what we’re doing for our people.’

One further problem from the community perspective is the substantial delay that is said to be associated with negotiating and finalising Shared Responsibility Agreements. While CWPs in some cases have agreed relatively quickly to the conditions set out in an SRA, it has taken some months to get government sign-off on the release of associated funds. This is a source of continuing frustration for CWP members, with a number of negotiated SRAs still unsigned.

4.4 Positives and negatives from a government perspective

According to many stakeholders, the lead agency arrangements in the Murdi Paaki COAG Trial have to date worked remarkably well. The contribution of the Action Team to the Trial was frequently mentioned as contributing to what has been achieved to date. In addition, the commitment of senior officials in both lead agencies has added impetus to the Trial process.

Outside of the lead agencies, there appears to have been a variable degree of response to community needs and concerns identified through CWPs and CAPs. Many departments were said to have found it difficult to adopt the whole of government approach required in addressing Indigenous disadvantage. Most of those interviewed ascribed such difficulties to organisational and cultural barriers within bureaucracy, rather than anything directly associated with the Murdi Paaki COAG Trial. Nevertheless,
stakeholders emphasised that non-lead agencies must learn to work with CWPs if service delivery and government/community relations are to improve.

Stakeholders made mention of several agencies when asked which parts of government had embraced the Trial and which might improve. Positive comments were received about DEST, DEWR and FaCS/FCSIA (at Commonwealth level) and DET, DoCS and DAA (at State level). Meanwhile, there have reportedly been problems achieving the required level of engagement from several other Australian and State government agencies.

The establishment of OIPC raised some concerns among those working on the ground in Murdi Paaki, and uncertainty over the respective roles of DEST and OIPC/ICCs in the Trial has reportedly created some difficulties in coordinating Commonwealth activity. By the time the new Indigenous affairs arrangements came into effect, the lead agencies in Murdi Paaki had made considerable progress in engaging with communities and in establishing structures for interagency coordination – particularly when compared with other Trial sites. As OIPC sought to contribute to various sites across the country, it no doubt encountered different needs from one Trial site to another. In Murdi Paaki, it was less obvious how OIPC could best make a positive contribution to the Trial.

Government stakeholders also raised concerns over what appeared to be unilateral funding decisions in relation to some communities and funding programs on the part of OIPC. It will be important in the future to clarify the respective roles of the lead agencies and OIPC and to build on progress made to date in building the capacity of communities to work with government.

4.5 Trial-related initiatives

The key elements of the Murdi Paaki COAG Trial are described in detail in Chapter 2, and feedback about these is provided throughout this report. Initiatives that have arisen through the signing of Shared Responsibility Agreements are described in Section 3.5. However, there are a number of smaller Trial-related initiatives that are not described elsewhere.

- The Rivertowns Project is an initiative of the NSW Premier’s Department, and has been undertaken through local government. The Project involves the work of community facilitators in four communities in the Rivertowns area; it was expanded with State and Commonwealth funding to become the Murdi Paaki Partnership Project.

- Activities under the Drug Education Strategy in schools have used the CWP model to involve communities in the education process. DET encouraged the involvement of CWPs to demonstrate to other agencies how the new community structures can be coordinated with existing government programs.

- DEST has recently announced funding under the National Accelerated Literacy Program for services in the Bourke region.

Community representatives consulted in 2005 gave a number of concrete examples of other initiatives that have been supported or facilitated by CWPs and have produced benefits for the local community. These included:

- improved community relationships with local schools
- arranging prompt response to housing maintenance needs
- development of a local park
- a program to encourage secondary schools students to participate in part-time employment
- establishment of a youth group
- better communication between community leaders and Police, enabling faster Police response times to matters brought to their attention
- successful conduct of a Well Persons’ Health Check
- an eight-day cultural festival.

Stakeholders were confident that there would be many more community benefits and improvements once CAPs and SRAs are fully established and implemented.

4.6 New ways of doing business

The Murdi Paaki COAG Trial has in various ways contributed to new and positive ways of doing business, on the part of both governments and community.

- Community Working Parties are now the primary mechanism for identifying community priorities and concerns. This is a significant advance on previous arrangements, under which different community organisations, families and individuals would deal with government separately.

- CWPs and the MPRA are unincorporated bodies, do not employ staff and do not manage funds. Both community representatives and government officials regard such arrangements as appropriate and as contributing to the effective operation of these bodies.

- The Action Team now constitutes a visible ‘face of government’, meaning that (in theory) communities/CWPs need only deal with one set of government officials instead of negotiating separately with each and every government agency. While the capacity of governments to work in coordinated fashion is still being built, this represents a important step towards simplifying relationships between communities and the government sector.

4.7 Government coordination and service delivery

There was mixed feedback from stakeholders about the extent to which government programs and services are being delivered in more coordinated fashion as a result of the Trial. Community representatives felt that there had been little improvement in government services on the ground, although examples of good outcomes were mentioned in relation to some government programs. Existing problems with coordination and service delivery were said to stem from the unwillingness of some government agencies to engage meaningfully with CWPs.

People consulted in various communities in 2005 referred to the apparent lack of coordination between or even within government agencies, and gave some examples of decisions that seemed arbitrary and did not reflect any local community input. It was said that grants of funds, for example, might be made to communities in pursuit of agency programs or priorities of one kind or another, but without reflecting local needs or opportunities as people in the community saw them. In smaller communities it appeared that shortcomings in agency co-ordination has tended to lead to an under-supply of services; in larger centres there was in some situations a duplication of services or functions resulting from a lack of effective inter-agency co-operation.

Some government representatives observed that it has been necessary to await the completion of Community Action Plans in all sixteen communities before a comprehensive strategy for addressing community priorities could be implemented at the regional level. The relatively slow progress on CAPs in some communities has therefore hampered government’s ability to respond quickly to issues identified in communities where CAPs have been in place for some time.

Government officials interviewed for this evaluation believed that a number of agencies have embraced the principles of the Trial, while for others bringing about changes in service delivery and in departmental approaches to working with communities will take further work. By way of generalisation
it was said that human service agencies had to date done better in this regard than economic and natural resource agencies. That said, stakeholder feedback indicates that continuing cultural change at virtually all levels of the bureaucracy was required if a whole-of-government approach was to be sustained.

At the Commonwealth level, a number of people saw the new arrangements in Indigenous affairs as adding another layer of complexity to the work of the Murdi Paaki Trial. OIPC's involvement in the Trial tends to be seen by community representatives at this stage as bringing additional bureaucracy without any obvious benefits in improved coordination and service delivery.

4.8 Evidence of better outcomes and working arrangements

Among stakeholders familiar with the COAG Trials elsewhere in Australia, Murdi Paaki is regarded as the most advanced Trial site in terms of community capacity and governance. Community members also regard CWPs as a significant advance on previous arrangements, and most CWPs appear to have the support of their respective communities.

From the government perspective, improved structures for government coordination and communication have been put in place (for example, the Action Team and the Murdi Paaki Steering Committee), although the extent to which this has translated into better outcomes for Indigenous communities and individuals is at this stage quite limited. Stakeholders argued that the Trial is a long-term initiative and that better outcomes will eventually flow on from better inter-agency coordination and improved community governance.

4.9 Unintended consequences

One feature of the Murdi Paaki COAG Trial is the sheer size of the Trial site. While there have been some difficulties in coordinating government activity across all communities in the region, stakeholders commended COAG and the lead agencies for their willingness to implement changes across the region. One benefit of engaging community representatives at regional level (notably through the Regional Council and the Regional Assembly) was said to be the strong sense of Aboriginal community identity across the region. However, a few government stakeholders expressed reservations about the large size of the Trial site and the implications this has for engaging with individual communities in tailored fashion. Delays associated with awaiting the completion of CAPs in every community before a comprehensive regional strategy could be implemented was cited as one disadvantage of instituting a 'Trial' across a region with a large number of communities.

As noted elsewhere in this report, there have been some tensions and misunderstandings in both government and communities since the new arrangements in Indigenous affairs came into being. These problems could be regarded as an unintended consequence of the interface between two initiatives – one by COAG and one by the Australian Government – designed to improve services for Aboriginal people. As at other Trial sites, there is a need to clarify the ways in which the lead agencies and OIPC can best contribute to better outcomes for Indigenous people and communities.

4.10 Achieving agreed objectives and priorities

Stakeholders consistently emphasised that the challenges that the Trial is designed to address are complex and long-term, and that the commitments of community and government to achieving the Trial's objectives need to be sustained. Substantially improving outcomes in key areas like education and employment is likely to take decades rather than years. A five-year 'Trial', then, can be expected to lay the groundwork for positive change, rather than bring about major improvements on the ground.

While working towards the Trial's objectives is clearly a long-term project, substantial progress has been made in enhancing the capacity of both governments and communities to work with each other. Structures to promote coordination between government agencies working in Murdi Paaki have been
established, as well as lines of communication between key personnel. Further, the governance capacity of communities has improved, with communities better able to articulate their priorities to government in constructive fashion. These developments are likely to contribute significantly to achieving the objectives and priorities articulated at the Trial’s commencement.

Stakeholders recognised the critical importance of establishing good community governance and stronger community capacity, as firm foundations for future progress. However, government representatives also acknowledged the importance of developing concrete initiatives to respond to the major priorities identified in CAPs. This approach may provide evidence on whether the trial arrangements in Murdi Paaki have in fact been successful in improving service delivery, which may then impact positively on social and economic outcomes for Indigenous people of the region.
5  Next Steps

5.1 Achievements to date

Stakeholders consulted for this evaluation emphasised that addressing the needs of Indigenous communities in Murdi Paaki (as elsewhere) requires long-term investment on government’s part and sustained commitment from key individuals in communities. On the whole, stakeholders believed that substantial achievements have been made under the Trial, particularly in enhancing governance capacity among communities. Both government and community representatives were optimistic that these will eventually translate into substantial improvements in individual and community outcomes.

Nevertheless, it was recognised that progress under the Murdi Paaki COAG Trial has not kept pace with community expectations. Long delays while communities developed their CAPs, along with lengthy negotiations over SRAs, have limited the amount that could be achieved in the first two to three years of the Trial.

The Murdi Paaki COAG Trial is in some senses reaching its final stage, with CWP arrangements firmly in place and CAPs completed in all sixteen communities in the region. Accordingly, there was optimism on the part of those consulted that the Trial’s last phase will yield substantial benefits for communities so long as government can respond appropriately and in coordinated fashion to community needs. In particular, the need to develop practical ideas to enhance employment opportunities and economic development (through education and training as well as by other means) was said to be a key priority over the coming months.

5.2 Likely barriers to progress

- To date some non-lead agencies have struggled to sufficiently respond to the needs and priorities identified by communities through CWPs and Community Action Plans. The recent restructure of the Murdi Paaki Regional Group is intended to generate a better response in key areas across the region. However, a comprehensive implementation plan (based on the CAPs) is required to assist governments in determining how best to respond to community priorities and how to ensure the involvement of non-lead agencies.

- Communities have identified a lack of resources as a barrier to achieving better working relationships with government. In particular, Community Working Parties and the Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly require administrative and professional support to operate effectively. While the lead agencies have taken steps to make such support available – most recently through the employment of eight Community Facilitators across Murdi Paaki – there is a need for ongoing and sustained investment in governance capacity at both community and regional levels. Although the issue of rewarding CWP Chairpersons and other members financially is a contentious one, some gesture acknowledging their contributions appears to be appropriate. At the very least, government and community organisations need to support employees who are regularly involved in CWP business (whether as full CWP members or attending CWP meetings on behalf of their organisation).

- At this stage there is limited capacity at many levels of bureaucracy to work in whole-of-government fashion to improve services for Indigenous people and communities. While some of these barriers are cultural or organisational, there is a need to properly resource non-lead agencies to respond adequately to their obligations under the COAG Trial and to promote better communication within and between agencies. As well, those responsible for the Trial might take note of the considerable amount of research and activity that has taken place in other contexts on the issue of achieving greater government coordination.
There appear to have been inconsistent messages from senior Commonwealth officials about the circumstances in which Shared Responsibility Agreements are appropriate and desirable. Those working on the ground remain uncertain about the practical application of Australian Government policy on the difference between ‘core’ and additional government services, and how these relate to SRAs. Discussion should occur at high level with the purpose of developing and disseminating a detailed policy on where SRAs should be developed, taking into account regional and local differences.

5.3 Continuation of the Trial

Both DEST and DET have made substantial commitments to the COAG Trial in Murdi Paaki, and have developed workable mechanisms for promoting government coordination outside the lead agencies. The Action Team has established strong and valuable relationships at the community level, and have worked with CWPs in the development of SRAs and CAPs. As well, communities generally support the objectives of the Trial and the principles underlying it. For these reasons, we believe the Trial should continue in its present form at least until it lapses in 2007.

Beyond 2007, there is at present some stakeholder uncertainty concerning the likely arrangements for government involvement and community input. The Trial is an initiative of the Council of Australian Governments, and any decisions about its continuation will need to be agreed at a future meeting of COAG. While this situation complicates long-term planning, the Murdi Paaki Steering Committee should consider as a matter of priority what future arrangements are preferable and will contribute best to the long-term wellbeing of Indigenous communities in the region.

More specifically, the Steering Committee should consider the roles of the two lead agencies in Murdi Paaki and how these agencies might work collaboratively with the OIPC and ICCs beyond the Trial period. When assessing future options in Murdi Paaki, the comparative success of the current community governance arrangements and the commitments made by governments and community members to the Trial to date should be emphasised.

While government officials are very much in agreement over the need to work with existing community structures and (where possible) in the context of existing relationships, this has not necessarily been communicated effectively to CWPs and community members thus far. Government should communicate to communities (through the MPRA and CWPs) its commitment to continuing and consolidating the governance arrangements built over the course of the Trial.

5.4 Evaluation and monitoring

5.4.1 Issues affecting evaluation

Murdi Paaki COAG trial partners developed a Monitoring and Evaluation Framework at the Trial's outset. This framework was to monitor and guide the evaluation of the Trial over its life. Under the new arrangements OIPC brought forward its own approach to evaluation – presumably to generate some consistency across all the Trial sites. Nevertheless, the introduction of the OIPC model of evaluation raised concerns for some of those involved in decisions about evaluation.

Consistent with the Murdi Paaki Monitoring and Evaluation Framework, a number of key elements or features of the Murdi Paaki Trial are expected to be ready for evaluation in 2007-8. In particular, community governance capacity, the nature of any improvements in service delivery, and the replicability and sustainability of the Trial arrangements are areas likely to yield meaningful evaluation insights.

However, there may be less merit in attempting to evaluate the extent to which tangible improvements have been made in outcomes for Indigenous people in areas such as education, employment and health. While some baseline data exists for comparative purposes at the regional level, it is said to be
equally important to examine changes at the community level – for which reliable and current data may be difficult to generate. The sixteen communities in the Murdi Paaki region are quite diverse – in population, services available, levels of employment, community engagement with CWPs, relationships among community members and so on. Each community has had different and distinctive experiences in relation to the Trial and in its relations with government, making region-wide assessment of indicator data problematic in the evaluation context.

5.4.2 Baseline data and performance monitoring

As reported in Section 2.2, some regional baseline data do exist that could be compared with information available to a subsequent evaluation. This data (mainly from 2002-3) has been collated by DAA and the lead agencies, and is presented in the first *Murdi Paaki Indicators Report* produced in October 2005 for the first *Two Ways Together Indicators Report*. Indicator data is available in the areas of health, education, economic development, justice, families and young people, culture and heritage, and housing and infrastructure. Additional health-related data are available in a report on *Health in the Murdi Paaki Region* produced by the Far West Area Health Service (this report was not available to the evaluation team). Since these reports are the first of their kind (presenting data from the time of the Trial’s inception or before), there are no regular performance monitoring reports relating to outcomes. However, agencies involved in the Trial report regularly to the Steering Committee and Regional Group on process-based issues where appropriate.

While these reports contain some useful baseline outcome data against which the progress of the Trial in the future might be assessed, additional data that relate directly to the four principal objectives of the Trial would allow for more accurate measurement of the Trial’s success. Such data would therefore relate to:

- the health and wellbeing of young people
- educational attainment and school retention
- family stability and healthy environments for young people
- community and regional governance.

Some such information – particularly data relating educational attainment – are available in the *Murdi Paaki Indicators Report*. However, additional measures might usefully be drawn from the Productivity Commission/COAG indicators for monitoring Indigenous disadvantage, which includes, *inter alia*, the following broad areas, along with specific indicators within each area:

- early child development and growth (eg infant mortality, birthweight)
- early school engagement and performance (eg preschool and school attendance)
- positive childhood and transition to adulthood (eg literacy and numeracy at Years 3, 5, 7 and 9, participation in organised sport, arts or community group activities, transition from school to work)
- substance use and misuse (eg alcohol-related crime and hospital statistics)
- functional and resilient families and communities (eg children on long term care and protection orders, access to the nearest health professional, proportion of Indigenous people with access to their traditional lands)
- effective environmental health systems. (eg rates of diseases associated with poor environmental health, access to clean water and functional sewerage, overcrowding in housing).
It is of course more difficult to objectively measure levels of *community governance*. Nevertheless, the Murdi Paaki Steering Committee and the Data Working Group might consider developing indicators of community governance and community cohesion (perhaps through a regular survey of CWP members). This would allow for the monitoring of improvements in governance levels over time, as well as making differences across the Murdi Paaki region and in individual communities more apparent.
6 References

A number of documents and reports were used in the preparation of this report. They include:

- *Murdi Paaki Strategic Plan*
- Outcomes of Community Working Party Governance Workshops
- Matrix of regional priorities, based on Community Action Plans
- Monitoring and Evaluation Framework for the Murdi Paaki COAG Trial
- Shared Responsibility Agreements signed in the Murdi Paaki region
- Minutes of meetings of the Murdi Paaki Steering Committee
- Minutes of meetings of the Murdi Paaki Regional Group
- A selection of endorsed Community Action Plans
- *Murdi Paaki Indicators Report*
- Bilateral Agreement between the Commonwealth of Australia and the State of New South Wales – Overarching Agreement on Aboriginal Affairs
- *Community Governance in the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) Murdi Paaki COAG Trial* – Report by Urbis Keys Young, 2005
- *National Framework of Principles for Delivering Services to Indigenous Australians*
- *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage – Key Indicators 2003* – Report by the Productivity Commission on behalf of the Council of Australian Governments
- A range of correspondence and memoranda relating to the Murdi Paaki COAG Trial.
Council of Australian Governments (COAG)
Trial Evaluation

WADEYE

Northern Territory

An independent evaluation by

Bill Gray AM
WJG & Associates Pty Ltd

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Introduction

The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) agreed in April 2002, to trial a new approach to the delivery of services to Indigenous communities, based on a whole-of-government cooperative approach with the aim of improving social and economic outcomes. The aim of the trials was “to improve the way governments interact with each other and with communities to deliver more effective responses to the needs of Indigenous Australians…and apply the lessons more broadly.” The trials were founded on two fundamental principles:

- Governments must work together at all levels and across all departments and agencies; and
- Indigenous communities and governments must work in partnership and share responsibility for achieving outcomes and for building the capacity of people in communities to manage their own affairs.

It was intended that the new approach would streamline government processes and support local Indigenous communities regaining responsibility for, and control over, decision making and general planning for social and economic development.

Eight trial sites were selected around Australia, with Wadeye being selected as the site in the NT. Each trial site was to be overseen by a Secretary of a Commonwealth Government Department. In the case of Wadeye, the Secretary of the then Department of Family and Community Services, FACS, (now the Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, FACSIA) was nominated to oversee the trial at Wadeye.

A Shared Responsibility Agreement (SRA) between the Commonwealth (through the then Department of Family and Community Services), the Northern Territory Government (through the Department of Chief Minister’s Office of Indigenous Policy) and the Thamarrurr Regional Council (located at Wadeye), was signed on 21st March, 2003 at a major ceremony conducted at Wadeye. The then Commonwealth Minister for Family and Community Services, Senator Amanda Vanstone, The Chief Minister of the Northern Territory, Clare Martin and the members of the Thamarrurr Regional Council were signatories to the SRA.

On 14 March 2006, some three years on from the commencement of the SRA, the consultant was contracted to undertake an independent evaluation of the COAG trial at Wadeye with a primary focus on “what’s working, what’s working well and what could be improved.” It was anticipated by the Office of Indigenous Policy Coordination (OIPC) that at this stage of the trial “most of the lessons learned will

relate to the processes of the trial, and capturing community and government perceptions of these processes will be an important part of the evaluation.” The OIPC also indicated that “though any interim evidence of outcomes should also be included, a detailed analysis of outcomes achieved is not required for this evaluation.”

The consultant was requested to provide a draft report for consideration by the partners and subsequently a final report, both of which were to be “short and concise”.

The History

Wadeye is located some 270km by air south west of Darwin, on the coastal lowlands between the Daly and Fitzmaurice Rivers. It is located within a region that was and continues to be the traditional country for 20 tribal groups whose traditional lands are situated within the region. First contact with European society started with the explorations of Captain King in 1819 but the complex and sophisticated social, economic and cultural systems of the Indigenous inhabitants of the region remained relatively unaffected up until the establishment of contact with non-Aboriginal influences in 1935.

The establishment of the town of Wadeye started with the founding of a Mission by the Catholic Church in 1935. Called Port Keats by the non-Aboriginal administration, its Aboriginal name was Wentek Nganayi. This area is often referred to as ‘Old Mission’. In 1938 the Mission moved to the present site of Wadeye, closer to a reliable water supply.

Services provided by the Mission attracted people from the tribal groups within the region, an increasing number of whom took up residence at Wadeye. These people were always considered by the traditional owners of Wadeye, the Kardu Diminin, as visitors with none of the rights that go with the ownership of Wadeye land. This same attitude prevails today.

In 1975, with the introduction of the Commonwealth’s policy of ‘self-determination’ for Indigenous people, a local council body called ‘Kardu Numida’ was established. Over the succeeding years the Council experienced many difficulties and setbacks in fulfilling its objectives of representing the people living at Wadeye and the delivery of services to the community.

In 1976, the land upon which Wadeye is situated and its surrounds, was granted as Aboriginal Land under the provisions of the Aboriginal Land Rights (NT) Act.

In 1994, following the breakdown of the Kardu Numida Council, a traditionally based institution of governance called Thamarrurr emerged and developed to the point where in March, 2003, the Thamarrurr Regional Council was established and given local government authority under NT Local Government legislation.

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2 Terms of contract signed between OIPC and WJG & Associates, March 2006.
The Thamarrurr structure is founded on the centrality of traditional clan affiliation and the role of Clan Elders and is seen by the people living at Wadeye and the surrounding region as a traditionally legitimate vehicle by which decisions can be made about their region, both traditional and contemporary, and through which the Indigenous people can manage their contact with governments and other agencies with whom they must deal in the wider community. The executive of the Council is made up of two elected representatives from each of the 20 clans with traditional estates located within the Thamarrurr region.

Today the Thamarrurr region has a population of some 2500 people with the population expected to double in the next 20 years. Wadeye is currently the sixth largest town in the NT and is the largest Aboriginal town in the NT. It is likely to become larger than Tennant Creek within a generation.

In 2003, Dr. John Taylor of the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, Australian National University, was commissioned by the partners to establish baseline data against which the impact of the trial and regional development could be assessed. The data established during that study constitutes the most quoted and reliable analysis available of the demography of the Thamarrurr region, along with profiles on housing, health, employment, education and involvement with the criminal justice system. Amongst other things, the study identified the following elements of the Wadeye profile:

- 100 people are aged over 50;
- 500 people are aged 25-50;
- 1500 people are aged less than 25; and
- 700 people are of school age.
- 60-80 babies are born into the community each year
- The population of the Thamarrurr region is likely to expand at a rate of 4% pa
- There are 144 habitable homes with an occupancy rate of 16 persons per dwelling.
- Another 122 dwellings will be needed by 2023 just to maintain the present level of occupancy. If a rate of 7 persons per dwelling was to be achieved, an additional 465 dwellings will be required by 2023.
- The vast majority of school age children are not attending school.
- Less than one-fifth of all adults are currently employed; and
- 82% of Aboriginal income is attributable to welfare sources (90% if CDEP is included).

The Process

As a consequence of the extended discussions between the NT Government and the population of Wadeye exploring the issue of developing a more customary mode of regional governance and the establishment of the Thamarrurr Regional Council, the Wadeye community accepted a proposal to become the COAG trial site in the NT.

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4 Ibid
The newly established Thamarrurr Regional Council entered into a Shared Responsibility Agreement (SRA) with the Commonwealth and Northern Territory Governments on 21 March 2003. (Attachment A)

The SRA is a formal agreement between three parties who are described in the agreement as “the Governments” – The Commonwealth Government, the Northern Territory Government and the Thamarrurr Regional Council. It is an agreement that is based on the following guiding principles:

- Each partner is equal and understands and accepts the role of others;
- The central role of the Thamarrurr Regional Council is recognised and partners understand and accept the differences of cultures;
- Responsibility for achieving outcomes and setting actions is shared;
- Partners recognise that priorities identified under the agreement will change over time;
- Thamarrurr will be the primary point of contact for undertaking activity in the region; and
- The development of Thamarrurr and the well being of its people will underpin all actions undertaken through the COAG Indigenous Community Coordination Project.

The stated aims of the SRA are as follows:

- To establish partnerships and share responsibility for achieving measurable and sustainable improvements for people living in the region;
- Support and strengthen local governance, decision making and accountability;
- Learn from a shared approach – identify what works and what doesn’t and apply lessons to future approaches both at the community level and more broadly;
- Ensure the provision of better coordinated and more flexible services to meet the needs, as agreed to by the Governments, of the Thamarrurr Region; and
- Concentrate on community capacity building by supporting the community’s assets capacities and abilities.

Following comprehensive consultations within the community and with the Commonwealth and NT Governments, three ‘key regional priorities’ were agreed and identified within the SRA. These were:

- Women and Families
- Youth; and
- Housing and construction.

The partners also agreed that education, training and enterprise development would also be essential for the well being of Thamarrurr and its people. As such, the partners recognised that any agreed actions to address the three key regional priority areas identified above, would also need to address agreed education, training and enterprise development needs.

The SRA established two mechanisms by which agreed actions would be developed and monitored. The first of these was the Tri-Partite Steering Committee (TSC) and the second was the establishment of three Priority Working Groups (PWGs)
corresponding to the three agreed regional priorities. The PWGs were to develop Action Plans which, when endorsed by the TSC, would be drawn together and attached as a schedule to the SRA and become part of the Agreement.

The Tri-Partite Steering Committee (TSC).

The TSC was established to:
- Guide and monitor negotiations on the partnership agreement;
- Negotiate with the community on establishing priorities and themes; and
- Develop an appropriate evaluation methodology agreed by all parties.

At the beginning of the trial, in March 2003, the TSC had a membership comprising of 4 from Thamarrurr, 4 from the NT Government and 4 representatives of the Commonwealth Government. (Attachment B) Although the Secretary of the Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services (FACS) (now FACSIA) was the designated ‘champion’ of the Wadeye trial, the NT Manager of FACS was the senior representative of the Department on the TSC. The Executive Director of the Office of Indigenous Policy in the NT Department of the Chief Minister was the senior representative of the NT Government. Given that the Chairman of the Thamarrurr Regional Council is nominated on a rotational basis at each meeting of the Council and is not a permanent position, the non-indigenous CEO of Thamarrurr was regarded as its senior representative on the TSC.

Although the first twelve months saw regular meetings of the TSC take place and it began operating in a way consistent with the intent of the SRA, it appears that over time, the operation of the TSC became less effective as a result of a number of factors.

Firstly, the TSC became the victim of conflicts of personality resulting in the disengagement of key personnel and agencies, including Aboriginal representatives from Thamarrurr. It was reported that during 2004/05 the TSC did not meet for a period of 8 months and that, as a consequence, the trial lacked direction and leadership. In these circumstances, there was little if any endorsement of work being undertaken by the PWGs or decisions being made in relation to issues arising from the implementation of the SRA that were properly the responsibility of the TSC. When the TSC was reconvened, the number of people attending the TSC grew to a point where there were as many as 30 people attending, some of whom appeared to be observers only. It was also the case that the attendance of Indigenous members of the partnership was decreasing. For example, of the 27 attendees at the TSC meeting of 9 December, 2005, none were Indigenous representatives from Wadeye. The notion of a TSC made up of senior representatives of the three partners exercising authority in relation to the trial was diluted to a point where the TSC became essentially an information sharing exercise. In the face of these developments, the senior representatives of the partnership recently took the step at the last meeting of the TSC held on 31 March 2006, to restrict attendance to two or three officers each in the hope that with fewer numbers, dialogue would be more focused and the time of the meeting might be used more productively.
Secondly, Thamarrurr complained that proposals that it had prepared and submitted to the TSC for comment and/or endorsement such as scoping papers, business plans and policy proposals were often ignored or left unaddressed from one meeting to the next. The Government partners, on the other hand, considered many of the proposals and initiatives put forward by Thamarrurr to be either draft documents, the status of which was unclear, or outside the framework of the agreed action plans and were, as a consequence, not confident in knowing how to respond to the Thamarrurr proposals. It was also stated by some government representatives that previously agreed agendas would appear to change with Thamarrurr pursuing new or different initiatives with highly placed personnel in government agencies which had not been endorsed by the TSC.

Finally, in terms of the TSC operations, it should be noted that during the course of the trial there have been a series of personnel changes within Commonwealth (and to a lesser extent NT) Government ranks of the TSC that resulted in the Thamarrurr participants having to accommodate a number of requests for a restatement of their position and priorities. This has caused considerable frustration and irritation with the process and a desire on the part of the Aboriginal participants to deal with and relate to ‘faces’ that are going to see the exercise through to completion. Maintaining continuity of personnel was seen by those developing the trial as an important factor and it is suggested by a number of the participants that the lack of continuity has resulted in a further distancing of the Indigenous partners from the process.

As a consequence of the difficulties experienced with the operation of the TSC and the lack of focus on agreed priorities, the TSC endorsed a series of new priorities at its meeting on 15 July, 2005. This was referred to as Phase 2 of the COAG trial and was initiated by Thamarrurr in a submission to the TSC. In comments given to the consultant following circulation of his draft report to the partners, Thamarrurr stated that a Phase 2 was suggested “in an attempt to breathe new life into a project which had been in the doldrums for a considerable period.” Phase 2 resulted in a greater number of priorities being identified than the original three agreed to in the SRA. The new priorities were listed as:

- Institutions and Economic Development
- Infrastructure and Construction
- Social Development
- Natural and Cultural Resource Management
- Communication and Engagement

Whether there was or is a wide spread understanding of the new priorities amongst the Indigenous partners in the trial is a moot point. During the consultant’s visit to Wadeye, for example, the Thammarrurr Regional Council Indigenous representatives placed considerable emphasis on the fact that the original three priorities as set out in the SRA had not changed as fas their community was concerned. No one interviewed at Thamarrur made mention of the new priorities. Indeed, it was not until the consultant was given access to documents by FACSIA late in the exercise that he became aware that a second phase of the trial had been put in place. The Darwin Urban Indigenous Coordination Centre (UICC) expressed the view that

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5 Correspondence from Thamarrurr Regional Council, 22 May, 2006.
“communication and understanding of the COAG trial and its activities to the Indigenous reps (sic) and community members has always been extremely poor. This was identified by the partners at various times and remains an issue that has not been addressed in any real way.”6 These comments reflect a broader concern held by both the NT and Commonwealth Government partners that the decisions and activities that take place within the COAG trial framework may not always be effectively communicated to the Indigenous representatives of Thamarrurr or community members.

As a consequence of the experience of the TSC over the past 3 years, all partners have recently expressed a desire to review the membership and responsibilities of the TSC in order that the trial can move forward on a more effective and productive footing. Recommendations as to how this might best be achieved were discussed by the partners at a roundtable conference convened by the consultant in Darwin on 19 April, 2006, the outcomes of which will be outlined later in this report.

Priority Working Groups

The PWGs were to work with the community to develop Action Plans to address the three identified key priorities and related issues. This was to have been achieved through the development of Action Plans in which the specific activities, timelines and allocated responsibilities of the partners would be identified. In addition, once the Action Plans were endorsed by the TSC, they were to be drawn together and attached as a schedule to the SRA.

Available evidence would suggest that only two of the Priority Working Groups (‘Women and Families’ and ‘Housing and Construction’) developed Action Plans which were submitted to and endorsed by the TSC in July 2003, some four months after the signing of the SRA. There was no endorsed Action Plan for ‘Youth’, although there was a draft prepared for consideration by the TSC. Based on the recollection of those involved, a ‘Youth Strategy’ was not finalised by the relevant PWG and was never submitted to the TSC for endorsement. In a document attached to the agenda of the TSC meeting of 31 March, 2006, it is recorded that in relation to the PWG on ‘Youth’, it had not functioned since 2003. In the same document it is reported that the PWG in relation to ‘Women and Families’ had not functioned “since approximately 2004.”It should be noted, however, that while the PWG on Women and Families had not functioned for some time, some of the activities that had been identified by that PWG in the initial year, were progressively put in place such as providing support to Palngun Wumangat (Womens Association), continuing with the sewing project and developing the screen printing project.7

With regard to the ‘Youth’ PWG, it is apparent that those involved with the attempts to develop strategies to address the Youth priority, came to recognise that there were a wide range of activities that could be defined to fall within the ambit of that priority. Based on the comments of those involved, it is clear that agreement was never reached within the partnership, either within the TSC or the PWG, as to what

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6 Correspondence with Darwin UICC, 19 May, 2006.
7 Ibid.
activities should be developed and as a consequence a youth strategy failed to emerge. Given the present situation of Wadeye in relation to youth violence and all that flows from it, it has to be a matter of some concern that one of the most critical of the agreed priorities within he SRA was unable to be effectively addressed by the partnership and was allowed to fall by the wayside so early in the process.

It should also be noted that during discussions with officers of the Wadeye Unit of FACASIA on 5 April, 2006, in Canberra, the consultant was informed that the Unit had developed a comprehensive ‘Youth Strategy’ for Wadeye. The strategy was drawn up to inform discussions across agencies and then to be presented as a package of options to Thamarrurr Regional Council and the Wadeye community for consideration. The consultant was later informed that implementing the Machinery of Government changes that merged OIPC and FACS into FACSIA, early in 2006, had resulted in a delay to the finalisation of the youth strategy. FACSIA has now indicated that the youth strategy will be further developed within OIPC and then submitted to the TSC for consideration and possible implementation.8

All in all, it is apparent that within the SRA framework, the priority area of ‘Youth’ had been allowed to fall between the cracks and is in urgent need of examination.

While the first 6 months of the trial saw the establishment of the 3 PWGs and the development of comprehensive Action Plans in relation to two of the three nominated priority areas, there is evidence that the partners began to initiate funding applications and responses outside the agreed framework of the SRA. Thamarrurr personnel began to initiate contact directly with funding agencies at a senior level with a series of initiatives and proposals which were perceived by others in the partnership to change agreed agendas. Government agencies and personnel initiated or responded to funding proposals that were often ad hoc or motivated by a desire to expend programme funds by the end of a financial year rather than in accord with identified activities within the Action Plans.

With the TSC endorsing a new set of priorities as set out above, the new structure now comprises some 6 PWGs – Education; Natural and Cultural Resource Management; Institutions and Economic Development; Infrastructure and Construction; Communication and Engagement; and Health (Attachment C). It should be noted, however, that there is no evidence of any Action Plans endorsed by the TSC having been formally attached as a schedule to the SRA since it’s signing on 21 March 2003.

In summary, although some of the PWGs are considered to have made progress, the overall consensus is that the PWGs have not been as effective as they should be and there is a recognised need within the partnership to rationalise their number, membership and objectives.

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8 Correspondence with FACSIA, 24 May, 2006.
Whole-of-government approach.

The new arrangements in Indigenous affairs have been described by Dr Peter Shergold, the Secretary of the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet as “a bold experiment in implementing a whole-of-government approach to policy development and delivery” and as “the biggest test of whether the rhetoric of connectivity can be marshalled into effective action.”9 The Wadeye trial has already provided some insight as to the challenges faced by those ‘on the ground’ who seek to translate the rhetoric of connectivity into practical action.

Streamlining

According to recent documentation submitted by the Thamarrurr Regional Council to the TSC for discussion on 31 March 2006, the burden of administering funds received from the Governments has increased during the trial rather than decreased. While acknowledging that the COAG trial may have delivered more financial resources to Wadeye than may otherwise have occurred, the Council expressed the view that “…there has been almost no change in the way in which governments engage the community and deliver services. The Trial was supposed to make delivery more streamlined and to assist the Council. In fact, there has been an increase in complexity for Thamarrurr, with a greater administrative burden than before”. Whereas Thamarrurr was administering around 60+ government funding agreements prior to the trial commencing, it now administers more than 90. In addition, the guidelines, reporting and acquittal requirements for these grants are many and varied, requiring Thamarrurr to dedicate significant administrative resources to the task.

Flexible Funding

One of the issues that arose in discussion with all partners was the inability to obtain access to flexible funding. The three partners see the development and availability of flexible funding as critical if streamlining is to occur. The need for access to flexible funding for rapid and targeted responses to clearly identified and agreed needs was highlighted by all partners. In the absence of flexible funding the notion of ‘single contract’ or ‘single chute’ funding cannot be achieved and there is little option for those working with the community other than to operate through the many programme silos that still dominate the funding and delivery of services to the community. The fact that Thamarrurr now have more funding contracts to administer rather than less would indicate that there is some considerable way to go before the intentions of the new arrangements, in so far as they relate to flexible funding and streamlining, are translated into practice at the community level.

Cooperation and Coordination

There are indications that the Commonwealth and NT Governments have moved to develop a more coordinated and cooperative approach in developing their responses to identified needs, most notably in relation to Education, Health and Housing. The Government partners, as a result of considerable work within the trial framework,

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9 Shergold P. A speech launching Connecting Government: Whole of Government Responses to Australia’s Priority Challenges, Management Advisory Committee Report No 4, Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, 20 April, 2004
have moved to lay the foundations for improved outcomes in these areas of need. In relation to Education and progress has been made in reviewing the funding agreement between the Commonwealth, NT Government and Catholic Education which it is anticipated will result in increased funding for education at Wadeye. There is also a funding commitment for the building of two secondary school classrooms for Stage 1 of the secondary school at Wadeye. A funding commitment of $11.3 million has also been made in relation to a significant upgrading of the Health Clinic over the next three years. With regard to housing there has been progress made through the completion of a cement slab prefabrication factory at Wadeye which will have the capacity to construct twelve houses per year. Funding for head works for a proposed new subdivision at Wadeye has also been secured through the NT Government.

Communication

Communication between Governments and within Governments is regarded as crucial to the success of a whole-of-government approach. The Wadeye experience would indicate that communications between the partners to the SRA has been mixed. All partners have indicated that the most consistent and direct communications were experienced at the beginning of the trial. As the trial has developed, however, there has been a reduction in effective communication across jurisdictional boundaries and in some cases within Departments. The causes may be many and varied but suffice to say that as communications began to break down so did the ability of the partners to maintain their combined focus on agreed priorities and to engage pro-actively and productively across jurisdictional lines on the many issues that flowed from the broad priority areas. This was to some extent exacerbated by the growing number of PWGs and sub-committees that were created to address the additional priorities endorsed by the TSC.

Lines of authority and allocation of responsibilities within the Commonwealth lead Department, FACSIA, have caused confusion and uncertainty between its national office, the NT office and the ICC field officers. It also caused uncertainty both within Commonwealth and NT agencies as to where the trial was being coordinated or run from within the Department. These are matters which have been acknowledged by FACSIA and were addressed at the roundtable held in Darwin on 19 April, 2006 and are commented on later in the report.

Leadership

One of the more common questions asked by all the partners was “who is in charge?” The SRA makes it clear that the three partners are to be treated as equal. While this principle is designed to address the ‘balance of authority’ within the partnership, it gives rise to the situation where no one person or agency is identified as the ‘leader’ of the group. There is no one person to whom the partnership can turn to take such action as may be necessary to keep the trial on track. This is seen as a contributing factor to the way in which the processes envisaged by the SRA have progressively deteriorated over the life of the trial. One option put forward was that a person, with the necessary authority, could be appointed to manage the trial on behalf of the partners. It was suggested that such a manager could more closely monitor the activities taking place within the COAG framework and impose a discipline upon the partners to ensure the trial proceeded consistently with TSC endorsed actions. In the
absence of such management, some felt that the TSC would again become too remote from the day-to-day action to provide the kind of direct supervision the partners were seeking. On the other hand, the NT Government has expressed the view that the authority should lie with the senior partner representatives on the TSC who should impress upon participants the need for discipline around priorities, strong leadership and management of implementation team work.

**Expectations.**

In hindsight, it is apparent that there were differing expectations held by Thamarrurr and the Commonwealth and NT Government partners. Thamarrurr is of the view that it seriously underestimated the amount of work and the ongoing commitment involved in having the trial at Wadeye. It was a newly formed body with little understanding of what a COAG trial might entail. It also participated believing that the combined and coordinated resources of both governments would result in early and visible improvements in the wellbeing of the people and the infrastructure of the town and surrounding region. These expectations were reinforced by visits by the Prime Minister, The Chief Minister of the NT and other Ministers over the past three years. Their expectations have not been realised and there is frustration and disappointment regarding the lack of visible and tangible outcomes on the ground.

The Commonwealth and NT Governments, on the other hand, foresaw that considerable preliminary and planning work would be necessary before any major improvements would be seen on the ground. They were also aware of the considerable lead times associated with the budget processes of government. This ‘mismatch’ of expectations goes some way to explain why the perceptions of the partners as to whether ‘progress’ is being made, can differ. What might be regarded as an ‘achievement’ by government personnel living outside the community may not be seen as a tangible improvement by people living at Wadeye. Thus, there are often differences of opinion within the partnership as to the pace of reform and the tangible outcomes that can be demonstrated as a consequence of the trial.

There are, however, areas about which the Thamarrurr Regional Council have very real expectations for early improvement but which they feel have yet to be appropriately addressed by the partnership.

**Community Safety**

There is little doubt that Thamarrurr had anticipated that the need for community safety and the reduction of violence, particularly with gangs, would be addressed and resolved at an early stage of the trial. That the issue of safety and youth violence continues to be a matter of immediate need and is seen to have worsened over the life of the trial, is the source of both disappointment and anger within the community and to many of the people involved in the trial. The provision of police in adequate numbers is seen by those living at Wadeye to be their most immediate need. This was confirmed by a women’s delegation from Wadeye appearing before the TSC in October 2005. To put the matter in perspective, the police establishment at Tennant Creek, a town with a similar number of citizens as Wadeye, is in the order of 30 officers. At the time of the consultant’s stay at Wadeye in March, 2006, there were 3
officers, all of whom were operating under extreme pressure. This is not a sustainable situation and the community is seeking an urgent and immediate response from the Government partners. All personnel involved with the trial recognise that the stationing of more police at Wadeye will not, of itself, resolve the endemic social dislocation and community violence which Wadeye has had to endure for many years. However, there is a strong view held, that without adequate policing and the restoration of law and order at Wadeye, none of the initiatives currently underway or planned to improve the wellbeing of the community are capable of succeeding. While there is an environment of fear and violence women are not prepared to take their babies to the clinic, children will not go to school, families are reluctant to obtain food from the store and the already unacceptable levels of overcrowding can be escalated dramatically in one night, due to the housing stock being vandalised and trashed by waring gangs. The importance of resolving the issue of community safety at Wadeye cannot be overstated.

**Overcrowding / Health.**

With regard to housing, the community has seen 4 houses for Indigenous occupants built over a period of three years. During that same period some 15 houses were made uninhabitable for periods of up to three months through gang violence and an additional 200 babies were born into the community. In these circumstances, there is little prospect of the chronic overcrowding being reduced in the foreseeable future despite the efforts being made under the COAG trial. Overcrowding is the most frequently identified cause of ill health within Wadeye and in this regard it is instructive to read the Health Priority Working Group report to the TSC on 31 March 2006. (Attachment D)

“In response to the recent Human Rights and Equal Opportunities visit to Wadeye, Commissioner Tom Calma was provided with an overview of the current health situation, together with the community aspirations regarding the use of the OATSIH funding. The following was highlighted:

- Statistics from the Taylor Report 2003 were quoted which reveals a Death Rate 18% higher than the NT Aboriginal Death Rate, which in turn is 3.4 times the Non Aboriginal rate. The Median age of death is 46yrs compared to 78yrs for non Aboriginal Australians
- There is a high incidence of infectious disease related to the poor environmental health / housing situation eg. Epidemic gastroenteritis, skin infections, recurrent respiratory tract infections, chronic otitis media with associated hearing loss. There is also a high incidence of conditions not seen in non-Indigenous communities which have significant long term morbidity & mortality eg Epidemic Post-Streptococcal glomerulonephritis, Bronchiectasis, Rheumatic Heart Disease. House occupancy rates are increasing, so is likely these conditions will also increase.
- Ongoing violence in the township is adding to the levels of overcrowding and high incidence of disease. The fear of violence also lowers people’s ability to access services. There was a recent incident of a mother being too scared to visit the clinic with her baby, when she finally did the baby was in a critical condition and was evacuated to Darwin.
- Recent Growth Assessment and Action figures demonstrate a high percentage of children in the 0-5 age range who are stunted, wasted, anaemic and/or
underweight. The World Health Organisation states that “provided there is no severe food shortage, the prevalence of wasting is usually below 5%......prevalence between 10-14% are regarded as serious” The percentage of children that are wasted in Wadeye is 12% (compared to 3% in Australia as a whole).

Given the dire situation outlined above, Thamarrurr Regional Council has raised the question as to why Governments can’t respond to the crisis currently facing the town of Wadeye in the same way as Governments have responded to the Ache disaster in Indonesia and cyclone devastated Innisfail in Queensland. There is a strong feeling within the Council that unless a ‘crisis’ approach is adopted by both the Commonwealth and NT Governments there will be little improvement to the health and wellbeing of the community for years to come.

Land Tenure

The future of housing and other developments at Wadeye will be dependent upon the claims by the traditional owners of the town site, the Kardu Diminin, being recognised and resolved through the granting of appropriate land tenure arrangements. This is an issue that has been under consideration for the period of the trial, but due to apparent difficulties with the NLC, Thamarrurr has not been able to progress the situation. The NLC was to have developed a plan for granting Section 19 leases under the Aboriginal Land Rights (NT) Act to meet the needs of the Kardu Diminin, but this has yet to eventuate. In any event the traditional owners of the town area have indicated that until their land needs have been appropriately recognised and dealt with, they will not approve any further house blocks or town development at Wadeye. This issue was nominated by Thamarrurr as an immediate priority at the meeting of SRA partners on 19 April 2006 and is discussed later in this report.

Homelands / Rural subdivisions

The population in the Thamarrurr region is expanding rapidly and is expected to reach more than 3000 by the year 2020. Wadeye is currently on track to become the fifth largest town in the NT, overtaking Tennant Creek. Given the social problems now endemic at Wadeye, it is not a socially viable option to continue to build houses at Wadeye for the members of the 20 different clan groups currently living within the town. Provision of more housing in homeland areas is seen by the community as imperative to ease the social pressure and is regarded as the only sustainable solution to overcrowding at Wadeye. The expectation of Thamarrurr is that the Commonwealth Government will recognise the need to establish housing on homelands and will facilitate the movement of people back to their traditional estates where, through the combined resources of the SRA partnership, appropriate accommodation will be provided along with upgraded regional infrastructure such as roads and communications.

It might also be noted that Thamarrurr seeks to promote the notion that the movement of people back to their traditional country should be seen in many cases, not as a movement to homelands but more as a desire to establish rural subdivisions or areas in much the same way as Darwin has a surrounding rural area which is serviced by roads and other infrastructure, including public transport. Many of the estates of the
19 clans outside Wadeye are relatively close to the town when compared to homelands in Central Australia or Arnhem Land and should be regarded as the rural areas surrounding Wadeye which would be used as the service centre. The subdivision at Manthape, where eight houses were built on Yek Maninh clan lands some 4 kms from Wadeye, prior to the COAG trial, is held up as a successful example of what can be achieved.

Lessons Learned

The experiences of the partnership over the past three years and the findings of this evaluation suggest that there are a number of lessons that have emerged. These are:

- Expectations of the partners need to be clarified and mutually understood at the outset and reviewed periodically through out the process.
- The identification of priorities needs to be specific, mutually understood and limited to an achievable level.
- The SRA should encourage the development of achievable deliverables that result in visible outcomes on the ground.
- The processes require a discipline on the part of the partners if they are to be effectively implemented.
- There is a need for an ‘authorised’ person (or group) to manage the process on behalf of the partnership. Someone (or some body) needs to be in charge of the trial.
- There is a need to work within the capacity of the Council and the community when developing strategies for delivering services.
- Developing effective communication links between the partners and within agencies is essential for the whole-of-government approach to succeed.

There has been a great deal of time and effort expended by a number of dedicated people who have sought to make a positive difference at Wadeye. That they have experienced difficulties of the kind outlined in this report trying to give effect to a new way of doing business should not detract from their endeavours. The COAG trial is exactly that – a trial in which experimentation and innovation is being applied in a very complex and demanding environment. That said, however, it remains the case that the processes are in need of review and there is a need to modify the current structures if the trial is to improve the way in which services are delivered and improvements in the social and economic wellbeing of the community are to be achieved.

The SRA was the vehicle by which a partnership between the Thamarrurr Regional Council and the Commonwealth and NT Governments would operate in a whole-of-government way to achieve positive outcomes for the benefit of the community. It set out procedures and established mechanisms to facilitate the achievement of these objectives. The findings in this report would indicate that while there was a period in which the procedures and mechanisms were closely followed, over time there has been a loss of focus by the partners and a consequent loss of confidence in the COAG processes on the part of the Wadeye community. These findings are generally endorsed by the partners and although there are differences of opinion as to how or
why this trial has lost some of its direction, there is agreement that a new and more focused approach is necessary.

The way forward.

Following a stay of 4 days at Wadeye (27-30 March, 2006) and interviews with representatives of the partners at Wadeye, Darwin and Canberra, the consultant convened a roundtable conference in Darwin on 19 April, 2006. A wide range of stakeholders were represented including the Secretary of FACSIA, the Executive Director of the Office of Indigenous Policy (Chief Minister’s Department) and Indigenous representatives and the CEO of the Thamarrurr Regional Council. (See Attachment E.)

The purpose of the conference was twofold:

1. To consider the preliminary findings of the consultant;
2. To consider the way forward in light of the findings.

The preliminary findings put to the conference by the consultant included:

- That the SRA mechanisms and processes were not being implemented effectively;
- That the TSC had lost focus and become largely an information sharing forum;
- That the PWGs were not operating as intended under the SRA;
- That there was confusion as to the current priorities and different interpretations of the key actions needed to address priorities;
- That there was an absence of flexible funding;
- Departmentalism and programme silos continued to dominate;
- Funding applications and Government responses were often ad hoc and outside the framework of the COAG trial;
- The burden of administration for Thamarrurr was now greater than before the trial began with 90+ funding agreements;
- There was a loss of confidence at Wadeye in the COAG process;
- There was a lack of communication both vertically and horizontally within and across government jurisdictions;
- There was some confusion within the partnership as to the roles and responsibilities of some FACSIA participants in the trial;
- There was a lack of focus on achievable deliverables;
- There was a need for policy and legislative action in relation to land tenure at Wadeye, homelands and local government; and
- There was a need for leadership as no one could identify who was in charge.

Although participants had their own views as to how the trial had come to this point, none argued against the validity of the findings as presented. Participants accepted that despite the good will and commitment that all stakeholders had demonstrated over the past three years, there had been a ‘loss of traction’. There was a need to review the situation, build on lessons learned and move forward.
In considering the way forward, Thamarrurr outlined to the conference what it now saw as its immediate priorities. These were:

- A rationalisation of the management structure for the trial;
- Action on resolving the land tenure issues at Wadeye; and
- Safety.

Thamarrurr made it clear that all future action in relation to improving the wellbeing of the community would hinge on the successful resolution of community safety and the recognition of the land owners of Wadeye, the Kardu Diminin, through the development of an appropriate land tenure arrangement that respected their rights and at the same time would allow a local governance authority to operate effectively in the town area. They suggested that the SRA/COAG partnership should focus on and give priority to these matters over the next 12 months.

In response, the Secretary of FACSIA agreed that there needed to be a sharpening of focus on the priorities and that the management of the trial needed restructuring. He expressed the view that perhaps the trial had tried to be too all-encompassing and that it had a better chance of success if the partners concentrated on a smaller number of priorities. In relation to the management of the trial, he indicated that the NT Manager of the Office of Indigenous Policy Coordination (OIPC) would now be the senior FACSIA representative in relation to the trial and that the NT Manager would have line responsibility for the COAG trial and would have direct access to the Secretary in Canberra. In addition, the Secretary endorsed the proposal to refocus on the two priorities nominated by Thamarrurr – Safety and Land Tenure- and committed his department to working in a whole-of-government way with the other partners to achieve appropriate outcomes within the twelve month timeframe.

The NT Government’s senior representative for the trial endorsed the view that there needed to be a rationalisation of priorities and management of the trial. He suggested that the TSC be reduced to three people - the NT manager of OIPC, the CEO of Thamarrurr and the Executive Director of the Office of Indigenous Policy in the NT Chief Ministers Department. The conference endorsed that view and agreed that any restructuring of the PWGs would be addressed by the newly constituted TSC.

In proceeding with these changes, the conference noted that the activities already underway and planned within the GOAG framework would continue and be monitored by the TSC and through the relevant Commonwealth Secretaries Group in Canberra and the NT Chief Executives Committee in Darwin.

The two most immediate priorities identified and endorsed by the partners at the conference – Safety and Land Tenure – do not at this stage have any agreed indicators or indices against which progress could be assessed. As the intention is to address the two priorities within a twelve month timeframe, it will require an early determination of indicators, specific actions to be undertaken, the delegation of responsibility for those actions and the development of a mechanism for reporting effectively and regularly on those actions to the TSC. All other activities undertaken within the COAG framework will need to have similar requirements.
In looking to the way forward, mention has already been made of the baseline study undertaken by Dr John Taylor of CAEPR at the ANU in 2004, which provided a significant amount of data and analysis against which future developments at Wadeye and in the Thamarrurr region could be assessed. The data upon which the study was based was provided, in large measure, by the relevant Commonwealth and NT Government departments and agencies. It was, however, material that was not regularly collated or presented on an ongoing basis by those departments and agencies and required the dedication of some considerable resources and time to extract in a format relevant to the Wadeye trial. Consequently, it would be of considerable advantage in terms of the ongoing evaluation of the trial if, where possible, the original data could be used as indicators for priorities and regularly updated with a view to ensuring a timely and valid basis for comparison when the trial is finally evaluated in 2008. To this end, the newly constituted TSC should place early importance on analysis of the critical and most instructive points of the existing data to support the strategy and indicators for the next part of the trial. Careful consideration is required as to how such material might be regularly updated, by whom and in what format, so that the relevant material will be available and current as the trial progresses. One suggestion would be to contract CAEPR, or such other appropriate body, to undertake the task of maintaining and updating the original data set through to the final evaluation in 2008. Alternatively, depending on the performance data required, a formal agreement might be reached with the respective provider for regular updates.

Conclusion

This report has concentrated more on process than outcomes. It is intended that there will be a second evaluation undertaken in 2007/8 that will analyse in detail the outcomes of the Wadeye trial.

It is clear that there was a general consensus amongst the partners to the SRA that the current evaluation provided a timely opportunity to review the processes set down under the Agreement and to take stock of the effectiveness and efficiency of those processes in the light of experiences to date.

As reflected by decisions taken at the conference held in Darwin on 19 April, 2006, the partners were as one in accepting that the TSC and PWG structure required modification. Their decision to modify the structure to make the processes less cumbersome and to be more sharply focused on fewer priorities is likely to lead to an improvement to the processes examined in this report. But these are decisions that relate only to process and will not, of themselves, bring relief to the people of Wadeye in respect of safety, land tenure, overcrowding, health, school attendances or employment. The processes recently endorsed must be used as a vehicle to deliver to the Thamarrurr region and its people the services and resources that will enable them to see immediate, relevant and tangible improvements to their wellbeing.
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Appendix A
Organisations and Individuals Consulted
This is a first-stage report on the COAG Trial in Cape York, Queensland; it was commissioned by the Office of Indigenous Policy Co-ordination (OIPC) and prepared by Urbis Keys Young. The research was conducted in June-July 2006. As well as consideration of some relevant background documents, the study involved consultation with a range of relevant government and community stakeholders. Short visits were made to five Cape York communities which were involved in the Trial, namely Wujal Wujal, Hope Vale, Lockhart River, Aurukun and Napranum.

The decision to conduct the COAG Trials and the choice of the Cape York as the Trial site for Queensland were made in 2002. The lead Australian Government agency for the Trial has been the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR), while the lead Queensland agency has been the Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy (DATSIP).

Over the period of the Cape York COAG Trial there have been other major initiatives affecting the Cape’s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities – for example, a range of State Government initiatives under the Meeting Challenges, Making Choices strategy, introduced in 2002 and involving a whole-of-government approach. Over this time there have also been significant changes in the Australian Government’s Indigenous affairs arrangements – in particular the abolition of ATSIS/ATSIC and the establishment of the Office of Indigenous Policy Coordination (OIPC), and the transfer to DEWR of responsibility for management of the Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) program.

Although the Queensland Government was pursuing major initiatives on Cape York during the period of the Trial, and although there were many examples of active State/Commonwealth cooperation, stakeholders who were consulted during this study saw the Cape York COAG Trial itself as essentially an Australian Government (and specifically a DEWR) initiative. DATSIP was actively involved in a range of innovative activity on the Cape over the period, but it did not ‘badge’ this work as part of the Trial. While there was close contact between DEWR and DATSIP (for example, DEWR staff worked out of DATSIP’s Cape York Strategy Unit in Cairns), conduct of the COAG Trial as such did not involve a State/Commonwealth partnership.

Various stakeholders identified what they saw as achievements or positive outcomes resulting from the COAG Trial in Cape York. These included:

- greater Australian Government interest in and engagement with Indigenous communities on Cape York;
- numbers of initiatives involving both State and Commonwealth funding and support;
- development of several consultative mechanisms involving various combinations of Australian Government, State Government and local representation - for example, Australian Government representation on the steering committee for Queensland’s Meeting Challenges, Making Choices strategy and on the Partnerships Queensland CEOs Forum;
- practical and financial support for a number of projects for Cape York in general or in particular Cape York communities – for example, development in Lockhart River of a commercial crayfishing venture;
- ongoing Australian Government support for Cape York Partnerships and for the establishment of the Cape York Institute for Policy and Leadership;
- demonstration of a practical model for working with communities that involved:
  - a substantial, on-the-ground presence by a public servant with sufficient expertise and seniority to work effectively with and on behalf of the community.
executive summary

- continuity in this role
- a degree of autonomy and capacity to make decisions
- access to a flexible pool of funds
- strong departmental support
- active co-operation with other Australian and State Government agencies.

- On the other hand there was criticism of what was seen as a lack of clear objectives for the COAG Trial and of a strategic approach to achieving long-term changes.

- While there have been a number of positive achievements related to the Trial, it cannot be said that the Cape York Trial has at this stage resulted in significant change in the ways that communities experience their dealings with government agencies. As community representatives describe them, such dealings remain complex, and confusing, and often frustrating, fragmented and unduly legalistic.

- At the end of 2005 DEWR announced that it would no longer act as lead agency for the Cape York Trial, given that since the Australian Government’s introduction of new Indigenous Affairs arrangements in mid-2004 the OIPC had increasingly played a key whole-of-government role. Since late 2005 there has not been any activity specifically relating to the Cape York Trial, and many stakeholders have accordingly concluded that the Trial is over. However, there has been no formal end to the process. There is a need for a COAG or Australian Government decision on whether there is to be any further action on the Cape York Trial, and clear communication of this to all relevant parties.
1 Introduction

This is an initial report on the Cape York COAG Trial. The study was commissioned by the Office of Indigenous Policy Co-ordination (OIPC) and was conducted by Urbis Keys Young.

1.1 The Cape York COAG Trial

In April 2002 the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) announced that a new approach to working with Indigenous communities would be trialled in up to ten regions across Australia. The Australian, State and Territory Governments were in agreement that both management processes and outcomes needed to be improved; the proposed new approach to Indigenous policy and service provision involved two key principles, as follows:

- governments must work together at all levels and across all departments and agencies;
- Indigenous communities and governments must work in partnership and share responsibility for achieving outcomes and for building the capacity of people in communities to manage their own affairs.

Queensland’s Cape York was chosen as one of the COAG Trial sites.

For each COAG Trial there is a lead agency acting on behalf of the Australian Government and another representing the relevant State or Territory Government. For the Cape York Trial the lead Australian Government agency was the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR); the lead agency for Queensland has been the Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy (DATSIP).

In July 2004 (that is, some time after the COAG Trials commenced) the Australian Government abolished the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Council (ATSIC) and
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Services (ATSIS), and established the Office of Indigenous Policy Coordination (OIPC) with responsibilities relating to a whole-of-government approach to Indigenous affairs. It also set up Indigenous Coordination Centres (ICCs) in regional locations across Australia (usually locations where there had previously been ATSIS offices). Staff of the ICC office in Cairns have subsequently been involved in various aspects of the Cape York Trial, as have OIPC officers based in Canberra and in Brisbane.

1.2 This Study

Through the OIPC the Australian Government has commissioned independent reviews of all of the COAG Trials. The plan is for a two-stage evaluation process, with a first stage focused on learning from the Trials and contributing to their future development, and the second stage (scheduled for 2007-08) intended to involve a more comprehensive assessment of trial outcomes and achievements.

This report represents a first stage review of the Cape York COAG Trial. The report was intended to provide information on the history of the Trial, processes, lessons learnt to date, and possible next steps. The study brief specified that the report should be relatively short, and should focus in particular on what is working well and on what could be improved.

Conduct of the study involved short visits to each of the five Cape York communities (Wujal Wujal, Hope Vale, Lockhart River, Aurukun and Napranum) which were the primary focus of DEWR’s work relating to the Trial. In each community Urbis Keys Young’s researcher spoke with people such as Council members, Council staff, and representatives of other service providers. Face-to-face or telephone consultations were also conducted with representatives of Australian Government agencies (DEWR, OIPC, the Cairns ICC) and
Queensland Government agencies (DATSIP, Department of the Premier and Cabinet, Department of Communities) based in Brisbane, Cairns or Canberra.

The background documentation available to the study team was limited. However it was possible to refer to relevant documents such as the earlier evaluation report on the Queensland Government’s *Meeting Challenges Making Choices* initiative, the Shared Responsibility Agreements (SRAs) that have been signed with communities participating in the Cape York Trial, and some background materials made available by DEWR’s Queensland office.

Appendix A lists the stakeholders consulted by the study team, either face-to-face or by telephone. The consultations undertaken in relation to the Cape York Trial were notable for the diversity of opinion that they revealed; for example there were both some strong supporters of the Trial, and other people who were quite critical or dismissive.
2 History of the Cape York Trial

2.1 Choice of the Trial Site

Cape York was originally chosen as the COAG Trial site in Queensland because of its large Indigenous population and because a number of significant and innovative activities were already occurring there – for example initiatives involving the organisation Cape York Partnerships (CYP). On the Cape, it was said, there was thus ‘something to build on’.

Originally the intention was that the Queensland Trial would cover the whole of Cape York (which was an ATSIC region). However, during 2003 DEWR and the Indigenous Communities Coordination Taskforce (ICCT)\(^1\) came to the conclusion that this was too large and too diverse an area for effective conduct of the Trial. It was accordingly decided to focus the Cape York Trial on five communities in particular – Wujal Wujal, Hope Vale and Lockhart River on the eastern coast of the Cape, and Aurukun and Napranum on the west coast. While there were Trial-related activities that did relate to the Cape York region overall, work with specific communities was generally limited to these five. People consulted during this study were not familiar with the rationale for the choice of these particular communities.

Given the range of innovative government, community and private sector activity taking place in the Cape York region over recent years, the Cape was (as one stakeholder described it) ‘a crowded playing field’. In the words of another observer, the COAG Trial on the Cape was ‘not the main game’. One result for the present study was that the task of identifying activities or outcomes that related specifically to the COAG Trial was far from

\(^1\) The Indigenous Communities Coordination Taskforce, which was responsible to the Secretaries Group on Indigenous Issues, played a significant early role in promoting a whole-of-government approach and, in effect, getting the COAG Trials off the ground. Among other things the ICCT had the task of defining the emerging roles and responsibilities of the lead agencies.
straightforward. When consulted about the Trial, both government and community representatives often found it hard to recall and to disentangle the various players and roles involved. Turnover in staff within both community and government bodies was another factor contributing to limited memory of the Trial and of the people directly involved with it.

2.2 History of the Trial

2.2.1 Relevance of State Government Initiatives

In understanding the way in which the Cape York Trial developed, it is essential to note that over recent years the Queensland State Government has been pursuing its own significant initiatives in relation to the Cape’s Indigenous communities. One key event was the preparation by Justice Tony Fitzgerald, in 2001, of what became known as the Cape York Justice Report. That report examined many of the problems being experienced by the Cape communities, with particular emphasis on issues relating to the misuse of alcohol. The Queensland Government in 2002 responded to Fitzgerald’s report with an innovative strategy (*Meeting Challenges Making Choices*) that was designed both to improve conditions in communities and to establish more effective relationships between communities and State Government departments and service providers. A whole-of-government approach was proposed, with all Queensland agencies working in partnership with each other and with communities. Primary responsibility for implementation of *Meeting Challenges Making Choices* (MCMC) was given to DATSIP which, as noted above, was also nominated as the lead State agency for the Cape York COAG Trial.

In the words of the evaluation report later prepared on MCMC, the strategy included:

…the development of alcohol management plans; transfer of canteen licences to independently managed, local entities; treatment and rehabilitation services; the
development of a Family Violence Strategy; and creation of a statutory basis for Community Justice Groups.

... community development plans; negotiation tables; and action plans agreed between communities and the Government. The Government Champions program was adopted by Government in parallel to the MCMC policy.

... simplified arrangements with Indigenous communities; reforms to community governance legislation coupled with a Community Governance Improvement Strategy; improved recruitment, training and retention of public sector personnel working in the communities; establishment of the Cape York Strategy Unit; and a Cape York budget strategy involving identification of the quantum of resources applied to endorsed priorities and pooled funding.

These changes were to be supported by strengthened service delivery in the areas of Child Protection, Health, Education and Training (including youth diversion, skill and leadership development and facilitating pathways to employment), Economic Development and Land and Sustainable Resource Management. Housing was added as a ninth domain of action when a revised MCMC Implementation plan was endorsed in October 2004.

The Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy led the implementation of MCMC.

As this extract from the MCMC evaluation makes clear, alcohol management was one of a broad range of inter-related approaches embodied in the strategy.

As well as the five Cape communities targeted by DEWR through the COAG Trial, a further twelve communities were included within the scope of MCMC (namely Bamaga, Cherbourg, Doomadgee, Injino, Kowanyama, Mapoon, Mornington Shire, New Mapoon, Palm Island, Pormpuraaw, Seisia, Umagico, Woorabinda and Yarrabah).
Initiatives within MCMC, or parallel to it, which have been taken by the Queensland Government on Cape York over recent years and which had important implications for the COAG Trial include the following:

- appointment of a State Government ‘champion’ for each Indigenous community (this was a departmental head or other senior State Government officer with specific responsibility for consulting and working with the given community on behalf of the Queensland Government);

- establishment of Negotiation Tables as a mechanism for regular consultation between communities and government (these were normally held every few months, and chaired by the relevant champion);\(^2\)

- establishment by DATSIP of the Cape York Strategy Unit (CYSU) as a mechanism to improve consultation and co-ordination among relevant Government agencies and between Government and community;

- appointment of an Interchange Officer for each community (a person seconded from a State Government Department, working within the CYSU, and responsible for day-to-day community liaison and consultation);

- development and implementation of Alcohol Management Plans (AMPs) for most Cape communities.

Other governmental issues that have been important (and in some cases difficult) for the Cape York communities in recent years have been significant changes to the CDEP arrangements (now administered by DEWR) and changes in the Local Government framework within which communities operate.

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\(^2\) Negotiation Tables had earlier been trialled in three Cape York communities, through Cape York Partnerships.
2.2.2 State/Commonwealth Relationships

Conduct of this review made it clear that, since the COAG Trial began, there has been a significant degree of cooperation between DEWR and other Australian Government agencies on the one hand, and a range of Queensland Government bodies on the other, in relation to Indigenous affairs on the Cape. For example, as explained below, there has been joint State/Commonwealth membership of various relevant committees and working groups. Numbers of those consulted during the study commented on the positive and co-operative relationships that developed between Queensland and Australian Government agencies.

On the other hand, despite DATSIP being identified as the lead Queensland agency for the COAG Trial, there was little if any DATSIP activity which was specifically ‘badged’ as part of the Trial. The point was made that, although the Queensland Government was making large commitments of funds for work on Cape York over this period\(^3\), DATSIP had no budget allocation for work on the COAG Trial as such. DATSIP was actively engaged in a range of work across Cape York, but its officers appear to have seen all this as part of its general departmental role, including its responsibilities for *Meeting Challenges Making Choices* and other State Government initiatives. While DEWR focused on the five ‘Trial communities’ previously listed, DATSIP did not treat those communities differently from others. As a result, the parties whom the study team consulted largely saw the *COAG Trial* as an Australian Government (and specifically DEWR) activity rather than as a Commonwealth /

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\(^3\) The Queensland Government’s significant investment in MCMC and related policies included the following:
- some $13.5 million in MCMC funding over four years
- the Partnerships Queensland Incentive Pool - $5 million over two years
- Indigenous health package - $69 million over four years
- Alcohol Demand Reduction program - $12 million over four years (plus $2 million from the Commonwealth)
- Indigenous child safety - $31 million over three years
- significant funding for Balkanu Cape York Development Corporation and other economic and enterprise development projects
- Nurturing Families initiative - $1 million
- $1 million in additional support for the operation of Community Justice Groups.
State partnership. By the same token, the Queensland Government was clearly supportive of the Trial and saw its own strategies as complementary.

2.2.3 DEWR’s Approach

In developing its lead agency role for Cape York, DEWR made reference to broad objectives for the COAG Trials as outlined by the ICCT, as follows:

- tailor government action to identified community needs and aspirations;
- coordinate government programs and services were this will improve service delivery outcomes;
- encourage innovative approaches traversing new territory;
- cut through blockages and red tape to resolve issues quickly’;
- work with Indigenous communities to build the capacity of people in those communities to negotiate as genuine partners with government;
- negotiate agreed outcomes, benchmarks for measuring progress and management of responsibilities for achieving those outcomes with the relevant people in Indigenous communities;
- build the capacity of government employees to be able to meet the challenges of working in this way with Indigenous communities.

Conduct of the study did not reveal any further set of objectives relating specifically to the Cape York Trial. However, one of DEWR’s project officers for the Trial reported having had a clear brief to work on a whole-of-government, systematic approach to addressing Indigenous disadvantage and the problems of government in servicing remote communities. It was also said that DEWR recognised the difficulty of solving deep-seated problems within a short timeframe, and placed an emphasis on underlying factors such as
the need for improved and better integrated infrastructure, and capacity building within
Indigenous organisations and communities.

In order to pursue its role as lead Australian Government agency, DEWR in 2003 appointed
a departmental officer to work in Cairns on the planning and implementation of relevant
activities. This DEWR representative (over time there were four separate people involved)
was based in DATSIP’s Cape York Strategy Unit (CYSU) in Cairns – an arrangement which
numbers of stakeholders described as appropriate and useful in ensuring clear State
Australian Government communication.

Rather than seeking to set up any separate consultation structures for the purpose of the
Trial, DEWR chose to work through the systems established by the Queensland
Government. For example, DEWR’s project officers usually took part in the Negotiation
Tables for the five Trial communities.

The longest-serving of DEWR’s Cairns-based project officers took up her post in the start of
2004 (that is, some six months before the abolition of ATSIC/ATSIS and the creation of
OIPC), and continued to work in Cape York until late 2005. Her role focussed on the three
east coast communities of Hope Vale, Wujal Wujal and Lockhart River. A second officer
was appointed at much the same time, to work with the west coast communities of
Aurukun land Napranum; however she remained in this role for only about six months⁴.
(Before making these two appointments DEWR had had two other officers, one after the
other, based in Cairns to work on the COAG Trial.)

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⁴ This officer then took up a position with the ICC in Cairns. One effect of this is that stakeholders interviewed by the
study team in mid-2006 were even more confused than they might otherwise have been about what was and was
not related to the COAG Trial.
The officer who worked with the east coast communities commented that her role had been to listen to communities and to share responsibility with them. She saw herself as an ‘independent broker’ whose task was to ‘make connections’ and to support, (and where possible identify funding sources for) worthwhile community initiatives. She was also a ‘facilitator’ aiming to identify and overcome barriers to action (‘How can we make this happen?’)

There was generally positive comment on the role played, over a two-year period, by this Cairns-based DEWR officer who worked with the communities of Wujal Wujal, Hope Vale and Lockhart River. Drawing together comments and observations from various sources, we can say that the role involved the following characteristics:

- This was a dedicated DEWR position, and one that involved working ‘on the ground’ with particular communities.
- The Department appointed a senior and experienced departmental officer to play this role.
- The officer enjoyed a substantial degree of autonomy (comparable, it was said, to that of a Regional Manager), backed up by direct communication with and very strong support from the Departmental Secretary.
- The fact that the officer remained in position for two years gave a reasonable degree of continuity to her work.
- The officer took a flexible and collaborative approach to her role.
- In Cairns she was co-located with the staff of DATSIP’s Cape York Strategy Unit.
- DEWR sensibly chose to ‘piggy-back’ on community consultation and communication arrangements set up by the State Government.
There was access to the COAG Trial Flexible Funding Pool, which simplified the task of funding financial support for appropriate initiatives.

A number of people noted that DEWR had taken its role as lead agency seriously, that it had devoted substantial resources to the Trial, that it had appointed senior members of staff to work on the Trial, and that these staff had had strong support at the most senior level of the Department.

2.2.4 Change in Lead Agency Arrangements

Towards the end of 2005 the Secretary of DEWR announced that his Department would no longer be acting as the lead Australian Government agency for the Cape York Trial. This was because of OIPC’s growing role in representing the Australian Government in a whole-of-government context. The DEWR officer who was at that time still working in Cape York accordingly returned to Canberra.

Since late 2005 there has been no activity explicitly related to the Cape York COAG Trial. DEWR’s expectation was that the Cairns ICC would take over its role in the Trial, but for various reasons this has not happened. The ICC has relationships with the communities of Cape York as part of its core business, but it has had no additional contact with DEWR’s five Trial communities, and has not undertaken any activity that it describes as part of the Trial. DATSIP’s work across the Cape continues but, as previously explained, none of DATSIP’s activities is regarded as relating specifically to the COAG Trial.

In consequence, a number of the people interviewed in the course of this study took the view that the Cape York Trial effectively finished in late 2005 (though the comment was also made that presumably the Trial would officially end only if COAG made a decision to that effect).
2.3 Community Involvement in setting Objectives and Priorities

DEWR’s intention was that priorities for action would be identified by communities participating in the Trial through their development of Community Action Plans, their participation in Negotiation Tables (see below) and the development of Shared Responsibility Agreements (SRAs). It was also reported that Cape York Partnerships, and its Director Noel Pearson in particular, were important early sources of information and advice.

Given the limited documentation that has been available to the study team, it is difficult to know to what extent there was active community involvement in determining the priorities which DEWR and its dedicated officers sought to pursue. The comment was made, for example, that DEWR initially aimed to follow a broad, whole-of-government agenda, and that health, education and employment (and the linkages among these) were key concerns. It was also said, however, that after the 2004 establishment of OIPC (which had explicit whole-of-government responsibilities), DEWR officers tended to give greater emphasis to the Department’s own Indigenous programs and to other matters that fell within the DEWR portfolio. Nevertheless it seems clear that the DEWR project officers appointed at the start of 2004, for example, did adopt an approach that sought active community consultation on key issues and needs.

2.4 Government and Community Commitments

Conduct of this review suggested that neither governments nor communities made very clear or explicit commitments relating to the COAG Trial in Cape York. It seems that DEWR’s project officers saw their role as being to improve communication and
understanding between communities and government, to promote inter-government and inter-agency cooperation and, as facilitators or advocates, to find ways of supporting worthwhile community projects and activities. It seems fair to conclude, however, that outside DEWR there was limited understanding of government objectives or commitments even in these broad terms.

DEWR’s five priority communities had no explicit obligations relating to the Trial as such (unless the broad-brush SRAs involving Hope Vale and Lockhart River – see section 3.3. – are seen in this light). At the level of individual projects there were implicit or explicit community commitments to ‘play their part’ – for example in pursuing the commercial fishing project at Lockhart River (see section 4.1.1). It can also be said that communities on the Cape have responded to the opportunity to work with the Queensland Government champions, and to take part in the work of Negotiation Tables – adopted by DEWR as part of its consultation strategy.
3 Working Together

3.1 Australian Government, Queensland Government and Community Roles

Over the period of the COAG Trial, as explained in section 2 of this report, DATSIP in particular was responsible for a range of activities relating to planning and service provision for the communities of the Cape. For example the Interchange Officers based in the CYSU worked closely with their designated communities, and Negotiation Tables were held on a fairly regular basis. While undertaking some initiatives that related to the Cape as a whole, DEWR’s project officers were particularly concerned with the five ‘Trial communities’ and on identifying ways in which they could access government support for projects or initiatives that were important to those communities.

People in the communities (especially Council members) were involved in ongoing consultations with both State Government and DEWR representatives, and took part in the Negotiation Tables (typically co-chaired by the local Mayor).

3.2 Coordination Mechanisms

One stakeholder who was familiar with the history of the Cape York Trial commented that it had involved streams of activity at both regional and community level. It was said that at a regional level the focus was on inter-government and inter-agency communication and co-operation, as evidenced in numbers of joint State/Australian Government funding arrangements and in numbers of committees, working groups and the like which involved both State and Commonwealth representation.
Examples of the these arrangements included DEWR representation on the steering committee for the MCMC Strategy, and Australian Government representation on what is now called the Partnerships Queensland CEOs Forum and the corresponding Senior Officers group. DEWR, Queensland Education and the Australian Government Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) have been involved in the Cape York Education Reference Group, which sought to tackle long-standing education problems such as the very small numbers of Indigenous students completing Year 12.

As a result of its lead agency role, DEWR was instrumental in the establishment of a Commonwealth Regional Managers forum for Queensland, which still meets on a regular basis. A so-called ‘hundred day planning agenda’ was set up to provide a government/community forum for regular monitoring of current initiatives in Cape York and for assessing new project ideas and proposals; this process involves OIPC, DEWR, Cape York Partnerships and other relevant organisations.

There were some stakeholders who felt that this collaborative effort had fallen off somewhat over the past year or so. Others regarded it as a valuable legacy of the Trial; it was said to be the first ‘the first time that all these senior people came together like that’. ‘The Trial did move us further down the whole-of-government track’, said a senior Commonwealth officer.

As noted elsewhere, there have been numerous examples of programs or projects on Cape York jointly funded by Queensland and Australian Government agencies.
3.3 Shared Responsibility Agreements

There have to date been relatively few Shared Responsibility Agreements (SRAs) signed with communities on Cape York. There have been just three SRAs involving the five communities which were targeted by DEWR for the COAG Trial.

In December 2003 an SRA was signed between Lockhart River Community Council and Community Representatives, the Australian Government (through DEWR) and the Queensland Government (through the Department of Employment and Training). The Agreement is expressed in broad terms and has the following objectives:

- establish partnerships and share responsibility for achieving measurable and … improvements for people living in the Community;
- support and strengthen local governance, decision making and accountability;
- learn from a shared approach – identify what works and what doesn’t and apply future approaches both at the community level and more broadly.

A Schedule to the Lockhart River SRA lists the following community priorities:

- To develop their outstations and improve access by road and sea.
- Break the unemployment cycle.
- Celebrate and teach traditional ways.
- Improve housing and community facilities.
- Have the best possible education for their children and build their capacity.

Under this SRA the government partners committed to providing $80,000 to fund two local people to undertake drug and alcohol diversion activities; there were no explicit obligations on the part of the community or families/individuals.
Another SRA (with objectives expressed in the same broad terms) was signed in December 2003 between Hope Vale Aboriginal Community, the Australian Government (through DEWR) and the Queensland Government (through the Department of Premier and Cabinet, or DPC). The community priorities set out in a Schedule to the Hope Vale Agreement are as follows:

- **Stronger community governance and improved community pride and cohesion.**
- **Reduced alcohol and substance abuse.**
- **Improved housing and water.**
- **Reduced suicide and stress and improved environmental, physical and mental health.**
- **Reduced crime, violence and disputation, and improved observance of the law.**
- **Improved school attendance and educational attainment, and improved skills.**
- **Improved sport, recreation and cultural opportunities, especially for young people.**
- **Enhanced employment and enterprise opportunities and economic participation.**
- **Resolution of land related issues.**

Again no obligations on the part of the community or families/individuals were specified. The Australian Government agreed to provide in-kind support to:

> Facilitate improved relationships between and across agencies, organisations and communities, share information regarding what does and doesn’t work and why. Negotiate agreed priorities and actions.

Another SRA was signed in October 2005 between the Aboriginal Community of Hope Vale, the Queensland Police–Citizens Youth Welfare Association, the Australian Government (through OIPC) and the Queensland State Government (through DPC). The signatories to this Agreement included the Prime Minister and the Queensland Premier.
The objectives of the SRA are again expressed in the same broad terms as the two 2003 agreements mentioned above, but in this instance the Schedule refers to Government responsibilities relating to refurbishment of a local community hall, purchase of sport and recreation equipment, and encouragement of other bodies ‘to provide or support youth related activities in Hope Vale’. The Hope Vale Shire Council also commits to contributing funds for the refurbishment of the hall, as well as ensuring community participation in the sport and recreation steering committee, encouraging regular school attendance, and encouraging local people to become community sport and recreation officers to assist in running the program. Families and individuals are to contribute to the initiative in various ways, such as ensuring that the hall and sport and recreation equipment are kept in good repair.

Some of the stakeholders consulted believed that the early SRAs, even if ‘light on content’, had an important symbolic role in reflecting the concept of shared objectives and commitment. It was clear at Lockhart River, for example, that community representatives still attached considerable importance to the 2003 Agreement. The comment was made that the Lockhart River SRA provided a plank for the subsequent development of the important Lockhart River Community Development Plan 2005-08.

### 3.4 Knowledge of and Support for the Trial

As other sections of this report indicate, the COAG Trial did not have a very high or clear profile among the range of programs and strategies that have been pursued in Cape York over recent years. The study team found relatively few people who had a clear understanding of the Trial or strong opinions about it.

We have noted that, in general, DATSIP did not see itself as jointly undertaking the Trial with DEWR; on the other hand it was certainly interested and supportive, as reflected in the
fact that DEWR officers were based in its CYSU office in Cairns. The various consultation arrangements that are mentioned in section 3.2 of this report also reflect broad agency support for the principle of collaboration.

It is not easy to generalise about community responses to the Cape York COAG Trial. On the one hand Urbis Keys Young spoke with some community representatives who referred very positively to the role played by DEWR’s dedicated officers. At Lockhart River, for example, it was said that the DEWR officer who worked with the community through 2004-2005 had been very helpful in a number of ways. The point was made that she was prepared to make extended visits of a week or more to Lockhart River, rather than simply flying in for a day or two as was so common. This meant that she got to know the community and its issues well, and was thus able to present an informed perspective to other agencies. She was also willing to visit at times that suited the community, rather than simply telling them when she would be there. She had played a role that was of great value to the community by helping them find their way through the complexities of departmental responsibilities, requirements and potential funding sources. Since her departure there had been nobody to work with in the community in this fashion. ‘Not one person came up here’, it was said, since the DEWR officer went back south; someone on the spot was needed to ‘link us up again’.

On the other hand there were community representatives elsewhere who took the view that DEWR and its people had achieved little, or that any progress had been slow and modest. There were some who saw the COAG Trial as simply another manifestation of governments being all talk and no action. (‘All these planeloads of people coming in to talk’; ‘All talk, talk, talk’).
4 Lessons Learnt

4.1 Successes and Limitations

4.1.1 Specific initiatives

One stakeholder who had had fairly close involvement with the Cape York Trial saw its achievements in terms of promoting better communication between the Australian and Queensland Governments around Indigenous affairs, and supporting ‘some good projects’ at both regional and community level. A number of relevant projects are listed below.

- Together with DATSIP and the Queensland Department of Employment and Training, DEWR funded the development of Local Jobs for Local People, a strategy designed to identify strategic employment opportunities for Indigenous people in Cape York.

- Through the Flexible Funding Pool, DEWR was able to offer funding support in 2005 and 2006 for the Cape York Strategic Leadership Program originally developed by Education Queensland, building on a successful pilot scheme undertaken in 2004.

- DEWR supported and helped promote use of the Cape York Digital Network, and funded a marketing position for the Network.

- Together with the Department of Family and Community Services, DEWR was a key funder of the Family Income Management project in the communities of Hope Vale, Aurukun, Coen and Mossman Gorge.

- DEWR funded an initiative designed to develop innovative solutions to the need for better accounting services available to communities and organisations across the Cape (the Cape York Accounting Service Solutions).
• DEWR made a three-year commitment of funds to support the work of the Indigenous business organisation Balkanu, underpinning the role played by private sector companies such as Westpac and Boston Consulting Group.

• DEWR supported and served on the Steering Committee for a major Apunipima study of health issues and needs on Cape York, funded by the Department of Health and Ageing.

• At Napranum, DEWR was one of several agencies involved in an initiative to provide pre-vocational training for prospective Indigenous employees of the Comalco mining enterprise and to support emerging Indigenous businesses. This work led to the establishment of the Weipa Multipurpose Facility, which is jointly funded by a number of Australian and State Government agencies.

• At Lockhart River DEWR supported a workshop designed to explore and promote possibilities for developing appropriate commercial enterprises, and has subsequently been one of several government agencies which have assisted in developing the Puchi Wu commercial crayfishing venture.

• In Aurukun DEWR worked with the Queensland Department of Development and Innovations (DDI) on issues relating to a proposed tourism venture involving use of a cruise boat. Other organisations such as DEST, Westpac and Balkanu were also actively involved in various aspects of this project.

• Another achievement that some stakeholders saw as very important was a program to support senior-year students to attend boarding schools in locations such as Cairns, Rockhampton and Brisbane. This is now the responsibility of the Transition Support Unit. It was reported that there are currently some 300 Cape York students enrolled in such schools with the aim of completing secondary education. This was described as a
significant initiative and one to which DEWR’s officers had made a valuable contribution.

A DEWR representative reported that during the period of the Trial the Australian Government – chiefly through DEWR, OIPC and Indigenous Business Australia – provided more than $7 million in additional funding for initiatives such as those listed above.

Since the start of the Trial there have been over 300 STEP employment placements on Cape York, nine Indigenous Small Business Fund contracts signed, and around 20 Indigenous Community Volunteer projects supported.

4.1.2 Cape York Partnerships and the Cape York Institute

It was reported that early in the period of the COAG Trial the Australian and Queensland Governments decided jointly to work with Cape York regional organisations (in particular Cape York Partnerships), which had played an active role in support of alcohol management initiatives and which were developing other innovative approaches designed to address such issues as welfare dependency. In the context of the COAG Trial, the Australian Government agreed to share with Queensland the cost of funding the work of CYP. One of the significant developments that grew out of work by CYP was the establishment of the Cape York Institute for Policy and Leadership, which is again funded by both the Australian and Queensland Governments, as well as through the corporate sector. Both DEST and Education Queensland continue to be represented on the Board of the Institute. One of the stakeholders consulted by the study team referred to the Institute as ‘one of the most successful initiatives from the COAG Trial’.

In turn the Cape York Institute has played a key role in developing proposals around welfare reform, and the Australian Government has now earmarked funds for trialling welfare changes in four Cape York communities – namely Hope Vale, Aurukun, Coen and Mossman
Gorge. The Australian Government has also provided funding to support community leadership programs in these four communities.

DEWR and OIPC also funded CYP to develop and implement a Work Placement Scheme that is designed to provide Cape York young people with ‘real life’ work experience in the fruit picking industry in Victoria and South Australia, together with intensive job-seeking assistance when they return home.

The COAG Trial also provided the opportunity for Indigenous Enterprise Partnerships (IEP)\(^5\) to approach the Australian Government with a view to co-operating in various activities such as support for establishment of Indigenous business enterprises. Through OIPC the Australian Government continues to provide some funding for IEP’s Cape York activities.

4.1.3 Broader impacts

Broader impacts or outcomes of the conduct of the Trial, as some stakeholders saw it, included:

- promoting a ‘meeting of minds’ between the State Government and the Australian Government on the need for systemic change in relationships with Indigenous communities
- bringing an informed Australian Government presence to negotiations and consultations on community needs, and the possibility of a clear and prompt response
- direct community engagement on behalf of the Commonwealth – for example through participation in the Negotiation Tables
- helping ‘demystify’ government for communities.

\(^5\) A Cape York body which involves contributions both from local Indigenous leaders and from private sector corporations such as Westpac and Boston Consulting
4.1.4 The Trial in general

Among stakeholders consulted during this study there was some criticism of the ‘fuzziness’ surrounding the concept of the COAG Trials, including the Cape York Trial. It was argued, for example, that despite the use of the term ‘trial’, there was neither any clear hypothesis being examined nor any particular strategy being tested; it was not necessarily clear, even to people quite closely involved, what the Trial was expected to achieve. A related point made by some of those consulted was that many of the activities undertaken as part of the Trial seemed ad hoc or opportunistic: ‘there didn’t seem to be any sort of strategic approach’. It was said that this was not just a theoretical objection: there was a ‘real opportunity cost’ in undertaking an initiative of this kind but doing it in an ill-considered or ‘half-baked’ fashion. On the other hand, as previously noted, DEWR argued that its approach was designed to address underlying factors important for achieving change, such as infrastructure, employment and community capacity building.

The point was also made that there had been very limited level of contact among those responsible for the various COAG Trials across Australia. Apart from a ‘fantastic’ early workshop in Canberra, organised under ATSIS, those involved in the Cape York Trial reportedly had little communication with those working on the Trials elsewhere.

In relation to the change in its role at the end of 2005, DEWR representatives noted that the Department informed all key parties including DATSIP, the Mayors and Councils of the Trial communities and other Indigenous organisations, and that the relevant Senate Estimates statement by the Secretary of the Department was widely reported. However, it appeared from the community visits undertaken during this study that there was inadequate communication with communities about the changed arrangements and their implications. In mid-2006 there were some community representatives, for example, who were still
waiting to see whether the last DEWR officer who had worked on the Trial would be replaced.

4.2 New Ways of Doing Business?

The Cape York Trial generated some new ways of doing business in the form of joint Commonwealth/State working groups, consultative committees and the like, as outlined in section 3.2. It can also be argued that in some communities the Trial helped to reinforce the Negotiation Table arrangements introduced by the Queensland Government, by providing meaningful Australian Government involvement in these.

On the other hand it was noted that the Trial did not involve any breakthrough in terms of the ‘silos’ within which each government agency operates. There was no progress, for example, towards joint contracts or an integrated approach to funding; these remain major barriers on the road to effective collaboration and coordination.

A number of the community representatives consulted in the course of the study emphasised their frustration with what they saw as government inefficiency and unresponsiveness. Some believed, for example, that over time government agencies were becoming less helpful and more rigid and legalistic. Communities had to deal with complicated contracts and ‘a whole folder of documents’ even in relation to minor issues or small (eg $500) grants.

Community perspectives on the Australian Government’s new Indigenous affairs arrangements seemed to be largely negative. There was uncertainty about what role the ICCs were intended to perform; did they, for instance, have any influence over other Australian Government agencies? if not, what function did they have? ATSIC/ATSIS, by

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6 Several of those consulted made the point that it was by no means an easy task for a lead agency like DEWR to take on a role as facilitator of a whole-of-government approach.
comparison, was described as having been better informed and more realistic, more flexible, more interested, and more accessible. Government agencies in general were seen as weak on consultation (‘They always think they know what’s best for us’; ‘They come in and tell us what’s going to happen’).

4.3 Value of DEWR’s Approach

As noted in subsection 2.2.3 of this report, numbers of those consulted during the study saw value in the kind of approach that was reflected in DEWR’s work in 2004-2005, particularly in the east coast communities of Hope Vale, Wujal Wujal and Lockhart River.

Key aspects of this ‘model’ of working with Indigenous communities included the following:

- a substantial, on-the-ground presence by a public servant with sufficient expertise and seniority to work effectively with and on behalf of the community;
- continuity in this role;
- a degree of autonomy and capacity to make decisions;
- access to a flexible pool of funds;
- strong departmental support;
- active co-operation with other Australian and State Government agencies.

4.4 Unintended Consequences

There was nothing specific identified as an unintended or unexpected result of the Cape York Trial. As we have seen, however, there was a sense in which the Trial was to some extent ‘lost’ among the range of other activities, strategies and changes which were affecting the Cape York communities at the time.
5 Next Steps

5.1 Is the Cape York COAG Trial Finished?

As earlier noted, numbers of the people consulted during this study believed that the Cape York Trial had effectively come to an end with the change in DEWR’s role in late 2005. In the eastern coast communities, however, some people were unsure of what the current situation was and whether DEWR would be appointing any more project officers in the future.

Given that there is current uncertainty about the future of the Cape York Trial, it is not possible to say whether there will be value in a later and more detailed evaluation of the Trial.

5.2 Remaining Challenges

As the previous subsection implies, one outstanding task is for COAG or the Australian Government to make it clear – especially to the relevant communities – what further action, if any, there is to be on the Cape York Trial.

There are also, of course, the ongoing challenges of improving inter-governmental, inter-agency and community/government communication and of making genuine progress towards more adequate coordination in the planning and delivery of services. Numbers of those consulted during this study identified issues that they believed would have to be addressed in this regard – for example the need for much simpler contracts (possibly common across agencies) and for progress towards pooling of funds from various sources.
Some of the State Government stakeholders who were consulted identified lessons for the future which they believed had emerged from experience with the Cape York Trial. These included the following:

- a trial or pilot approach requires a clearly defined hypothesis and methodology;

- effective Commonwealth/State liaison requires clearly defined and shared priorities;

- central agencies need to play a significant role in the identification of these shared priorities and the development and maintenance of collaborative arrangements.
Appendix A – Organisations and Individuals Consulted
appendices

**Australian Government**

*Department of Employment and Workplace Relations*

Mike Burris, Deputy State Manager Queensland  
Marian Pettit, former COAG Trial project officer  
Jane Whyte, former COAG Trial project officer  
Alison Stanley, former State Manager Queensland

*Office of Indigenous Policy Coordination*

Diane Hawgood, State Manager Queensland

*Indigenous Coordination Centre, Cairns*

Mike Fordham, Senior Executive Manager  
Robert Willmett, Deputy ICC Manager  
Michael Bible

**Queensland State Government**

*Department of Premier and Cabinet*

Anna Moynihan, Executive Director Social Policy  
Ros Walker, Director Social Policy

*Department of Communities and Disability Services*

Michael Hogan, Assistant Deputy Secretary

*Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy*

Rodney Goodbun, Strategic Policy and Partnerships Directorate (Brisbane)  
Wayne Dodson, A/g Regional Director (Cairns)  
Alan Butler, A/g Deputy Coordinator, Government Coordination officer  
Rose Manzini, A/g Assistant Regional Director FNQ Region

*Cape York Strategy Unit*

Paul Loney, Manager
appendices

Cape York Communities

Hope Vale
Lee Robertson, CEO
Eileen Deemal-Hall, Interchange Officer (CYSU)

Wujal Wujal
Cr Desmond Tayley, Mayor
Cr Keith Rush, Deputy Mayor
Cr David Jackson
Peter Opio, CEO

Lockhart River
Cr Johnson Chippendale, Mayor
Cr Dorothy Hobson
Peter Buckland, CEO
Denise Hagan, Executive Director Community Development, DATSIP

Aurukun
Grant Crossley, A/g CEO
Charlie Walker, CDEP consultant
Charlie Street, Arts program coordinator
Andrew Shaw, Deputy School Principal
John Longhurst, Interchange Officer (CYSU)

Napranum
Peter Solly, CEO
Robert Barry, Finance Manager
Diane Nona, CDEP Coordinator

Other Stakeholders

Ian Mackie, Principal, Western Cape College
Review of the COAG Trial in the APY Lands

Prepared for: Office of Indigenous Policy Coordination

March 2006
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Executive summary

- This is a first-stage report on the COAG Trial in the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yakunytjatjara (APY) Lands in South Australia. The report was commissioned by the Office of Indigenous Policy Coordination (OIPC) and prepared by Urbis Keys Young. The research was conducted between October and December 2005, and chiefly involved study of background documents and consultation with government and community stakeholders.

- The decision to conduct the COAG Trials and the choice of the APY Lands as the likely South Australian trial site were made in 2002. Work on the APY Lands Trial began in earnest in early 2003. The lead Australian Government agency for the Trial has been the Department of Health and Ageing (DoHA). The lead South Australian agency was originally the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and Reconciliation, but since early 2004 this role has been played by the Department of Premier and Cabinet (DPC).

- The period of the COAG Trial has coincided with other significant developments affecting the APY Lands – in particular, State Government initiatives that followed two coronial inquests into deaths on the Lands. There have also been important changes in the Australian Government’s Indigenous affairs arrangements – in particular the abolition of ATSIS/ATSIC and the creation of the Office of Indigenous Policy Coordination (OIPC). This report discusses three main aspects of the COAG trial – the Mai Wiru (regional stores policy) project, the PY Ku (retail transaction centres) project, and the evolution of consultative arrangements including the establishment of a new regional forum – Tjungungku Kuranyukuta Palyantjaku (TKP) – which has Australian Government, State Government, community and service provider representation.

- Since 2002 there have been important developments in South Australia in mechanisms to promote intergovernment and interagency collaboration, in Indigenous services generally and for the APY Lands in particular. These include:
  - the TKP, which serves among other things as a forum for discussion of issues relating to the COAG Trial;
  - an Aboriginal Lands Taskforce (with both South Australian and Australian Government representation), which has a strong focus on the Lands and has produced an APY Lands Strategic Plan supported by an additional $25 million in funding from the State Government;
  - a regular (4-6 weekly) meeting of the South Australian heads of Australian Government agencies (chaired by OIPC);
  - appointment of a Regional Services Coordinator for the Lands, reporting to DPC, OIPC and the TKP;
  - a strong working relationship between DPC and OIPC, both with a whole government agenda.

These represent significant ‘new ways of doing business’, though not all are necessarily related to the conduct of the COAG Trial.

- The COAG Trial in the APY Lands has to date been more strongly associated with the Australian than with the South Australian Government, and it is identified with DoHA in particular. South Australian agencies have been supportive of Mai Wiru and PY Ku in a number of ways, but these still tend to be seen as DoHA projects. Through the Aboriginal Lands Taskforce and its AP Lands Strategic Plan, the SA Government has strongly emphasised a whole of government approach, but it has not presented this as an aspect of the COAG Trial. At present DPC evidently finds it effective to pursue co-operation with the Australian Government through its relationship with OIPC rather than through the COAG Trial as such.

- In the early stages of the Trial, government/community relationships were affected by controversy and instability within the APY Lands Council and Executive. Establishment of the TKP Regional Forum early in 2005 has inaugurated a period of more effective
government/community/service provider relationships, although the TKP’s role and mode of operation are still evolving. For example, there is some concern among community organisations that Government members tend to dominate the TKP agenda and proceedings.

- Positive aspects of the COAG Trial from a community perspective have included progress on the Mai Wiru and PY Ku projects. More broadly, the COAG Trial has raised the profile of the Lands and has resulted in greater community access to influential decision-makers. The establishment of the TKP and other consultative mechanisms are also steps forward. Limitations have included relatively slow progress on (admittedly complex) COAG projects, uncertainties about project funding, and the fact that many problems in interagency and government/community relationships remain.

- Stakeholders identified various possible lessons learnt from conduct of the COAG Trial to date, including these:
  - It would have been valuable to those responsible for the trial in the APY Lands to have more contact with people involved in the trials at other sites.
  - Funding of projects and services is traditionally difficult to approach on a whole of government basis. However, the South Australian approach of having DPC oversee other agencies’ spending of the $25 million allocated for work under the AP Lands Strategic Plan seems to have worked well to date.
  - Promoting intergovernmental and interagency collaboration is a challenging task that tends to require the influence and the experience of senior public servants.

- A tripartite Shared Responsibility Agreement that was prepared in 2003 was never signed on behalf of the APY communities. Some stakeholders would like to see a replacement agreement (probably a Regional Partnership Agreement) put in place to provide a clear, agreed framework for conduct of the Trial for the future.

- Longer-term evaluation of the APY Lands COAG Trial will naturally raise the issue of just what its objectives have been. At this point it is difficult to identify objectives beyond the broad goals of the COAG Trials in general (improved delivery of services, improved collaboration among government agencies and new ways of doing business) and the particular objectives of the Mai Wiru and PY Ku projects. If a new Regional Partnership Agreement is developed, it may spell out some further objectives or possible measures of success.

- Both the Mai Wiru and PY Ku projects have objectives and timelines that can be reviewed in the course of a summative evaluation in 2007-08. It would be useful over the next couple of years if those responsible for the COAG Trial made specific efforts to identify and document relevant community impacts, whether positive or negative. It would also be desirable to identify and document specific changes in ‘ways of doing business’ in the Lands, outcomes that have resulted from these, and the ways in which the COAG Trial has influenced or contributed to them.

- The establishment of the OIPC and the role which it is playing in the APY Lands COAG Trial represents a new element in the mix. Some stakeholders believe that creation of the OIPC has brought into question the continuing value of DoHA’s role as lead Australian Government agency; others are keen to see DoHA continue to lend its ‘muscle’ to the Trial and to the improvement of services on the Lands. Issues around the relationship between the OIPC and the lead Australian Government agencies for the COAG Trials are of course not unique to the APY Lands. Over coming months there will possibly need to be a wider review of OIPC/lead agency relationships, to clarify roles and responsibilities and to ensure the most effective possible Australian Government contribution to improved services and more effective partnerships.
1 Introduction

This is a first-stage report on the COAG Trial in the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) Lands in South Australia. The report was commissioned by the Office of Indigenous Policy Coordination (OIPC) and prepared by the social research firm Urbis Keys Young.

1.1 The COAG Trial in the APY Lands

The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) announced in April 2002 that a new approach to working with Indigenous communities would be trialled in up to ten regions across Australia. The Australian, State and Territory Governments agreed that both management processes and outcomes clearly needed to be improved; the proposed new approach to Indigenous policy and service provision involved two key principles:

- governments must work together at all levels and across all departments and agencies; and
- Indigenous communities and governments must work in partnership and share responsibility for achieving outcomes and for building the capacity of people in communities to manage their own affairs.

The APY Lands in the far north of South Australia, which have a substantial Indigenous population and which were seen as having significant needs in terms of service delivery and community development, were selected as one of the COAG Trial sites.

For each COAG trial there is a lead agency acting on behalf of the Australian Government and another representing the relevant State or Territory Government. For the Trial in the APY Lands the lead Australian Government agency is the Department of Health and Ageing (DoHA); DoHA appointed a first Project Officer to work on the trial in March 2003. Initially the lead South Australian Government agency was the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and Reconciliation (DAARE), but in early 2004 that responsibility passed to the Department of the Premier and Cabinet (DPC).

The APY Lands Council has formal responsibility for representing the APY communities. During 2003 and 2004, however, the Land Council experienced a number of problems which limited its capacity to work effectively on the Trial with the government partners. From early 2005 the Directors of a group of community-based service providers in the Lands have joined the APY Executive and representatives of the Australian and South Australian Government as members of a new body known as Tjungungku Kuranyukuta Palyantjaku (TKP) Regional Council (see below).

In July 2004 the Australian Government established the Office of Indigenous Policy Coordination (OIPC) with responsibilities relating to a whole of government approach to Indigenous affairs. It also set up Indigenous Coordination Centres (ICCs) in numbers of regional locations across Australia (usually locations where there had previously been offices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Services, or ATSIS). Adelaide-based officers of the OIPC and ICC staff-members at Port Augusta have subsequently been actively involved in various aspects of the COAG Trial in the APY Lands.

1.2 This study

The Australian Government has decided to commission, through the OIPC, independent evaluations of all of the COAG trial sites. The plan is for a two-stage evaluation process, with a first stage focused on learning from the trials and contributing to their future development, and the second stage (scheduled for 2007-08) involving a more comprehensive assessment of trial outcomes and achievements.

1 RFQ for evaluation of the COAG Trial in the APY Lands, p1.
This report is concerned with the first stage review of the COAG Trial in the APY Lands. It involved two main tasks:

- study of a range of background materials provided by OIPC, DoHA, DPC and other parties; and
- consultation with a range of peoples who have been involved in various aspects of the trial in the APY Lands, including representatives of relevant government agencies and the leaders of community organisations in the Lands.

The research was conducted between October and December 2005. Among other things the researchers visited Adelaide, Alice Springs and Umuwa for face-to-face discussions. They also had the opportunity of a short visit to Mimili to get a sense of the early implementation of the PY Ku project (see section 2.5).

Appendix A lists people consulted by the study team, either face-to-face or by telephone. Appendix B lists the key written materials that were available to the study team.

The RFQ for the study specified that this report should be relatively short, and should focus particular on what is working well and on what could be improved. The report was intended to provide information on the history of the trial in the Lands, processes, lessons learnt to date, and possible next steps.
2 Conduct of the COAG Trial in the APY Lands, 2002-2005

2.1 The APY Lands

The RFQ for this evaluation provides a good introduction to the APY Lands (often called the AP Lands) and their communities, in the following terms:

The AP Lands cover some 103,000 square kilometres in the far north west of South Australia. The AP Lands are defined and protected under the Pitjantjatjara Land Rights (PLR) Act (SA) 1981. The title (freehold) to the land is held by Anangu Pitjantjatjara (the AP Council), an incorporated body established under the PLR Act.

The AP Lands are part of a much larger country of Ngaanyatjarra, Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara (NPY) people which covers some 350,000 square kilometres of South Australia, Western Australia and the Northern Territory, and is known as the ‘cross border’ region.

Communities in the cross border region share strong language and cultural ties that operate irrespective of State borders. The communities are; Pipalyatjara, Kalka, Murputja Homelands, Amata, Pukatja (Emabela), Kaltjiti (Fregon), Mimili, Watarru and Iwantja (Indulkana). The communities range in size from approximately 650 at Pukatja down to small homelands groups.

The estimated total population in the AP Lands is 2,600. Population is comparatively young with 34% aged under 15 and only some 9% over 55 years (source: Nganampa Health Council). The totally NPY population in the cross border region is estimated to be 5,000. There is a considerably mobility throughout the whole region, for family, ceremonial, access to services, and other purposes.

The AP Lands Council and its Executive have responsibilities under the Pitjantjatjara Land Rights Act 1891 as amended 2005. This Act establishes the APY Executive as the governing board of Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (the body corporate of which all Anangu are members), with responsibility for carrying out the functions and the day-to-day business of Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara in relation to the management, use and control of the lands\(^2\). The larger communities of the Lands have Community Councils elected by local residents.

Among those who were consulted in the course of this study there was general agreement that at the time the COAG Trial commenced the communities of the APY Lands were suffering from a wide range of social and economic problems and disadvantage. This was still the case in August 2004, when Mr Tim Costello of World Vision Australia and Professor Lowitja O'Donoghue visited the APY Lands as advisors to the South Australian Government. In their subsequent report they referred to:\(^2\)
… the problems of poor living conditions in the APY Lands communities characterised by unemployment, substance abuse particularly petrol sniffing, inadequate housing capacity, low attendance at school, boredom and inadequate youth initiatives, high violence and crime, rubbish and lack of care for the communities and most noticeably great fears for personal safety and evidence of much protective wiring bars and security.

Mr Costello and Professor O'Donoghue also referred to serious clan and factional conflicts within the Lands. They noted that the range of problems affecting the Lands were well known and had been documented in various earlier reports, including the reports of two Coronial inquests into deaths related to substance abuse. Various people consulted during the present study commented in negative terms on the situation in the Lands at the start of the COAG Trial; one, for example, referred to a situation of ‘chronic neglect overlaid with internecine politics’. Another commented that a decline in investment in the Lands by previous South Australian governments meant that ‘we were starting from a low base’. Even apart from these various problems, the APY Lands represent a challenging environment in light of their large geographical area, remoteness and cultural and linguistic diversity.

2.2 History of the COAG Trial in the Lands

Description and analysis of the COAG Trial in the APY Lands is complicated by the fact that during the period of the Trial there have been numbers of other significant events, reviews and program and service initiatives that overlap or intersect with what the Trial aims to achieve. These include South Australian Government responses to the two inquests referred to in section 2.1. As a result there are diverse views, both within government and in the community, about what the COAG Trial does and does not encompass and about the extent to which various activities and achievements should be regarded as COAG Trial activities and achievements. Early consultations with a number of government stakeholders suggested that the COAG Trial could be considered as having three core components or areas of activity, namely the Mai Wiru Regional Stores Policy, the PY Ku Network (rural transaction centres initiative), and development of consultation and decision-making processes – for example through the TKP Regional Forum. (Each of these is further discussed below.)

The following summary of key dates and events thus includes some significant related developments as well as matters directly associated with the APY Lands COAG Trial. It is drawn from a Chronology provided by DoHA's COAG project team, other relevant documents such as steering committee minutes, and supplementary information gathered in the course of stakeholder consultation.

2002

• Decision to conduct the COAG Trials; choice of the APY Lands as the trial site in South Australia and of DOHA and DAARE the lead agencies for this trial.

2003

• A first steering committee for the Trial was held in Adelaide in February 2003, with the communities of the Lands represented by leaders of the AP Lands Council.
• In March 2003 DoHA appointed an Adelaide-based Project Officer with responsibilities relating to the trial, and in April-May 2003 consultations were conducted with communities across the Lands. In light of these consultations, the APY Lands were formally announced as a COAG Trial site in May 2003.
• A draft Shared Responsibility Agreement relating to the trial was circulated in April 2003. The Agreement identified five key areas for action: improved health and well being; education and
training; provision of government (e.g., Centrelink) and financial services; improved infrastructure; and improved governance.

- In July 2003 a second steering committee meeting was held (in Canberra). The participants included representatives of the APY Land Council Executive, ATSIC, ATSIS, DoHA and DAARE; officers of the Indigenous Communities Coordination (ICC) Taskforce also attended. The minutes of the meeting refer, among other things, to the possibility of adopting a Regional Stores Policy as a first COAG Trial project. It was announced that ATSIC had appointed an officer based at Port Augusta to work full-time on the Trial. It was noted that the April–May consultations in the Lands had revealed broad community support for a long-term, whole-of-government approach to meeting community needs. There was also discussion of implications arising from a Tri-State (WA, SA and NT) Justice Forum on such issues as petrol sniffing, use of cannabis, protection of women and children, and the use of traditional law in sentencing options.

- In September 2003 a two-day workshop for COAG stakeholders (‘Working together – shared responsibilities agreement’) was held in Alice Springs. This was followed by the third steering committee meeting, at which the Mai Wiru Regional Stores Policy and the PY Ku Network (rural transaction centres) were endorsed as COAG projects. It was agreed that the draft Shared Responsibility Agreement could now be circulated for signature by all parties. There was discussion, among other things, of funding for a planned drug rehabilitation facility in the Lands.

- In December 2003 Australian Government representatives were the first to sign the Shared Responsibility Agreement.

2004

- In February 2004 a further meeting of the AP Lands COAG steering committee was held, in Alice Springs. (It proved to be the last such meeting.) The minutes record discussion of issues relating to the steering committee’s roles and responsibilities, and also of some legal and procedural concerns relating to membership of the AP Executive (the South Australian Government agreed to recognise the current Executive as interim Executive until the end of March 2004). It was confirmed that DoHA funding for Mai Wiru would be provided (up to June 2004) through Nganampa Health Council, and noted that implementation of the Stores Policy required co-operative action by Nganampa Health, the APY Executive and the various Community Councils. It was reported that funding for PY Ku had been sought by the DoHA COAG team from the Department of Transport and Regional Services (DOTARS) for infrastructure, and from the Department of Family and Community Services for staffing. The PY Ku proposal was for service centres to be established in seven locations across the Lands. There was further discussion of issues relating to the Tri-State Justice project.

- In March 2004 the DPC took over (from DAARE) South Australian Government responsibilities relating to improvement of services in the APY Lands, and soon after it established an APY Lands Taskforce to promote a whole-of-government approach. Membership of the Taskforce included key Australian Government bodies (e.g., representatives of DoHA) as well as all the relevant South Australian Government agencies. Sub groups of the Taskforce also involved representation of several of the APY Lands’ community-based service providers. The Taskforce subsequently produced the APY Lands Strategic Plan which set out six key objectives, as follows:
  - increase public safety
  - increase health and welfare services
  - improve service and program co-ordination
  - improve employment, education and training outcomes
  - improve housing, infrastructure and essential services

  3 Reported in the DoHA Chronology, although the minutes of the meeting do not make this explicit.
– develop an effective governance model for the APY lands.\(^4\)

The SA Government provided an additional $25 million over four years to support implementation of the Strategic Plan.

- Also in March 2004, the Shared Responsibility Agreement was signed on behalf of the South Australian Government. The South Australian Government announced the appointment of an Administrator of the APY Lands.
- In April 2004 the Australian Government announced that ATSIS would be abolished in June 2004, and ATSIC in June 2005. Mr Bob Collins was appointed as Administrator of the APY Lands, and provided the South Australian Government with an initial report on circumstances in the Lands.
- In June 2004 Bob Collins was seriously injured and was unable to continue as Administrator.
- The OIPC was established in July 2004, following the abolition of ATSIS.
- In August 2004, DOTARS funding for the PY Ku rural transaction centres project was announced, with PY Media as the project sponsor.
- In August 2004 the Secretary of DoHA met with representatives of DPC to discuss reconvening the COAG Trial steering committee – which had not met since February 2004.
- Professor Lowitja O’Donoghue and Mr Tim Costello were in August 2004 appointed as Advisors on the AP Lands, and in September 2004 they visited the Lands to consult with community members and organisations.
- In September 2004 the responsibilities of the AP Lands Taskforce were broadened to cover all Aboriginal lands in South Australia, and it was renamed the Aboriginal Lands Taskforce.
- A new chairman of the AP Lands Council was elected in October 2004, and met with DoHA’s COAG team.

**2005**

- A Strategic Implementation Plan for the Mai Wiru Regional Stores Policy was issued in January 2005.
- In February 2005 a ‘Whole of Government Workshop’ was held in Alice Springs. Those taking part (a total of around 25 people) included representatives of a number of the community-controlled service providers, AP Lands Council, OIPC, ICC, DoHA and DPC. This meeting reached agreement that a new ‘policy and planning group’ should be established with representation of Anangu service providers, the APY Executive, the Australian Government and the SA State Government. Australian Government representation was to include DoHA as the lead COAG Trial agency, OIPC/ICC and possibly ATSIC. As finally constituted the group – called Tjungungku Kuranyukuta Palyantjaku, or TKP – consisted of representatives of DoHA, OIPC, DPC, and the Directors of PY Media Corporation, Ngarluma Health Council, NPY Women’s Council, PY Education Committee, Ku Arts, and the APY Lands Council / AP Services. Draft Terms of Reference for the TKP were discussed. Among other things these proposed that it meet four times a year. The role of TKP was to seek -

… better results through improved services for Anangu through shared responsibility for

1. Policy development

2. Service planning and coordination (including priorities, gaps, barriers and opportunities)

\(^4\) It will be noted that these priorities are similar to the key points in the draft SRA prepared in 2003.
3. **Reporting on progress and results.**

Areas for priority attention identified at this time included education, law and order, communication, coordination in service planning and funding, employment and governance (see also the APY Lands Strategic Plan).

The role of the TKP in relation to the COAG Trial was not specifically referred to in the draft Terms of Reference. However, it was decided at the workshop that the ‘COAG team’ should develop a funding package for TKP which would include such things as secretariat support, payment of a meeting facilitator, and expenses including travel and accommodation.

- The PY Ku Network Planning Committee met for the first time in March 2005.
- The second TKP meeting (Adelaide) was held in April 2005. Matters covered included clarifying TKP roles and membership, agreement on Terms of Reference, the need for secretariat support for the Anangu Taskforce⁵, and agreement to the concept of a ‘Place Manager’ for the Lands⁶.
- In April 2005 the OIPC engaged Mr John Thurtell and Mr Bob Smillie ‘to undertake a preliminary assessment of what was required to improve program and service delivery in the (APY) Lands… and consequently improve outcomes for the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (Anangu) people, communities and organisations’⁷. A key recommendation of that report was the appointment of a suitably qualified person to act as a **Regional Service Coordinator** for the APY Lands, and Mr John Thurtell himself was subsequently engaged by the South Australian Government to carry out that role⁸. The Regional Service Coordinator reports to the DPC, and also to the quarterly meetings of the TKP Regional Forum.
- The third TKP meeting was held in Adelaide in May 2005.
- A planning workshop and the fourth TKP meeting were held in Alice Springs in September 2005.
- The *Pitjantjatjara Land Rights Act* was amended in October 2005, incorporating stronger provisions relating to accountability of the APY Executive, clarification of roles and provision for three-year terms.
- A new APY Executive was elected. The fifth TKP meeting was held, in Adelaide, in November 2005.

### 2.3 Community involvement in setting objectives and priorities for the Trial

Community involvement in COAG Trial planning and decision-making has taken three main forms:

- On-the-ground community consultations undertaken at the outset of the trial and at various later dates;
- The role of the AP Land Council / AP Executive on the COAG Trial steering committee between 2003 and 2004; and
- The involvement of the Directors of community-based APY Lands organisations, together with the APY Land Council, as members of the TKP Regional Forum since the start of 2005.

Various reports and minutes of meetings relating to the COAG Trial refer to there being broad community support for the concept of a sustained, whole of government approach to improving services in the Lands, and also to support for the Mai Wiru and PY Ku projects in particular (see sections 2.4 and 2.5). Implementation of Mai Wiru has been managed by Nganampa Health, while

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⁵ A group including the community members of the TKP and representatives of the Community Councils.

⁶ This later became the Regional Service Co-ordinator position referred to below.


⁸ As well as a Regional Service Coordinator, there are two Service Coordinators working on the ground.
Py Media has similar responsibilities relating to PY Ku. Both Mai Wiru and PY Ku have made use of consultative groups or processes involving a range of local people and organisations. Representatives of Nganampa Health, for example, referred to the enormous task of consulting effectively over a very large geographical area and a series of different languages and cultures.

2.4 Mai Wiru Regional Stores Policy

Given the challenges and complexities of the APY Lands as a trial site, those involved in the early stages of the COAG Trial saw considerable merit in committing themselves to a small number of specific projects that could be expected to achieve significant community benefits. As already noted, the two initiatives endorsed as COAG projects were the Mai Wiru Stores Policy and the PY Ku rural transaction centre network. Apart from the fact that both of these were seen as valuable projects for the Lands, they were also seen as well aligned with the spirit of the COAG Trial in that, in various ways, they involved delivery of improved services, impacts across a range of policy areas (including, for example, training and employment), shared responsibilities and a need for cooperation among a range of government and community partners.

As noted below, work on the Mai Wiru project had already begun by the time the COAG Trial was set up.

The Mai Wiru Strategic Implementation Plan, dated January 2005, describes the Mai Wiru Regional Stores Policy as:

…an Anangu community initiative for health and wellbeing on the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Lands. [Its] implementation … is being auspiced by Nganampa Health Council for the Aboriginal community-controlled service providers to the region and all community councils. Implementation of the Stores Policy has been funded by the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing … through Rural Primary Health Services.

Mai Wiru is:

…a comprehensive plan to address the issues of food security, food access (including affordability) and food availability (including range and quality) which form barriers to Anangu health and wellbeing.

The Strategic Implementation Plan notes that the impact of food supply on Aboriginal health in remote communities is widely recognised, and that issues relating to the community stores have been a concern in the AP Lands for some years. Resolutions on developing an appropriate stores policy, and specifically on the pricing of identified health items, were passed at an AP Executive meeting as early as December 1998. In December 2000 the Australian Government Department of Family and Community Services (FaCS) made funds available for this purpose. Between that date and October 2001 ‘the Mai Wiru Regional Stores Policy was developed through a community development process operationalised through a 25-member steering committee, using participatory planning techniques’ (Strategic Implementation Plan, p6). The policy was ratified in July 2001 by a General Meeting of Anangu Pitjantjatjara. ‘By December 2001 all community councils and the regional Aboriginal community controlled service providers ratified the Stores Policy’ (p6).

The Mai Wiru Stores Policy addresses a range of inter-related issues including:

- Food supply – food security, availability and affordability
- Food safety and hygiene
- Nutrition awareness and health promotion
- Employment and training
• Fair trading (eg advertising and sales activities, credit, quality of goods and services, refunds, customer complaints)
• Management and accountability
• Infrastructure
• Monitoring and evaluation
• Public display of the Policy.

The policy and associated regulations were printed and distributed to all community stores and other relevant parties in 2002.

The origins of Mai Wiru thus clearly precede implementation of the COAG Trial in the AP Lands. However, support for the Stores Policy was considered as a possible COAG project from the early stages of the Trial; for example, the minutes of the COAG Steering Committee meeting of 3 July 2003 refer to implementation of the Stores Policy as a possible first COAG project. The minutes of that meeting note that while there were many high priorities for action on the AP Lands, in certain areas (such as Mai Wiru) ‘where a lot of effort had already been invested, it might be now timely to take them forward under the whole of government COAG framework’.

In response to a funding application made in October 2003, DoHA made funding available in June 2004 to support implementation of Mai Wiru over the three-year period 2005-2007. Further community consultations were then undertaken in September-October 2004, leading to development and documentation of the Strategic Implementation Plan. This was ratified by the Mai Wiru Steering Committee (see below) in February 2005.

A Steering Committee for the Stores Policy involves representatives of each community and store on the Lands; it is supported by Nganampa Health Council through its public health arm, UPK. Early work on the implementation of Mai Wiru included initiatives relating to nutrition awareness, installation of standardised scanning and point of sale equipment, development by the South Australian Department of Human Services of a nutrition handbook for use by store managers and others, advice from relevant retail exports, and stores forum meetings for consultation and information sharing. Practical support for Mai Wiru came from various sources; for example ATSIC provided funding to AP Services to build new stores in four of the communities, while the South Australian Department of Transport and Urban Planning conducted an assessment ‘of freight logistic services to the AP Lands, with the aim of identifying options for improved services’ (Strategic Implementation Plan, p8).

Banking and credit facilities are seen as an important related issue affecting people’s capacity to obtain the food and other goods they need; there is thus a link between the Mai Wiru Stores Policy and PY Ku, the initiative to establish rural transaction centres in a number of the communities within the AP Lands (see section 2.5).

As one community stakeholder saw it in late 2005, Mai Wiru had not yet had an obvious impact on the range of food stocked by the community stores; for example, it was still difficult to find a good range of sugar-free items such as low-joule cordials. Other people emphasised the scale of the challenge involved in implementing the Policy, particularly given the separate ownership of the stores by each community and uneven quality in present management of the various stores: ‘They’ve got a big job ahead of them’. There also remain some significant funding issues to be resolved.

2.5 PY Ku Network

DoHA issued a Progress Report on PY Ku in November 2005. Quotations in this subsection are drawn from that Progress Report.
During 2003, as noted elsewhere, DoHA provided funds – through the AP Lands Council – for the development of a business case for the PY Ku Network. At the September 2003 meeting of the COAG Trial Steering Committee, PY Ku was adopted as a COAG Trial initiative.

PY Ku is managed at the whole of Government level by DoHA, with the ‘regional development role’ being undertaken by PY Media. ‘There are currently over twenty partners at Australian and South Australian Government level as well as Anangu organisations’.

Under PY Ku the intention is to provide seven customer service centres across the Lands that will deliver a range of government and financial services. The proposed locations are at Iwantja, Mimili, Kaltijti (Fregon), Pukatja (Ernabella), Amata, Watarru, and either Pipalyatjara or Kalka. The aim is to provide:

- A range of Government and non-Government services to communities
- Training and employment for local Anangu
- Public access internet facilities
- Office, meeting, conference, video-link, internet and administrative support facilities for Government staff and visiting professionals.

In June 2004 the South Australian Government, through the Aboriginal Lands task Force, endorsed the principle of delivery of appropriate State services through the PY Ku network.

In response to an application made in October 2003, DOTARS funding of $2.23 million for PY Ku infrastructure was announced in August 2004. In March 2005 a request for a budget increase was put to DOTARS, and a further $1.82 million was approved in September 2005. At one point a reduction in the number of transaction centres from seven to three or four was contemplated; however, DoHA’s expectation is that all seven PY Ku service centres will be constructed during 2006.

Up until December 2004 PY Media had received funding support from the Australian Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts (DCITA) for IT training and support. After cessation of that funding, temporary funding to continue IT training and support for the PY Ku Network until June 2006 was provided by DoHA, FaCS and DPC. These funds will also support ‘development of business cases for the establishment of fee-for-service training and technical support into the future’.

Some PY Ku services are currently being provided on a trial basis at two locations, Mimili and Amata. There are seven Anangu staff working on a part-time basis at these two trial locations. They have received induction training and also training from Centrelink and from Service SA. The Progress Report provides the following further information:

The PY Ku Network has been providing Centrelink services from the Amata and Mimili trial sites since July 2005. On completion of the building infrastructure Centrelink services will be provided from the remaining sites.

SA Government services are now available in Mimili and Amata and the required training has been delivered to existing staff. SA Government service delivery may be expanded across the Network when established. Services now available include payment of Expiation Notices and Fines, renewal of standard vehicle registrations, application for Birth, Death and Marriage Certificates.

Negotiations have commenced with Australia Post and the Australian Electoral Commission for delivery of services. The Australian Electoral Commission have also expressed interest in delivering services on a trial basis at Mimili and Amata in the short term.
Negotiations will commence shortly with the NT and WA Governments for the potential delivery of basic State Government services, such as registration and licensing, to people living in the cross-borders region.

It has been estimated that a total of about 30 Anangu staff will be employed (on a part-time basis) within a year of the PY Ku building program being completed. However, at the time the consultations for the present evaluation were conducted, significant aspects of the funding requirements for implementation of PY Ku remained to be resolved. This was of concern to several of the community representatives consulted in the course of the study, who expressed criticisms of the forward planning for the project and in particular of the continuing uncertainties about funding. (Some suggested that DoHA representatives had been unduly concerned with micro-management of the project rather than focussing on strategic and resource issues.)

A number of those consulted during this study saw PY Ku as a valuable and potentially influential project that could have a major impact on life on the Lands; in particular it could mean a real shift in the direction of community control and self-determination. It was sometimes suggested, however, that DoHA staff appeared to have a narrower concept of PY Ku and that there was some ‘lack of vision’ in the current approach. Several of the parties consulted during the study raised concerns about the long-term management of the PY Ku, noting that this would be a challenging task and was well outside PY Media’s core areas of activity. There was also concern that the project could not be self-sustaining and would require long-term commitment of public funds.

A PY Ku Network Planning Committee held its first meeting in Alice Springs in March 2005. Membership of this Committee includes PY Media, the PY Education Committee and the AP Land Council; DoHA, FaCS, DOTARS, DCITA, Centrelink and other relevant Australian Government bodies; South Australian Government bodies including DPC and Service SA; and Indigenous Community Volunteers.

As well as the Planning Committee, a PY Media Network Group had been formed to ensure ‘open lines of communication with Anangu communities’. Community chairpersons and Municipal Service Officers from the relevant communities are members of this group.

PY Media has been active in securing an agreement for the introduction of Broadband technology across the Lands – a development seen as important both for PY Ku itself and for broader purposes:

*The PY Media Corporation recently brokered an agreement between themselves, the Australian and SA Governments and Telstra to progress roll-out of ADSL2 Broadband technology across the APY Lands region. This will not only benefit the PY Ku Network through state-of-the-art technology on which internet access and video-conferencing can ride, but also deliver a range of benefits for education, health, justice and community services.*
3 Processes

3.1 Coordination arrangements

There are currently several arrangements in place in South Australia that aim to improve inter-Government and inter-agency co-ordination of services for Indigenous communities, including the APY Lands. These are not all necessarily or exclusively COAG Trial arrangements, however.

- A wide range of relevant South Australian Government agencies, together with key Australian Government bodies, are represented on the Aboriginal Lands Taskforce – which developed out of the earlier AP Lands Taskforce. It now has responsibilities relating to Aboriginal lands across the State, though the AP Lands remain a strong focus. The Taskforce meets approximately every six weeks; reports on progress with Mai Wiru and PY Ku are always on the agenda.

- The earlier AP Lands Taskforce was responsible for development of the AP Lands Strategic Plan, under which the SA Government has committed an extra $25 million over four years for improvement of services and facilities in the APY Lands. The DPC oversees the allocation of these funds, with the aim of ensuring that planning and funding decisions are made in a well-informed and coordinated fashion.

- A group involving the heads of Australian Government agencies in South Australia meets every 4-6 weeks; OIPC has taken over from DoHA the chairing of these meetings. It is reported that COAG Trial matters are always included on this group’s agenda.

- The TKP Regional Forum (see section 2.2) normally meets four times a year. It involves Australian Government, South Australian Government and APY community and service provider representation, and it deals with COAG Trial issues as well as other matters relating to the APY Lands.

- It is reported that since DPC’s becoming responsible for improved coordination of services in the Lands and the establishment of OIPC, these two agencies have worked closely together on developing whole of government approaches to issues affecting the APY Lands in particular. For example, DPC maintains a listing of current projects and activities in the Lands, to which all State and most Australian Government agencies contribute.

- With financial support from the Australian Government, through OIPC, the South Australian Government in 2005 appointed a Regional Service Coordinator for the APY Lands; the Coordinator is intended to have the support of a four-person team, two of whom have been appointed to date. The Regional Service Coordinator is paid by and reports to DPC, but also reports to and works closely with TKP. The Coordinator’s responsibilities include the following:
  - Improve the design, implementation and monitoring of programs and services in the APY Lands;
  - Ensure collaboration and partnership between Government and non-Government agencies;
  - Identify gaps and duplications in programs and services;
  - Broker increased and more effective communication between Anangu and Government.

The new Bilateral Agreement between the Australian and South Australian Governments provides an overall framework for intergovernmental co-operation in Indigenous affairs in South Australia.

The existence of these various mechanisms for consultation and co-ordination represents a major change from the situation before the start of the COAG Trial. While the exact influence of the Trial on such developments is open to debate, it is realistic to conclude that it has at least been one significant factor contributing to a much greater focus on the importance of collaboration.

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9 See APY Lands Regional Service Coordinator – 2005/06 Work Plan.
On the other hand, despite the progress made in recent years, a number of those consulted during the study emphasised that there was still a ‘long way to go’ in effectively involving the community, in simplifying and rationalising government processes and in achieving genuine cross-agency collaboration. For example, it was claimed, some TKP meeting time was ‘wasted’ on dealing with State/Commonwealth disagreements that could have been addressed in advance; TKP meeting procedures and business were not necessarily easy for all members to follow (especially those for whom English was a second or third language); government agencies still imposed onerous responsibilities and demands on small-scale community organisations; the PY Women’s Council reported experiencing major problems in negotiating a contract with the Commonwealth for the funding of an Anangu Director position; there was still apparent ill-will and lack of co-operation among some agencies, and ‘the blame game’ was still being played. The recent major changes to the CDEP system were cited as an example of government failure to consult with and listen to Indigenous communities.

3.2 Role of the lead agencies

The original lead agencies at the start of the COAG Trial in the APY Lands were DoHA on behalf of the Australian Government and DAARE on behalf of the South Australian Government. In early 2004 the South Australian Department of Premier and Cabinet took over from DAARE various responsibilities relating to the Lands – including the role of lead State agency for the trial. This change was said to reflect a clear recognition by the SA Government that a well-coordinated, whole of government approach was essential to progress in the Lands, and DPC was seen as being in a far stronger position than DAARE to achieve this.

DoHA has played a very active role since the inception of the COAG Trial, particularly in terms of the adoption of Mai Wiru and PY Ku as COAG projects, and ongoing support for their planning and implementation. DoHA has itself provided some funding to support implementation of the projects, and has also sought funds from other sources.

Some of those consulted during this study argued that DoHA’s role had to date been more successful in progressing Mai Wiru and PY Ku than in promoting inter-government and inter-agency coordination and ‘new ways of doing business’. However, DoHA would argue that it has been a keen supporter of and participant in both the original COAG Trial steering committee and the TKP, and that as lead Commonwealth agency it faced particular difficulties as a result of instability in the AP Lands Council during 2004. It would also argue that the vision embodied in the COAG Trial, and the practical experience gained by APY community organisations in working directly with DoHA and other government agencies, contributed to the confident and positive approach shown by community service providers in initiating the TKP process.

The establishment of OIPC and the role it has played in relation to the trial are seen by some observers as having strengthened a whole of government approach on the part of the Commonwealth.

3.3 Knowledge of and attitudes to the COAG Trial

The fact that the APY Lands are the site of a COAG Trial is well-known among both Australian and South Australian Government agencies. Levels of active interest in and support for the trial, however, no doubt vary.

On the evidence of this study it seems that people tend to associate the APY Lands COAG Trial more closely with the Australian than with the South Australian Government, and that the Trial is closely identified with DoHA in particular. While the South Australian Government has been active in the Lands, especially over the past two years, its agencies have tended to work outside the...
COAG Trial framework. South Australian agencies have been supportive of Mai Wiru and PY Ku in a number of ways, but these still tend to be seen as DoHA projects. Through the Aboriginal Lands Taskforce and its AP Lands Strategic Plan, the SA Government has strongly emphasised a whole of government approach, but it has not presented this as an aspect of the COAG Trial. It remains to be seen what approach DPC takes to the COAG Trial in the future; at present, however, it seems happy to pursue co-operation with the Australian Government through its relationship with OIPC rather than through the COAG Trial as such.

3.4 Government/community relationships

In the early stages of the trial in the APY Lands, government/community relationships were adversely affected by controversy and instability affecting the AP Lands Council and Executive. Among other things this led to the South Australian Government making amendments to the legislation governing the operations of the Land Council. The establishment of the TKP Regional Forum early in 2005 (after new Land Council elections in late 2004) is generally seen as having inaugurated a period of much more effective government/community relationships and communication, although it is acknowledged that the TKP’s role and mode of operation are still evolving. At the time of this study there was some concern among community organisations represented on TKP that ‘It’s still coming from the Government down’ – that is, that Government members were dominating the TKP agenda and proceedings. There was a hope that establishment of a separate secretariat for the Anangu Taskforce would help to give APY organisations more effective influence in the work of the TKP.

3.5 Shared Responsibility Agreements

A tripartite Shared Responsibility Agreement (SRA) setting out a framework for the COAG Trial was drafted in 2003 and subsequently signed on behalf of the Australian and the South Australian Governments; it was never signed, however, on behalf of the people of the APY Lands.

At the time this study was conducted only one community-level SRA had been signed within the Lands, namely an agreement relating to development of a mechanic’s workshop in the Pipalyatjara community. In subsequent months, however, several other SRAs have been signed, relating to such issues as school attendance, youth leadership and childcare facilities.

Feedback from the Pipalyatjara community on the implementation of its SRA has been extremely positive; it appears that both the government and the community commitments are being well observed, and the establishment of the mechanic’s workshop is having clear benefits in the community.

SRAs are now being used to bring about changes within APY Lands communities, based on mutual obligations reflecting the nature of the new Indigenous affairs arrangements since July 2004. While early SRAs have tended to have a single-issue focus, newer agreements are likely to be broader and more comprehensive in scope.

Two Regional Partnerships relating to the APY Lands are now in development – one addressing youth issues and the other Caring for Country/Land Management.

It is not easy to say how widely the concept of shared responsibility is understood and accepted in the context of the COAG Trial. It does appear that there are some unresolved issues about government and community roles and responsibilities in relation to both Mai Wiru and PY Ku (see below).

11 This position was filled in January 2006.
3.6 Government and community commitments

Given that the Shared Responsibility Agreement prepared in 2003 was not signed by all parties, there is no formal statement of government or community commitments relating to the COAG Trial. The only comments on this issue that were made in the course of the study related to some community dissatisfaction with funding arrangements for COAG projects. In particular, as noted earlier, concerns were expressed about funding uncertainties affecting PY Ku. It was said, for example, that if the number of PU Ku centres had been reduced from seven to three or four (seen as possible at one stage), this would have been seen in the Lands as a serious breach of government commitments.

3.7 Involvement in and support for the COAG Trial

The main changes in the range of parties involved in the APY Lands COAG Trial over time have arisen from DPC's taking over State Government responsibilities from DAARE, and from the Australian Government’s abolition of ATSIS and ATSIC and the creation of OIPC. DoHA has been involved throughout, as has the AP Lands Council. Community-based service providers such as PY Media and the NPY Women’s Council have played a larger role in the trial since the establishment of TKP.

The scope of this study did not provide firm evidence about the extent of understanding of and support for the COAG Trial in the broader APY community. However, it is frequently reported that the development of both the Mai Wiru and PY Ku projects have included substantial community consultation, and that both these initiatives are regarded positively within the community.
4 Progress to date and lessons learnt

4.1 Positives and negatives from a community perspective

On the evidence of this study, positive aspects of the COAG Trial from a community perspective have included genuine – if not necessarily speedy – progress on two significant initiatives, namely the Mai Wiru Regional Stores Policy and the PY Ku rural transaction centres network. The origins of both of these pre-date the start of the COAG Trial, but there seems little doubt that their adoption as COAG projects has contributed significantly to their advancement. As noted elsewhere, the main reservation in this regard is uncertainty regarding ongoing project funding; even so, the trial has helped attract significant government funds to the Lands.

More broadly, representatives of several community-based service providers commented positively on the higher profile that the COAG Trial has brought to the Lands, and on the access to influential decision-makers and policy-makers that they have enjoyed as a result. The fact that the Secretary of DoHA has personally played a significant role in deliberations on the COAG Trial (for example, attending all steering committee and TKP meetings) was seen as particularly valuable.

There appear to be practical benefits flowing to the Lands from the South Australian Government’s increased funding provision and improved co-ordination of State service-provision since 2004; a number of stakeholders referred to improvements in policing in particular. It is not clear, however, that these can be regarded as directly related to the COAG Trial.

4.2 Positives and negatives from a Government perspective

The various government representatives consulted during this study had some quite diverse perspectives on the COAG Trial in the AP Lands.

Some people took the view that in various ways the trial had led to marked improvements in relationships between the APY communities and government agencies. In particular the development of TKP – generally seen as having been initiated by Anangu organisations – was regarded by some as a valuable step forwards in facilitating ‘mature dialogue’ between governments and community, and it was argued that this was very unlikely to have occurred without the encouragement and opportunities provided by the COAG Trial.

Others agreed that there had been important changes and developments in the Lands in recent years, but were more inclined to attribute these to the emergence of a stronger bi-partisan approach to Indigenous affairs by the current Australian and South Australian Governments and the fact that both were now working through agencies specifically charged with implementing whole of government policies – OIPC and DPC respectively.

4.3 New ways of doing business

As indicated in earlier sections of this report (in particular section 3.1), there have been substantial changes during the life of the COAG Trial in the planning and decision-making processes that affect service provision and response to community needs in the Lands. All of those who were consulted during the study would see these as desirable changes with potential for ongoing community benefit. Again, however, there is no consensus on how significant the COAG Trial has been in bringing about such developments. Some argue that the COAG Trial has served to highlight the problems faced by the Lands and the need for concerted inter-government action to address these; others believe that the COAG Trial as such has had relatively little success in promoting ‘new ways of doing business’ and that these have developed for other reasons. Yet others would say that these are
largely semantic arguments and that there is little value in trying to decide what is Trial-related and what is not.

4.4 Unintended consequences

Stakeholders identified little in the way of unforeseen or unintended consequences flowing from the COAG Trial in the Lands. One outcome that some might see in this light was the forward-looking resolve shown by community-based Anangu organisations in initiating formation of the TKP.

4.5 Lessons learnt

Various stakeholders identified what they saw as lessons learnt from conduct of the COAG Trial to date. These included the following:

- In implementing the COAG Trial there was insufficient emphasis on ensuring that adequate funding was available for trial activities and projects. DoHA, for example, had no ‘bucket of money’ available to enable it to proceed with significant projects without substantial financial support from other sources. (On the other hand, it is said, the COAG Trials were originally intended to be about getting greater benefit from existing funding, not about large additional expenditure.)

- It would have been valuable to those responsible for the trial in the APY Lands to have more regular and systematic conduct with people involved in the trials at other sites.

- The respective roles and responsibilities of government and community agencies in relation to COAG projects may not have been made sufficiently clear in advance.

- **Funding** of projects and services has not been easy to approach on a whole of government basis. However, the South Australian approach of having DPC oversee other agencies’ spending of the $25 million allocated for work under the *AP Lands Strategic Plan* seems to have worked well to date.

- Traditional Australian Government funding processes and contracts are not sufficiently simple or flexible to facilitate the Commonwealth role in an undertaking like the COAG Trial. (‘You don’t need a 40-page contract for a $5,000 grant, it was said.)

- Promoting intergovernmental and interagency collaboration is a challenging task that requires the goodwill, influence and experience of senior public servants.
5 Next Steps

- Among the people consulted in the course of this study there was a common perception that progress on COAG Trial initiatives in the APY Lands had been slower than they would have wished. It was acknowledged, however, that implementation of the trial has faced significant barriers, including the size and remoteness and the Lands and the number of separate communities and homelands involved, the extent of social and economic problems and disadvantage in the Lands, problems arising from a recent period of instability and controversy affecting the AP Land Council, significant changes in the management of Indigenous affairs at both State and Commonwealth level (e.g., the abolition of ATSIC and ATSIS), and problems and uncertainties relating to the funding of COAG projects.

- On the other hand, progress has been made on various aspects of the Mai Wiru policy, and PY Ku’s first two regional transaction centres are now in operation on a trial basis. The TKP is seen as providing a useful forum for progressing conduct of the COAG Trial as well as other initiatives relating to the Lands. A number of those consulted also believed that, with OIPC and DPC both actively involved and both charged with implementing a whole of government approach, SA Government/Australian Government relationships are currently much stronger and more positive than in the past. The fact that over the past two years the South Australian Government has taken a number of significant funding and policy initiatives in the Lands is seen as helping to provide a more positive environment for continuation of the COAG Trial.

- Although it was said that the Trial involved an ongoing process of adjustment and refinements, there was no particular feeling among those consulted that there was a need to revisit Trial objectives or priorities. While it was acknowledged that Mai Wiru and PY Ku represented only two of a large number of desirable social and economic initiatives, those consulted generally supported the value and appropriateness of these projects. Several stakeholders noted that the tripartite Shared Responsibility Agreement that was prepared in 2003 had never been signed on behalf of the APY communities; some would like to see a replacement agreement (probably a Regional Partnership Agreement) put in place to provide a clear, agreed framework for conduct of the Trial for the future.

- Longer-term evaluation of the APY Lands COAG Trial will naturally raise the issue of just what its objectives have been. At this point it is difficult to identify objectives beyond the broad goals of the COAG Trials in general (improved delivery of services, improved collaboration among government agencies and new ways of doing business) and the particular objectives of the Mai Wiru and PY Ku projects. If a new Regional Partnership Agreement is developed, it may spell out some further objectives or possible measures of progress. The study team understands that there is some pressure for the nomination of specific statistical measures of success – presumably measures such as improvements in school attendance or retention, numbers of people in non-CDEP employment, or a decrease in the incidence of particular diseases. However, given that no overall targets of this kind were originally set in relation to the COAG Trial, it would seem arbitrary to adopt them at this stage.

- A second stage evaluation of the Trial in 2007-2008 is likely to consider a range of issues such as the following:
  - What progress has been made in implementing the Mai Wiru Regional Stores Policy; to what extent have its objectives been achieved; and what specific benefits (or disadvantages) have flowed to the APY communities as a result?
  - What progress has been made in implementing the PY Ku rural transaction centres network? to what extent have its objectives been achieved? and what benefits (or disadvantages) have flowed to communities as a result?
  - In what ways and to what extent has the COAG Trial contributed to new ways of doing business on the part of governments and government agencies, and between governments and
communities? What evidence is there of improved consultation and co-ordination among Australian and South Australian Government agencies in the planning, funding and delivery of services in the Lands, and in what ways has the COAG Trial contributed to such improvements?

Both the Mai Wiru and PY Ku projects have specific objectives and timelines that can be reviewed in the course of a future summative evaluation. It would be useful over the next two years, however, if those responsible for the COAG Trial made specific efforts to identify and document significant community impacts, whether positive or negative, related to these two key initiatives. It would also be desirable, in preparation for a 2007-2008 evaluation, for those involved in the Trial to identify and document specific changes in ‘ways of doing business’ in the Lands – in particular, examples of improved consultation and co-ordination, the outcomes that have resulted from these, and the ways in which the COAG Trial has influenced or contributed to them. Written records will become increasingly important for evaluation purposes as time goes on, because the passage of time will mean there will be fewer individuals able to recall and speak accurately about the history and experience of the trial.

• The establishment of the OIPC and the active role which it is playing in aspects of the APY Lands COAG Trial represents a new element in the mix. Among those consulted during this study there were some who thought that creation of the OIPC brought into question the continuing value of DoHA’s role as lead Australian Government agency. Others were keen to see DoHA, as a major line agency, continue to lend its significant ‘muscle’ to the Trial and to the improvement of services on the Lands.

Issues around the relationship between the OIPC and the lead Australian Government agencies for the COAG Trials are not unique to the APY Lands; changes in the OIPC/lead agency relationship have already occurred at other trial sites, such as Shepparton and Cape York. Over coming months there will possibly need to be a wider review of OIPC/lead agency relationships, to clarify roles and responsibilities and to ensure the most effective possible Australian Government contribution to improved services and more effective partnerships.
Appendix A

Stakeholders Consulted
appendices

Australian Government

 Department of Health and Ageing:
 Jane Halton, Secretary
 Jan Fenelly, State Manager South Australia
 Helen Bulis, TKP Secretariat
 Fiona Buzzacott, TKP Secretariat
 Peg Nicholls, TKP Secretariat

 Office of Indigenous Policy Coordination
 Adrienne Gillam, State Manager South Australia
 Richard Trevena, Manager Indigenous Coordination Centre, Port Augusta
 Di Hawgood, Canberra

 South Australian Government

 Department of the Premier and Cabinet:
 Joslene Mazel, Senior Executive

 APY Lands, Community Organisations

 APY Land Council / APY Services:
 Rex Tjami, Director
 Ken Newman, General Manager

 Nganampa Health Council:
 Chris Masters, Health Services Manager
 Stephan Rainow, Public and Environmental Health Officer

 PY Media:
 Mary Anderson, Acting Director
 Karen Aucote, Acting General Manager
 Ian Marshall, PY Ku project officer
appendices

NPY Women’s Council:
Vicki Gillick, Project Manager

Ku Arts:
Colin Cosh
appendices

Appendix B
Key Written Materials
appendices

Tim Costello and Prof Lowitja O'Donoghue,
Anangu Pitjantjatjara & Yankunytjatjara Lands Report, March 2005

Department of Health and Ageing,
PY Ku Network – Progress Report November 2005

Department of Premier and Cabinet (SA),
Progress on the APY Lands – Departmental website, October 2005

John Thurtell Consulting Services Pty Ltd,
Improving Program and Service Delivery on the Anangu Pitjantjatjara
Yankunytjatjara Lands, June 2005

Joint Group of Commonwealth and State Government Officials,
AP Lands Community Consultations (28 April – 9 May), 2003

APY Lands Strategic Plan, November 2005

Strategic Implementation Plan, Mai Wiru, January 2005

Terms of Reference, Tjungungku Kuranyukutu Palyantjaku

Minutes of the APY Lands COAG Trial Steering Committee

Minutes of the TKP Regional Forum
Family violence is a sensitive, complex community issue. The Aboriginal community in Tasmania knows the secrecy, the deep hurt, the suffering and humiliation it causes. It is theirs to own, heal and solve. The Aboriginal community also knows that they can’t do it alone. The Aboriginal people who spoke for this report want government partnership in this work.
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Preface

COAG trials are a new approach of the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) to working in partnership with Indigenous communities and sharing responsibility for improving outcomes, management processes and service delivery, and for building the capacities of people in communities to manage their own affairs, especially with the aim of reducing family violence.

There were two key objectives for the Tasmanian Trial:

- to develop partnerships to achieve better outcomes for the Aboriginal community on family violence; and
- to develop ways in which the Commonwealth, State and Local governments could work together to more effectively deliver services.

This is an interim evaluation of a formative nature so that learning gleaned from the first stage (2005-2006) can contribute to the second (2007-2008).

Consultation involved evaluative work in the Trial site in Tasmania, in the north-eastern region covering the 63 telephone area where Aboriginal people have opted to work in partnership with governments in small groups with project workers in the Launceston, Meander Valley, St Marys, St Helens, Cape Barren Island, Flinders Island and Northern Midlands localities.

These small groups have been determining priorities and developing shared community projects that tackle local issues of family violence.
Consultation also involved key project participants and personnel from leading Commonwealth, State and Local Government agencies.

Members of the Aboriginal community, and government and non-government agencies were consulted mostly in interviews held face to face, either one-to-one or in small focus groups. Occasional telephone interviews occurred when this was not possible. The participating agencies are listed in the Appendices to this report.

Proper ethical research and evaluation practices were observed as follows.

The consultant, Roy Pugh, sought advice from project workers to find appropriate ways of connecting with and interviewing the participants*. Invitations to meet with the consultant and meeting processes were as open as possible, whilst at the same time, provided and ensured privacy, confidentiality and anonymity for interviewees, as they required.

The protocols for the COAG Trial consultation were adopted from the Indigenous Family Violence Project Tasmania, ya pulingina kani – Good To See You Talk (2002), and were made clear at the beginning of the consultations. They required the consultant to honour the ethics of hearing and interpreting the stories of people’s lives, beliefs, values and views. This meant:

• protecting the confidence and rights of individuals related to releasing his or her story or views into the public arena;

• suspending judgement, listening to and recording stories and views in field note form (not on tape) and interpreting them in ways that would not betray the identity or integrity of individuals;

• giving an authentic and trustworthy account of the participants’ views of the Trial’s impact, outcomes, learning, and recommendations for stage 2;

• being respectful of the fact that information that could identify any individual or organisation taking part in the consultation, except by their explicit wish, will be withheld;

* The term participant refers to all those active in the Trial and all those to be consulted.
• asking permission from all participants for the consultant to take notes; and
• keeping field notes in one place, in confidence, to be destroyed when the report is complete.

This approach to formative evaluation respects and values the stories and commentaries about the lived experience of Aboriginal community and government participants. The stories and commentaries are contexts for conveying the learning, understandings and views that people wished to communicate amongst their community as well as with government partners. The consultant guided interviews with a small number of questions about the Trial related to what people perceived was working, what was working well and what could be improved.

A number of Aboriginal people could not meet with the consultant because they were mutton-birding on Big Dog Island; they were reluctant to meet because they did not feel confident they had anything to say about the COAG Trial; too much time had passed since they were last involved; they did not want to support the COAG Trial because they did not agree with what they had heard was happening; or there was too much happening for them in their lives that was taking up their energy and time.

Within the COAG Trial site, fourteen Aboriginal people agreed to meet with the consultant individually, preferring to meet one-to-one in informal settings such as homes, coffee shops, or a private space in a work place.

Twenty-seven Aboriginal people met with the consultant at focus groups at Cape Barren and Flinders Islands and Deloraine. Eight non-Aboriginal people from local organisations met with the consultant in small groups, or one to one, in Launceston and St Helens.

The project workers suggested meetings with Aboriginal people outside the Trial site who were involved in the early COAG Trial consultations and had expressed a keen interest in working with the issues of Aboriginal family violence. The consultant met individually with eight Aboriginal people in Hobart, Cygnet and
Bruny Island, and fifteen Aboriginal people in groups in business and cultural settings at Glenorchy and Bruny Island.

Sixteen members of the Inter-Governmental Coordinating Committee (IGCC) met in focus groups and three individually with the consultant. Members of the Lead Agency Group met with the consultant on several occasions to participate formatively in sharing information and views, identifying and drawing together the learning from the consultations and looking forward.

The main aim of this evaluation is to capture and relate lessons learned so far that might enhance the outcomes of the second stage. It is expected that the emerging findings will help participants appreciate what is working, what is working well and what can be improved, and indicate emerging evidence of outcomes, trends and possibilities for the future of the COAG Trial.

The audience for this report is expected to be members of governments, the Aboriginal community and the wider community.
Executive Summary

The COAG trials are to develop and test new approaches of the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) in eight regions of the states and territories to:

- work in partnership with Indigenous communities and share responsibility for improving outcomes, management processes and service delivery; and
- build the capacities of people in communities to manage their own affairs.

There were two key objectives for the COAG Trial in Tasmania:

- to develop partnerships to achieve better outcomes for the Aboriginal community on family violence; and
- to develop ways in which the Commonwealth, State and Local governments could work together to more effectively deliver services.

Advantages

In early 2003 there were some distinct advantages for setting the COAG Trial to address issues of Aboriginal family violence in Tasmania:

- Addressing family violence was already established as a priority issue for the Aboriginal community and government partnership with the publication of the *ya pulingina kani* - Good To See You Talk Report.
- Willingness by some community members, Elders and organisations to become involved in advisory roles and working roles to address family violence in particular.
Commitment by Commonwealth, State and Local Governments to overcoming Aboriginal disadvantage.

A longer time span than ever before was granted by COAG to pilot new arrangements and ideas for addressing family violence.

These advantages are still available for continuing the work of the COAG Trial in 2006.

**Barriers**

Some early events in establishing governance for the COAG Trial reflected two main barriers to government and community partnerships that are historical, emotional and political:

- the divisive issue of Aboriginality in Tasmania and
- the loss of trust in government support for addressing Aboriginal needs.

Both Tasmanian and Australian Governments have three tiered criteria for eligibility to access specific government programs and services for Aboriginal persons or Torres Strait Islanders. The three criteria are: ability to prove Aboriginal lineage, identifying as an Aboriginal and being accepted as such by the community in which he or she lives or has lived. In practice, the two governments test these criteria in different ways. It is likely that this difference will recurrently cause unease in the processes of community and governments' attempts to work together.

**Priority**

Participation by both governments allows the COAG Trial to spread its work more widely as opposed to less widely throughout the Trial site. Addressing family violence is also complex and emotional and profoundly affects the community’s well-being and confidence.

This report clearly demonstrates that the underlying causes of family violence - overcrowding in houses, intergenerational abuse, alcohol, drug and other
substance abuse, loss of identity, mental illness, and poverty - will take considerable, sustained and long-term application of effort to overcome.

The Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage (OID) Framework endorsed by COAG, under all its headline indicators, shows that the worst statistics in relation to housing, education, crime, violence, family dysfunction, employment, health and economic participation reflect the situation of Indigenous people. These statistics overwhelmingly justify the priority for the COAG Trial to continue.

The three OID Framework priorities are:

- Safe, healthy and supportive family environments with strong communities and identities;
- Positive child development and prevention of violence crime and self harm; and
- Improved wealth creation and economic sustainability for individuals, families and communities.

The COAG Trial fits firmly within these priorities.

In the contexts of the issues of Aboriginality and family violence, it is reasonable to assume that progress would be slow, from the beginning and throughout the life of the Trial. The IGCC view has been to keep going with the Trial and continue consulting, bringing the community and governments together, and responding to ideas for particular projects or programs with realistic strategies.

**Achievements**

In keeping going, largely through the commitment and hard work of the project workers, the COAG Trial has built a reliable degree of confidence and trust where members of the community have agreed to work closely with government agencies and understand what is achievable. This occurred through on the ground activity such as:

- Forming consultation networks in the Northern Midlands, Launceston, Meander Valley, Break O’Day and Cape Barren and Flinders Islands;
• Forming working groups in Launceston and Cape Barren Island;
• Completing an SRA with the Cape Barren Island community to address underlying causes of family violence, and implementation is underway;
• Building upon the meenah mienne partnership project for youth at risk in Launceston and leading the agreement processes for an SRA that is currently near completion;
• Modelling a successful program for young Aboriginal people at St Helens to assist understanding of cultural and social issues that affect their well-being;
• Developing and evaluating, in consultation with the community, the pilot of a family well-being program in Launceston; and
• Initiating processes for agreement for an accredited family well-being training program to be delivered through TAFE in Launceston.

As well, the COAG Trial has established:
• a strategy for the work of the Trial in stage 1:
  • inter-government governance structures, such as the IGCC and LAF;
  • partnership agreement protocols; and
• stronger, more cooperative State/Commonwealth working relationships.

Ways forward

A key principle of the whole of government approach is to make it easier for Aboriginal people to access government services that can assist in addressing the influences of family violence.

Ways forward could include both the community and governments:
• taking steps to increase the level of participation by Aboriginal people in matters of decision-making, governance and accountability;
• refining strategies for streamlining funding and reporting requirements that some government agencies, such as the Indigenous Coordination Centre (ICC), have already developed;
• engaging and empowering new generations of Aboriginal people to run their own social, family, cultural and financial business;

• developing a new coordinated whole of government and whole of community strategic approach to build upon and continue the achievements of the COAG Trial; and

• working with the Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage Framework, endorsed by COAG, to develop indicators for baseline and performance monitoring reports.
1. The Setting for the COAG Trial in Tasmania

Background understandings

In April 2002, the Council of Australian Governments announced the COAG whole of government community trials. Eight trials are taking place in eight regions. In Tasmania, groundwork on the COAG Trial began in October 2003. The site of the Trial is the north-eastern region of Tasmania with the theme of family violence.

The COAG trials are to inform governments and the Aboriginal Community about new ways of doing business together. They are to foster government and community partnerships and processes that will lead to formal agreements for sharing responsibility to address particular issues that affect the communities in the trial sites. Priority issues for the COAG trials cover primary health and early educational outcomes for children, safer communities programs, drug and alcohol dependency and building Aboriginal employment, culture and wealth.

The COAG Trial in Tasmania is exploring new ways of governments and the community working together. These ways are opportunities to contribute to the long-term vision and plans that Aboriginal people have for their community, children and grandchildren. The COAG Trial in Tasmania focuses on the theme of strengthening the Aboriginal community as part of the vision and work of reducing Aboriginal family violence.
The historical context of the COAG Trial in Tasmania

The COAG Trials commenced in 2002 as part of major changes in the way governments administer and deliver services to Indigenous people. The emphasis moved to shared responsibility: to seeking more effective ways of working in partnership with the Indigenous community, and to a more co-operative approach to service delivery between all tiers of government.

Subsequently, there were changes to the way in which the Australian Government delivered specific Aboriginal programs from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) and its service delivery arm, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Services (ATSIS) to mainstream government service agencies in 2004-2005.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, Tom Calma, describes the early progression of these changes as a time of great uncertainty for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. In the Social Justice Report 2004, Australian Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, Mr. Calma did note the optimism amongst government departments about the potential of the COAG trials and that the early stages of the trials were already showing improved relationships across governments at the trial sites. He commended government departments for embracing the challenge to re-learn how to interact with and deliver services to Aboriginal people.

For many Tasmanian Aboriginal people, though they may not have agreed with the ways ATSIC and ATSIS worked, the abolition of ATSIC and ATSIS represented the loss of national icons that symbolised and recognised their identity and right to self-determination. One challenge of the COAG Trial in Tasmania would be to build trust between governments and the Aboriginal community around the new arrangements.

The new arrangements emphasise regional service delivery to Aboriginal people and, therefore, require all government departments to coordinate their services
and adopt whole of government approaches. This involves government departments in consulting with and negotiating agreements regionally and on a community level with Aboriginal people.

It is expected to take some time for agreements to be put in place and to be working, to build mutual respect and trust between partners, and to engage government and community members to work together on agreed priorities.

**Principles**

The new ways of working together embrace a number of principles that foster opportunities for Aboriginal people to access and benefit from mainstream service delivery in ways that are equitable with all other Australians. These include: listen directly to local Aboriginal people; make it easier for Aboriginal people to deal with government agencies and programs; promote self-management and self-sufficiency amongst Aboriginal people; and support both governments and Aboriginal communities to build their capacities for sharing responsibility for agreed outcomes.

The new ways also foster flexibility of governments to respond to innovative programs that can create results for Aboriginal people. As whole of government goals are met, it will become possible for governments to support good local strategies and programs through allowing funds to move between agencies and programs. For instance, the Indigenous Coordinating Centre (ICC) in Hobart has been developing shared funding agreements through which contributing agencies handle both payments and receipt of reports.

**Government commitment**

The following statements of commitment are only three amongst many documented that demonstrate the high level of inter-governmental commitment and leadership for the COAG trials.

- The COAG National Framework of Principles for Delivering Services to Indigenous Australians, states:
All jurisdictions are committed to achieving better outcomes for Indigenous Australians, improving the delivery of services, building greater opportunities for helping Indigenous families and individuals to become self-sufficient. To this end, and in delivering services to Indigenous people, the Council Of Australian Governments (COAG) agreed to a national framework of principles for delivering services to Indigenous Australians. The principles include sharing responsibility, harnessing the mainstream, streamlining service delivery, establishing transparency and accountability, developing a learning framework and focusing on priority areas.

- The Australian Ministerial Task Force articulates a long-term vision, that over twenty to thirty years:

  Indigenous Australians, wherever they live, have the same opportunities as other Australians to make informed choices about their lives, to realise their full potential in whatever they choose to do and to take responsibility for managing their own affairs.

- The tenth goal of the Tasmanian Government’s long-term social, environmental and economic plan over twenty years, Tasmania Together, is to

  …acknowledge and respect the contribution that the Aboriginal community and its culture have made and continue to make to Tasmania and its identity…

  and

  …enhance the participation of Aboriginal people in decision-making to meet the needs of the Aboriginal community and respect the rights of Aboriginal people to self-determination.

* Governance structures

The new arrangements have created new governance structures for achieving better service delivery to Aboriginal people. An important part of the work of the COAG Trial in Tasmania is to help community members understand the new arrangements and invite and support community members to engage with governments in these processes.
The Ministerial Taskforce on Indigenous Affairs

A Ministerial Taskforce oversees the coordination of Australian Government programs for Aboriginal people and sets national priorities. Individual departmental heads, collectively constituting the Secretaries Group on Indigenous Affairs, account to their Ministers and the Prime Minister for program delivery and cooperate across government and with Aboriginal communities. The Secretaries Group is responsible for working with Aboriginal communities in a whole of government manner.

The National Office of Indigenous Policy Coordination (OIPC)

The Office of Indigenous Policy Coordination (OIPC) coordinates a whole of government approach to programs and services for Aboriginal people Australia wide. OIPC was originally located within the Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs (DIMIA). In 2006, its location is within the Department of Family Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaCSIA).

The Regional Indigenous Coordination Centre (ICC)

The Indigenous Coordination Centre (ICC) is a regional centre based in Hobart. ICC coordinates a whole of government approach to programs and services on a regional basis and negotiates with Indigenous communities at local levels.

The Department of Premier and Cabinet (DPAC)

The Department of Premier and Cabinet (DPAC) supports Tasmanian government policy and supports the work of whole of government leadership through the Lead Agency Forum (LAF) and the Inter-Governmental Coordinating Committee (IGCC) for the COAG Trial.

The Office of Aboriginal Affairs (OAA) is a Division of DPAC, and it plays a key role in the Trial.
The Lead Agency Forum (LAF)

The Lead Agency Forum (LAF) is a small working group of Senior State and Commonwealth Officers - two from the Policy Division of DPAC, one from OIPC, one from ICC and two project officers for the COAG Trial, from ICC and OAA. The LAF plays a coordinating role and provides leadership, direction and problem-solving for the COAG Trial.

The Inter-Governmental Coordinating Committee (IGCC)

Senior officers, or their representatives, of all Commonwealth, State and Local Government departments attend meetings of the IGCC four times a year. At the IGCC, they share information, strategies and plans to contribute to and enable the progress of the COAG Trial. (See Appendix I).

Community involvement in Tasmania

In the initial negotiations between Commonwealth and State Governments for setting up the COAG Trial in Tasmania, the State proposed that, if the Aboriginal community in Tasmania agreed, both governments and the Aboriginal community take forward the report on Aboriginal family violence in Tasmania, *ya pulingina kani* - *Good To see You Talk*, as a COAG Reconciliation Trial Project. In a letter to the Premier of Tasmania, the Prime Minister agreed to the State’s proposal.

The Tasmanian Office of Aboriginal Affairs (OAA) took responsibility for taking this agreement forward. In December 2002, OAA conducted a round of consultations seeking the willingness of the Aboriginal community for this to happen. The Aboriginal community agreed on the condition that the community have a shared leadership role and that the knowledge, expertise, experience and voice of Aboriginal people is respected and honoured in the process.

Consultations for *ya pulingina kani* - *Good To see You Talk* during 2001 was both extensive and intensive. Community members had not spoken out about family violence in this way before with such united voices. At the launch of the *ya pulingina kani* - *Good To see You Talk* Report in October 2002, the Premier
committed his government to pushing forward its recommendations. The Aboriginal people welcomed the Premier’s response and said they were looking forward to working with the Government in a spirit of reciprocity. There was very good reason to support the COAG Trial.

Upon gaining community agreement on the theme of family violence, State and Commonwealth agencies met to work on setting up the trial and gain further community involvement. The first steps in this were difficult and inadvertently led to perceptions amongst Aboriginal community members that governments had not consulted with the community appropriately about the priorities of the Trial. This also led to the withdrawal of significant support from some Aboriginal people.

Constraints for the COAG Trial in Tasmania

A critical task of the COAG Trial was to encourage the Aboriginal community to take ownership of specific programs for Aboriginal people in ways that governments have not been able to do in the past. In the interviews held for this review process, community and government individuals and groups expressed positive support for the COAG Trial to bring community and government together to work. Those interviewed were also invariably concerned that there were underlying constraints for the COAG Trial in Tasmania. Two of these were the most strongly voiced:

• Aboriginality is a historical, emotional and political issue that causes division and alienation amongst people who identify as Aboriginal people; and

• It is a long, hard task to overcome the Aboriginal people’s suspicion of governments telling them what is best for them, especially in addressing family violence.

In the task of understanding the contexts of these constraints for the COAG Trial in Tasmania, some excerpts from interviews could indicate why these issues are both constraints that hold the progress of the Trial back as well as barriers for the governments and the community to overcome. Exploring this issue is particularly
relevant to the COAG Trial's work to sustain the trust amongst and support from Aboriginal people in the Trial site that has already been achieved.

What follows respectfully reflects the views of some Aboriginal people who raised the issues as constraints and barriers to gaining trust and agreement between governments and community.

Aboriginality in the Tasmanian context

Because the issue of Aboriginality is both complex and contextual, and intrinsic to understanding the progress of the COAG Trial in Tasmania, it is important to hear how some Aboriginal people explain what being Aboriginal means to them, especially within the context of family violence.

On identity and community

Women want safe houses. We need to find a model run by Aboriginal people. The houses need to be accessible, secret, out a bit. They’re women’s business. They stay with the women. You have to honour that. There’s also men’s business, of course. We want to do our own welfare. Some of our women need pampering. Violence leaves us as shells. It’s hard to get healed. We need walks in the scrub, in our own country, cultural stuff like the beach, traditional foods, bush tucker – seafood, shellfish, kangaroo, wallaby, mutton birds, mutton fish, Cape Barren goose, warrener, white currants, wild cherries, grass tree bread. We need to be doing it right, like our mothers told us. But a lot of Aboriginal people don’t know about that. We need to experience our special connectedness to the land. As we grew up we were told to say we were Italian or Greek. Assimilation worked. It brought us shame. You can see the community bringing that stuff with them. We have to lose that. We have to heal. Be proud of who you are!

On ownership

Ownership issues are political issues that pull us apart when there is no doubt about our credentials, our honesty and our identity. We need to speak up within our community and it needs to be by a person who can’t be got at. If your identity is challenged, you are attacked. They attack who you are and your
integrity and character. You don’t know who the gatekeepers are. You need a strong figure, an Elder, who, if she sees something that is unethical or not moral or targeted for political reasons, she’ll speak up.

On more than one Aboriginal community

There is not just one Aboriginal community. There were many tribes and we can come from many different families – on the islands, down south Oyster Cove way, up the north west and so on. If you’re from the north, you could well be from the families of Aunty Dolly Dalrymple or Aunty Fanny Cochrane.

On proving identity

There are a lot of people who don’t know where they come from but if you sit down and talk with them about who their families are and what they know about them, you can tell they are Aboriginal. We’re a small place, Tasmania.

If people are talking about their culture, their identification and where they come from, how do they get that from written genealogical stuff? The first thing you get is, who is your family? I tell them who my real family is, my dad’s, my mum’s, the mission they came from. That is different from hearing people say that they have written proof.

The Tasmanian State Government has three tiered criteria for establishing the eligibility of Aboriginal persons to access to specific Aboriginal services, such as affirmative action programs for employment by government, and rights to access resources and cultural practices. The criteria for eligibility requires that an Aboriginal person is of Aboriginal descent, identifies as an Aboriginal, and is accepted as such by the community in which he or she lives or has lived. The Commonwealth has the same three tiered criteria but tests them in different ways. The issue of Aboriginality is perhaps the most confounding problem for the COAG Trial. Another view from an Aboriginal IGCC member explains this further:

Local voices are marginalised

In the business of community, government and society of Tasmania, there is one key, central Aboriginal organisation in this state. If you haven’t got the centre
engaged, you have to deal in the margins of the community, with localised community groups and organisations. They might be well focussed, and recognised with funding, programs and skills. To validate [those local voices] and potential, we need leadership and philosophy to change. One of the things [the central organisation] that got us there, to the forefront in self-determination, is also holding us back. Change is needed. It will happen – for historical reasons, not for government.

**Conflict over identity, ideology and power**

Our critical issue is the generation we are tripping up with fights over identity, dominance of groups and ideology. The issue of community governance is rising to the fore. We’re living in a post self-determination stage. In some ways, this is a good thing but for all the wrong reasons. Committed to the concept of self-development, the community started to get recognition and acknowledgement of the right to defend their identity. Then community capacity to sustain the gains began to wane because community didn’t have enough skills in a critical capacity to make this work. Even if we crack issues of coordination, community is limited in its ability to take up what’s available and run with it. There’s a level of activity that is missing. That “there is only one community”, is political.

Whatever the agreements or disagreements or eligibility criteria are, the Aboriginal people decide within their community who their people are. The Aboriginality issue is of concern to the community because it causes division. For example, some Aboriginal people interviewed expressed concern about the barriers they meet in relation to one another, their organisation and governments due to the issue of Aboriginality.

Whatever the disagreements, some said, addressing the issue of family violence is such a deeply serious issue related to the survival of their Aboriginal identity and culture that they would support all parties, the community together with governments, to come to the table, to talk through the issues of family violence in their community, and come to some agreed action to address the threat of violence to their people’s well-being.
Loss of trust in governments

Some three years after the COAG Trial started, it is important to acknowledge the anger and disillusionment with the COAG Trial that Aboriginal people expressed during the interviews for this review. The anger was strongly indignant. The loss of community support that occurred at the beginning of the Trial contributed to the slow difficult start that the project workers faced.

Therefore, part 2 of this report attempts to clarify events in the hope that mistakes and misunderstandings can be accepted as natural processes of learning, and instill some confidence that steps have been taken to responding to what was learnt for working together in the future.

Participation of Aboriginal organisations in the COAG trial

For this evaluation process, all Tasmanian Aboriginal organisations (Appendix 2) were invited to comment on the COAG Trial during the review process and nine responded positively from both inside and outside the Trial site. Two organisations have become involved in agreement processes.

Though these organisation groups or organisational managers were interviewed separately, there were many shared views. All expressed a keen interest in coming to the table to talk, sharing information, and working together in new ways with each other and with governments.

Phases of the COAG Trial 2003-06

The COAG Trial project workers adopted a firm community-based approach to consulting with and supporting Aboriginal people at local levels, with individuals and community groups. The Commonwealth and Tasmanian Governments each appointed a project worker to begin this work jointly in 2003. One project worker was attached to OAA, the other to ICC. The project workers planned a five-phase strategy for implementing the COAG Trial:
Phase 1: Communication strategy;
Phase 2: Consolidating working groups;
Phase 3: Trial partners working together to develop strategies to address Aboriginal family violence in each of the Trial site locations;
Phase 4: Review and evaluation; and
Phase 5: Signing of Shared Responsibility Agreements (SRAs).

Phase 1 of the Trial, the communication strategy, was completed in December 2003. Phase 2 of the Trial, consolidating working groups, commenced in mid-January 2004.

The project workers realised that activities at different locations within the Trial site would be at different levels of engagement with Phase 2. They anticipated that activities would continue at different levels of engagement with Phases 3-5 of the Trial through 2004 to 2006.

The project workers also foresaw that after Phase 1, the other phases could occur concurrently rather than sequentially. Each year, the project plan builds on the achievements of the previous year. Since the momentum of project activity was increasing, a sixth phase was added to the 2005 Project Plan: Implementation of Shared Responsibility Agreements (SRAs).

Phase 1

In 2004 the project workers consolidated the work of the consultations by the Victorian company, Success Works. Sometimes together, sometimes individually, the project workers gradually covered the whole Trial site through the Northern Midlands, the Meander Valley, Flinders Island, Cape Barren Island, and the Break O’Day municipalities.

The work in Phase 1 was to inform Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people about the COAG Trial and invite them to become involved in setting local priorities for engaging community members in the Trial processes. Community members who came to the meetings included Aboriginal Elders and other Aboriginal people,
community leaders, such as Local Government aldermen and alderwomen, members of the police force, neighbourhood house coordinators, health service workers and members of other government agencies that have branches in the localities.

This was difficult for the project workers. One said,

It was a long, hard slog - talking through the issues and people putting up their hands so we could establish working groups. It was hard to develop focus, build trust and get relationships happening.

Though it was hard getting community members engaged in working groups and to enter into an agreement, 2004 was a good year for the COAG Trial.

By early 2005, the project workers had achieved expressions of support from many government and non-government agencies as well as Aboriginal people, and suggestions for possible partnerships. The momentum had picked up and a third project worker was appointed to work out of Launceston.

Phase 2

**Deloraine and the Meander Valley**: Local visits and telephone hook-ups with service providers led to strong support for the COAG Trial, especially recognition of the need to address issues of family violence. Service providers, including the Neighbourhood House, the Men’s Shed, the school, social workers, Ashley Youth Detention Centre (AYDC) and Jahadi, an Aboriginal community enterprise, were keen to participate. They found the problem was getting Aboriginal community members involved.

**Cape Barren Island**: The Cape Barren Island Aboriginal Association Inc (CBIAAI) supported the Trial with a sub-group of their governing committee and the health worker forming a COAG Trial working group. An SRA on family violence has been signed between CBIAA and Commonwealth and State governments. Complimenting this, a further SRA has been signed between CBIAAI and the Commonwealth Government for the development of a community health and well-being centre.
Launceston: The project workers have woven a strong network of support and action for the COAG Trial in the Launceston area. This is a network of individual people in the Aboriginal community and individual people in government agencies including Aboriginal Elders, the Launceston City Council, Anglicare, the Launceston College through J Block, TAFE, Tasmanian Aboriginal Childcare Association, Riawunna, a centre for Aboriginal studies at the University of Tasmania, the Family Services and Youth Justice Division of DHHS and Ashley Youth Detention Centre (AYDC) at Deloraine.

The COAG Trial is working very closely with the community to develop a Shared Responsibility Agreement for extending meenah mienne, an arts mentoring program for youth at risk in the justice system. It is expected that partners will have signed an SRA by September 2006.

A second initiative by the COAG Trial was the pilot Family Well-Being training program in 2004. This was well attended and supported by many Aboriginal community members. Negotiations to consolidate the pilot as a TAFE training course are in initial phases in mid 2006.

Break O’Day: The COAG Trial consultations in St Marys and St Helens drew positive support from Aboriginal community members and Elders, St Helen’s Hospital, the schools, the Break O’Day Local Government Council, Anglicare, St Helens Neighbourhood House, and St Helens Healthy House. A working group formed and enabled a number of activities for young Aboriginal people. Further work is expected in the Break O’Day municipality with the suggestion for a developing a Shared Responsibility Agreement to address mental health issues caused by alcohol or substance abuse particularly amongst young men.

Flinders Island: The project workers are continuing to work with the Flinders Island Aboriginal Association Inc (FIAAI) at Lady Barron. The FIAAI is concerned with delivering services to the Aboriginal community that include health, housing, employment, counseling, childcare, well-being programs and aged care. The underlying currents of issues, such as Aboriginality and distrust of others,
including governments and Aboriginal organisations, is constraining agreement. Nevertheless, certain priorities have been identified and are being worked on with a view to possible agreement.

The Northern Midlands: The COAG trial has supported an arts mentoring program for young Aboriginal people in the Campbelltown–Cressy area. The particular outcome was building self-esteem amongst Aboriginal youth at possible risk of alcohol abuse and crime and helping them find the confidence to be employed.

Phases 3-6

Partners working together (3), review and evaluation (4), signing SRAs (5) and implementing SRAs (6) are continuing concurrently through the Trial site in 2006.
Summary

Conditions and challenges at the start of the COAG trial in Tasmania:

Events, activity highlights, governance and partnership agreements 2003–2006

- Family violence already established as a priority issue for the community and government partnership;
- Commitment by both Commonwealth and State governments to overcoming Aboriginal disadvantage;
- Willingness by some community members, Elders and organisations to become involved in advisory roles and working roles;
- Main barriers to the trial identified: the divisive issue of Aboriginality in Tasmania and loss of trust in government support for addressing family violence;
- Governance structures and partnership agreement protocols established during 2004;
- Strategy for the work of the trial begun;
- Consultation networks identified and established in the Northern Midlands, Launceston, Meander Valley, Break O’Day and Cape Barren and Flinders Islands;
  Working groups established in Launceston and Cape Barren Island;
- SRA completed with the Cape Barren Island community to address underlying causes of family violence, and implementation underway;
- SRA near completion in Launceston for youth at risk;
- Model program for young Aboriginal people at St Helens to assist understanding of cultural and social issues that affect their well-being; and
- Pilot program and evaluation of a family well-being program in Launceston. Processes for agreement in initial stages for an accredited family and well-being training program to be delivered through TAFE in Launceston.
2. Learning from Working Together

This part of the report explores what has been working well or not so well in the COAG Trial in Tasmania. Interpretive comments appear in the boxes to highlight some perceived and interim learning outcomes from the trial, with particular regard to working relationships, the partnerships that are developing, the progress toward shared responsibility agreements, community involvement and government coordination and strategy.

A difficult beginning

Though, as indicated in the first section, the difficult and underlying issues of Aboriginality and family violence are complex, historical and emotional, the Aboriginal people interviewed were clear in articulating their views.

This part of the report attempts to set out, as accurately as possible, the events that made the beginning of the Trial difficult. It is crucial to see how the misunderstandings have, in the long run, increased the need for community and governments to work together.

Meetings on the COAG Trial began between Commonwealth and State Governments in Tasmania late in 2002. Each government was approaching the COAG Trial with different emphases. The Commonwealth Government wanted to focus the COAG Trial in the north-east of the state where there was a higher and less scattered number of Aboriginal people living. The State preferred a whole of state approach. As mentioned earlier, this was perhaps because the State
Government was proceeding with its response to the *ya pulingina kani-* Good To See You Talk Report.

Through an open state wide invitation, OAA had, before the COAG Trial started, invited Aboriginal community members to express interest in becoming a member of the Indigenous Family Violence Aboriginal Advisory Committee (IFVAAC). From expressions of interest, nine members of the Aboriginal community were selected for the committee.

The Commonwealth agency at the time agreed that, as the process for appointing IFVAAC members was already complete, IFVAAC would advise the COAG Trial as an important part of its work. At a later meeting of Commonwealth and State agencies, the Commonwealth agency suggested that the IFVAAC was inadequately representative of Aboriginal people in Tasmania and argued for wider representation. It was agreed that ATSIC nominate more Aboriginal people for selection to advise on the Trial at the next meeting. OAA advised the already successful applicants for IFVAAC that the selection process would be repeated and asked for permission to put their names forward again. One declined due to changed work circumstances.

At the meeting, ATSIS and OAA listed their names on the whiteboard. It was noted that some of those nominated had not yet personally agreed. Some of the original eight selected through OAA were not selected again. Also some of those selected did not accept their invitation to join the advisory group.

Aboriginal community members who accepted the nomination to IFVAAC attended the first meeting of the group on 21 July 2003. Two Commonwealth representatives from Canberra and one State Government representative joined the meeting, along with two officers from OAA and one from DIMIA, Hobart.

When the Meeting Coordinator welcomed members, she stressed that this was a meeting of IFVAAC, an Aboriginal community meeting to provide advice to the government.
During the introduction of members, Aboriginal Elder, Aunty Pat Green, said that she had been involved with the Aboriginal community for over thirty years and that...

...she felt the *ya pulingina kani* project to be one of the biggest projects the community has ever done.\textsuperscript{vi}

One IFVAAC member commended the State Government for...

...stepping out of its comfort zone in the way that the *ya pulingina kani* Report was done.\textsuperscript{vi}

Members heard about the agreement by the Premier and Prime Minister, the selection process for IFVAAC, the process of taking the *ya pulingina kani* – Good To See You Talk Report forward and the whole of government approach that both the Commonwealth and State Governments were engaging in.

Some members voiced their objection to the way the selection process took place. They also objected to the proposal by the Commonwealth that the Trial site be confined to the north-east of Tasmania.

If IFVAAC was the advisory group to the COAG Trial, this also meant advising on the Trial site. To some IFVAAC members, it seemed that the Commonwealth Government had already made the decision for the northern site and the State had agreed. A number of people walked out of the meeting. Those remaining were asked to vote on the location of the COAG Trial site. There was no longer a quorum of members in the room. At interviews for this COAG Trial Report, Aboriginal people who attended this IFVAAC meeting recalled that:

- The meeting went horribly wrong.

- There were misunderstandings about what the committee would be doing and about the COAG Trial.

- There was lack of respect given to IFVAAC members, a lack of listening to what they actually were saying.

- The Commonwealth process was offending IFVAAC members and the process that had gone into forming it.
- That [the process] is why some Aboriginal community people declined the invitation to go on IFVACC.

IFVAAC members had left the meeting in confusion and frustration. They believed that *ya pulingina kani*, as a Reconciliation Project, was giving the community a way forward for healing from and stopping family violence. They felt left out of the decision-making.

The alienation felt at that time in 2003 was conveyed strongly in the interviews in 2006. Aboriginal people expressed their belief that the decision about the location of the Trial site had not been agreed upon with the Aboriginal community and neither was the theme of family violence agreed.

Family violence is a sensitive, complex community issue. The community knows the secrecy, the deep hurt, the suffering and humiliation it causes. It is theirs to own, heal and solve. The Aboriginal community also knows that they can’t do it alone. They want government partnership in this work. The community made this clear in the *ya pulingina kani* – Good to See You Talk Report through the principles of reciprocity, healing and partnership.

The State Government continued to support IFVAAC in its role in taking up the *ya pulingina kani* - Good To See You Talk Report. With secretariat services from OAA, IFVAAC continued to develop a vision and action plan for working with the report. They developed a portfolio of formal protocols and planning documents to legitimise the identity and integrity of their group. IFVAAC became *ya pulingina kani Group*.

As well, the process was underway for setting up Tasmania's Safe at Home legislation, which was to be passed during 2004. This legislation was part of the Tasmanian Government’s response to family violence: it was to protect victims whilst making the offenders responsible for their behaviour through the justice system.
In February 2004 the *ya pulingina kani* Group was asked to participate in Safe at Home advisory processes and agreed. Now at the time of writing, the State government is bringing together the *ya pulingina kani* Group, Safe at Home and the COAG Trial to explore possibilities for working together.

As the narrative of this review of the COAG Trial in Tasmania unfolds, it becomes possible to see how these first decisions and some that followed, though they were not part of the COAG trial, combined to confuse understanding by Tasmanian Aboriginal people about the trial and its potential.

In the initial events of the trial, there was much to be learned about:

- The divisive issue of Tasmanian Aboriginality; and
- The difficulty of communicating changing government directions and decisions to the Aboriginal community who were already suspicious of governments’ motives.

It became apparent through the review process that the community and government working well together depends on

- Acknowledging and explaining mistakes;
- Acknowledging and explaining misunderstandings;
- Talking until shared understandings emerge;
- Involvement in decision-making;
- Clarifying roles, responsibilities, and strategies;
- Allowing time to heal and trying again; and
- Anticipating and sharing possibilities for good future outcomes.

**Round Table Talk**

In the early consultations held at Deloraine, a number of service providers and some Aboriginal people who are very active in their Meander Valley community attended. The problem was getting more of the Aboriginal community involved.

During an interview, an Aboriginal community worker explained why getting Aboriginal people involved is so difficult.
Men don’t ask for help for domestic violence. They don’t have courage to stand up. Even women are reluctant to talk about it. You bring them together and always two or three who come don’t make comments. We had a COAG Trial meeting at one person’s home. Every woman who would have experienced domestic violence would have denied it. They would deny the abuse of children.

Even with strong local support, the project workers believe it is going to be difficult to establish a working group for the COAG Trial in the Meander Valley. Aboriginal people would find working with the COAG Trial on the theme of family violence painfully and frighteningly confrontational, and would feel unready to bring family violence out into the open.

Aboriginal workers believe there are opportunities for engaging Meander Valley Aboriginal community members in the COAG Trial.

There is a big opening possible. We can use the cultural ways of doing men’s business and women’s business. We can do this without offence to husbands and wives. We’re already structured to bring the issue of family violence out front. We have good Aboriginal role models. You can mend. With one-to-one counselling and individual privacy we can recognise the problem. We can’t fix it: we need to learn how you go managing it. We have to try and identify individuals and Aboriginal bodies that can help.

Men’s gatherings and women’s gatherings for Aboriginal people work, say Aboriginal community workers. Interviewees across the Trial site tell positive stories of change in men’s and women’s belief in themselves when they go to the gatherings. In the gatherings, Aboriginal people learn from each other non-violent ways of relating to one another, and encourage each other to talk, heal, solve problems and learn more about the culture of their people.

Story telling for the healing from violence is a time-honoured way amongst Aboriginal people. The ya pulingina kani – Good To See You Talk Report says that story telling releases
... the voices of individuals who suffer pain and who offer compassion by coming to terms with their own experience of violence and through opening their hearts and minds to understand it.

It may be that, at Deloraine, a working group for the COAG Trial is slow in coming about because, as members of the small group meeting said, Aboriginal people there ‘don’t want the shame’ of associating with the theme, Aboriginal family violence. They won’t risk rumour, speculation or being reported. There are people there though who have pulled through family violence, who are still healing and want to help others. There is a trusted and skilled group of Aboriginal people there willing to work with the COAG Trial through arranging and facilitating places and times for men and women to talk and tell their stories. Through reclaiming their dignity, developing support for and trust in each other, and understanding their individual and community needs, the Aboriginal people in this community could possibly come to the table to talk with government agencies.

In a small community where everyone knows everyone, many Aboriginal people want to hide violence. They don’t know what to do, so they suffer its recurrence. They need to feel safe. They want to be accepted for who they are. Though reluctant to talk about violence, they might know they need to talk about it.

Building working partnerships in the difficult circumstances of family violence can perhaps only begin by:

• gathering together ‘round the table’, community with community, community with government;

• listening to Aboriginal community ways that work - opening to talk and story telling, listening and talking long enough till trust comes; and

• supporting the Aboriginal community to heal, in ways that they know, safe in the confidence of having the empathy and support of governments in order to move into the future with dignity.
Creative consultation towards SRAs

In the Launceston area, the project workers cast the COAG net outwards to individual people in the Aboriginal Community and in government agencies. The project workers visit Aboriginal people one-to-one regularly, listen to their needs and views, encourage people to speak out, give whatever time it takes, run meetings, follow up requests for information as soon as possible, glean ideas that might work and give feedback to the community about them. Thus, two SRA processes are in train in Launceston.

meenah mienne: An arts mentoring project for youth at risk

In this project an Aboriginal Elder and other Aboriginal artists, the Ashley Youth Detention Centre School Principal, the Manager of the Family Services and Youth Justice Services of DHHS together with the project workers from the ICC and OAA, are working towards an SRA for continuing the meenah mienne project.

The story of meenah mienne illustrates the complexities, frustrations and rewards that occur when government agencies work meaningfully with the Aboriginal community. It shows how political agendas can be transcended. It shows what can be learnt from strong partnerships that are already building trustful relationships between government organisations and Aboriginal organisations.

This is a story of partnership that begins with Family Services and Youth Justice Services in DHHS, Launceston, which has a mandate to work alongside Aboriginal community members and leaders. Reports like Aboriginal Deaths in Custody and Bringing Them Home, the Beijing Rules and the UN Chapter of Human Rights set the scene for this mandate. The Youth Justice Act of 1997 was implemented in February 2000. It emphasises the need for family and community inclusion in all aspects of work with young people who have offended. This prescribes the involvement of Elders in community conferencing and crime prevention community safety activities.
The Children and Families division of DHHS had certain funds for engaging with the community. They discovered that there was already a strong partnership between Aboriginal artists and arts related government organisations in Tasmania. There were well established and trusted relationships with the Elders. Through a tendering process, Arts at Work, an employment service for artists and a division of the Department of Tourism, Arts and the Environment formed a partnership with Children and Family Services and Youth Justice to develop a project with an arts-based format which became *meenah mienne*, My Dream, My Art. In the words of a Manager in Youth Justice Services, it was a brave thing for Arts at Work to do:

This was funding about developing a partnership process, not about outcomes for young people. It was only a pilot, six months long. We knew we couldn't make significant changes in lives but we could work out how to work together – how to agree on objectives and processes in sensible, meaningful ways. Using the arts community was particularly relevant for enabling young people to access their culture. All of our artists were keen to work with young people at risk.

People were willingly involved in *meenah mienne*. There were four young male participants, three female artist mentors and a male artist who was a role model for the young men, a female Elder, a female government arts adviser and a female mentor trainer. Some of the issues that emerged from the young people, such as violence, anger, not having a sense of belonging and feeling excluded, are not uncommon in youth justice client groups, according to the Youth Justice Services manager who was involved in planning the project.

The *meenah mienne* Project Report made a series of recommendations from a community gathering held at Bruny Island. These included the provision of training for artist mentors to develop skills and competencies for working with youth at risk and professional Aboriginal support for both artists and young people.

The National Minimum Data Set, published in Juvenile Justice in Australia 2000-01 to 2003-04 by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, indicates an over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people under
juvenile justice supervision in the states and territories at a rate of 34.2 per 1,000, compared with 2.8 per 1,000 for non-Aboriginal young people (Pp.30-31). The rates for Tasmania are lower: 13.8 per 1,000 Aboriginal young people compared with 5.4 per 1,000 non-Aboriginal young people, though DHHS, Tasmania reported that “the Indigenous data for Tasmania may not be reliable due to limitations in the reporting capabilities of the information system (P.31)”.

The meanah mienne working group asked how they could contribute to reducing these alarming statistics. According to the Youth Justice Services manager, Aboriginal youth at risk most often have a life trajectory that sees them go to jail. Staying out of the justice system only works when the young person feels they belong in a community, an extended family, where significant adults can influence their lives, where they are attached and can have a sense of hope through the attention focused on them. It’s really about identification with the community and citizenship and to be able to say something like, I feel I am valued. I’m happy about the community I’m in. I feel like I belong here.

meanah mienne is a way to draw the young people back into community, particularly those interested in the arts. In the pilot project, the Youth Justice Services manager observed that all the young Aboriginal people involved moved from feelings of failure to self-confidence and success. They had made a mistake but they can make good decisions that can be seen by everyone. When you see them after they’ve made a valuable contribution to the community, you can see that something has ticked over: something has clicked. They turn from being public enemy to being able to do good stuff.

By coincidence, the meanah mienne group presented at the Family Partnerships Forum in Hobart in March 2006, chaired by David Fanning, Commissioner for Children, and attended by more than three hundred service delivery agents. Following the meanah mienne presentation, Professor Hilton Davis presented a set of family partnership models developed in the UK. Hilton Davis highlighted and endorsed the work of meanah mienne a number of times during his talk. The
members of meenah mienne were heartened. The Youth Justice Services manager was particularly struck by Hilton Davis’ family partnership model. He was thinking, ‘yes, yes’ as Hilton Davis detailed the approaches in this model.

These approaches can be applied to the way we work in the organisation as managers or staff building a supportive working environment with all colleagues. It’s an opportunity to include everyone in a democratic sense: they are empowered to invest their ideas and encouraged to contribute, and they are recognised for the value of their contribution.

In the every day of the workplace, it’s easy to be unaware. We are all capable of being ruthless, deaf and discriminatory at times.

Yet, at the conference Dave [a project worker in the COAG trial] spoke from his heart to a three hundred strong audience which was a mixture of organisational representatives from a broad cross section of human service agencies. He was urging them to come on board, join and share in the journey with commitment and resources. People were impressed by his passion.

Though meenah mienne’s success has been recognised, the Youth Justice Services manager is concerned that the risks of working with young people in this disadvantaged group may deter his colleagues from getting involved in the project.

It’s hard work and can be confronting. There is yet more potential for meenah mienne. We can overcome such obstacles. With a thorough, integrated and well coordinated project plan, it will be possible to maintain the integrity of meenah mienne. The possibility of Arts Mentoring on lungtalanana (Clarke Island) would have great potential in such an inspiring cultural setting.

The meenah mienne project members have formed a working group for the COAG Trial. The SRA process is well underway. At a recent strategic planning session, the group identified three anticipated results:

- ongoing prevention and rehabilitation of young Aboriginal people at risk going in and out of the justice system;
• a stronger, more resilient and happier Aboriginal community that is involved in decision-making, initiating ideas and leading plans, empowered and supported by government; and
• valuing Aboriginal artists and the potential of young people to participate in the restoration, celebration and on going creation of Tasmanian Aboriginal culture and community.

The Family Well-Being Program

The Family Well-Being Program is designed to promote personal healing from family violence and to train individual Aboriginal people to support their community to heal as well. A two-day taster program was held during 2004. The healing aspect was a key recommendation of the *ya pulingina kani* - Good To See You Talk Report. Aboriginal women who were already recovering from the wounds of

The model of *meenah mienne* can be adopted and adapted for other SRA initiatives and activities. Its success lies in the ways and processes of working together:

• Networking with and bringing together those who are keen to work together for worthwhile anticipated results;
• Listening to each other’s voices;
• All participants having a voice in program development and management;
• Identifying goals, and working out a strategy to achieve them together;
• Commitment to on going participation by workers, government, community, volunteers, artists and others;
• Valuing and recruiting participation by *the right people*, that is, people who have qualities of respect, genuineness, humility, compassion and empathy, quiet enthusiasm and personal integrity – people who can be with people; and
• Supporting workers with mentoring training.
family violence particularly welcomed the opportunity to try the two-day program because they were now wanting to help others in need in their community.

Those who attended were enthusiastic about the possibilities of the program for strengthening their community. They thought the training program could be adapted in Tasmania and would be a big benefit for learning how to support Aboriginal people in situations of family violence. They expected that they would continue to attend the program in 2005 for nine spaced, one-day training sessions for each of four modules. The program was delayed. One participant, for whom the program would have been a significant boost to her work in educational programs, said,

[The pilot program] was part of the COAG Trial. We wanted the course to go ahead. We were disappointed. We wanted to do the course and then become accredited trainers.

The program has the potential for community members to work together, strengthening each other. We need a whole community strategy for a stronger community. Also it would help get the community working more with government people in a collective group. That’s starting to happen.

The community should have input into what they believe are the issues and have ownership of them. [This means] listening, hearing their voices. It should be the [Aboriginal people] getting ownership rather than being told how, what or why.

This last point, often articulated by Aboriginal women, that the Aboriginal people take on the problem of family violence in their community as their own, is a continuous theme that occurs in this review. The opportunity for Aboriginal community members and leaders to gain knowledge, skills and understanding to deal with family violence is essential.

Government support for the program has continued though action has taken place very slowly. Change for such deeply rooted issues as family violence is going to be slow and will need deep generational healing. Aboriginal people lose heart when they get to taste something that offers good outcomes for them and they don’t
get to go ahead with it. After a time, when they think nothing is happening, they lose trust. This is not surprising. Nor is it surprising that they withdraw interest when, having experienced possibilities for hope, they sense the hope being withdrawn from them.

One Aboriginal woman becomes quite angry when this happens, she said,

Go back to the recommendations of this book here [ya pulingina kani – Good To See You Talk]. Reciprocity - go over the recommendations - healing, taking stories back to the people, training for community grief and healing. Where has that gone? Yet, we are still asked to work in partnership. We’re missing the healing stage. There have been recommendations for Reconciliation for forty years. We have got to start the healing.

It goes back to Deaths in Custody, the Royal Commission, ten years of that; the Stolen Generation, ten years of that; Reconciliation, Bring Them Home, ten years of that. You have change of government, change of policy, change of ministers, change of department heads. We don’t have change of community. Give us back all the land you want, take all the money back. Is that going to heal me from family violence?

The learning from the COAG Trial is that a slow or silent response can let energy leak away. A thoughtful, measured response can be mutually motivational. Governments need to be mindful of the ways they respond. An IGCC perspective suggests circumspection:

Government people should feel comfortable to say there are some things we can do, there are some things we can’t do. You may be approaching issues specifically and honestly. The community may not be as committed to you. But at least you have integrity. You have personal standing in the community. You need to have integrity. Governments come and go.

Be mindful. Say, I can’t do that. But we have to find a way. I need your support and guidance on how this can best be achieved. The people will thank you for your honesty.
Negotiations for a Shared Responsibility Agreement between the Aboriginal community, FaCSIA and TAFE for the Family Well-Being Training program are still at the preliminary stage in June 2006. There is a particular concern for attention voiced by community members and COAG project workers: that the main parties to the agreement work with a shared understanding that is consistent with the original recommendations of the pilot.

Modest funds are available now and consultations between government agencies in focus groups with Aboriginal people are being planned at the time of writing.

The COAG trial has brought to the surface many possibilities for the Aboriginal people to work in partnership with government agencies to meet community goals. The impetus is for governments to be open, sharing constraints and possibilities for action. The Family Well-Being pilot training program was designed particularly for Aboriginal community members to:

• participate in a program of self-healing;
• gain skills to strengthen their community in the face of family violence; and
• gain education and training qualifications, as well as confidence and recognition.

The recommendations from the pilot project are well considered, proposing realistically attainable learning objectives and outcomes for participants in the course. These should be preserved and properly resourced in the planning and implementation of the training program.

**Refining strategies for implementation**

The Cape Barren Island COAG Trial working group was slow in coming to agreement but it worked. One Project worker said it worked because

... representatives of government services were sitting at the table with community. Also the community raised the bar.
The reference to the community “raising the bar” is significant in that it points to the importance of the community taking a strong, participatory role in the agreement and implementation processes of SRAs.

During the focus group for this review held at Cape Barren Island in April 2006, the CBIAA members looked back to the beginning of the COAG Trial working processes. Different people commented,

- The COAG Trial put the Government to the test to see just how well the three levels would be able to help. The community wanted a health or well-being building. It’s been very difficult in such a tiny community to deal with the issues of family violence. We don’t believe there’s much here, within the strict legal sense of Safe at Home. Mostly people are single here.

- We were firm that the SRA was not going to [be about agreeing to] reduce family violence. We talked in terms of it addressing underlying issues that might address family violence, like community cohesion.

The Cape Barren Island working group members were not denying that there was violence on the island. They felt that it would be more realistic and achievable to tackle underlying causes over a long period of time.

Building a stronger community became the focus of the COAG Trial agreement. An SRA on family violence was signed between CBIAAI and Commonwealth and State governments in July 2005. Complimenting this, a further SRA was signed between CBIAAI and the Commonwealth Government for the development of a community health and well-being centre.

For the working group, the test of the partnership is in the implementation. One focus group member told of the delays:

One of the worst things that happened was the inability of government departments to work together in a ‘whole of government’ way. There was a delay of twelve to eighteen weeks while they were scraping up the rest of the money. ICC was good. The problem was that FaCSIA and OATSIH have got their own rules and regulations. This didn’t really affect the community as such.
There was delay [and] delay. There is a barge only every four or five weeks to bring building materials and furniture and so on. At the eleventh hour, FaCSIA said, hold it. We said, we couldn’t. It’s too late. The architect had arranged everything ready to go. Purposes agreements were wanted. This was stressful and difficult for the community.

Thus the Cape Barren Community held to the agreement.

In refining strategies for following through agreements, the impetus for governments and government departments is to

- provide motivation for government workers to respond to community action as agreed with government agencies;
- overcome old resistances between agencies to work together; and
- ease the weight of rules, procedures and paper work for the sake of speed and efficiency in supporting the community to achieve the desired outcomes.

**Sharing decision-making and responsibility**

When the project workers and the evaluation consultant arrived for the focus group for this review at the FIAAI, Lady Barron, there was an air of tension amongst the group. There had been difficulties in negotiations for working together in relation to the COAG Trial.

How do these difficulties arise? How do communities understand SRAs? The questions that the community members were asking at Lady Barron, were:

- What was permissible for an SRA and what was not?
- Was COAG about services that are not currently provided, for instance, even if TAC is funded to provide them?
- Were SRAs meant to include services that should not be provided elsewhere?
- If a service was not being provided by a particular body, could funding be transferred from that body and have it provided with SRAs where partners are bound to stand by it?

- Why has the process with the COAG Trial taken so long?

At a meeting in December 2005, the FIAAI listed five items that could be included in an SRA because they could be quickly and easily fixed, and the outcomes could be tangible: providing adequate and appropriate counseling services on Flinders Island, appointing a Community Liaison Officer, developing a cultural festival, providing appropriate and culturally supportive hostel accommodation for Flinders Island secondary/tertiary students in Launceston, and ensuring safe and supportive transportation for Aboriginal students between home and school. All of these activities would have required a high level of resources.

Housing was also discussed as an important issue relevant to family violence. The COAG Trial project workers undertook to work for a whole of government approach to housing. Though these items were recorded officially, there was no agreement reached by the FIAAI in the COAG Trial process. Until arranging for this review’s focus group meeting at Lady Barron in April, there was no further discussion with the FIAAI group though the COAG Trial project workers had tried to progress the December one by telephone and email contact. Could this have been a standoff and if so, how could it have happened?

The Flinders Island Aboriginal Association Inc. (FIAAI) was formed under the State Act of 1973 to provide housing and Land Rights Education. There is an elected Executive Committee. FIAAI provides housing services for the aged, hosts the Community Development and Employment Program (CDEP) and a Centrelink agency. It runs a childcare centre for fourteen children. It provides emergency welfare relief, arts and crafts, sports programs, and support for the school farm. Since last year, the FIAAI has held land titles. The staff and the volunteers are very community minded.
Flinders Island has the lowest rate of unemployment amongst Indigenous people in Australia. The FIAAI has 1% rental non-payments compared to 5% non-payments in similar organisations Australia wide. The Aboriginal people at Lady Barron are proud of their achievements as well as their capacity to build a strong community:

Our main aim is to control our destiny, remain self-sufficient and not be dictated to by the State or Local Government. The FIAAI always runs the show well. In its best light the SRA is governments walking towards community, in its worst it’s attempting to control.

Governments have clearly established decision-making protocols. One IGCC member pointed out that decision-making processes in the Aboriginal community are different; they are internal; the Aboriginal community decision-making process is a long process:

It could be six – eight - or nine months till they come back. If they say they won’t support you, they offer possible alternatives. Also, if there is pressure to get outcomes more quickly, the community will walk away from the table, in complete contravention to government decision-making processes. If governments want a decision made, it’s better not to fix a timeline.

Since the last meeting with the COAG Trial government representatives four months earlier, the FIAAI group is less interested in the five things listed for quick achievement. Local priorities and events seem to have superseded them. Also perhaps, the group had more decision-making time. In April 2006, they offered alternatives for SRAs. The FIAAI group said there were good reasons for agreeing to share responsibility and serve their community better. The proposals they made would relieve the pressure of many underlying causes of family violence in the Aboriginal community of Flinders Island: unemployment, the lack of childcare that undermines employment, having nothing to do and turning to alcohol, and extended families crowding into one house. They proposed to improve access to childcare and early education for the children through SRA processes.
The FIAAI want government assistance and agreement to work through processes that will permit them to buy land from the DHHS and build eight houses in Whitemark for mothers whose children leave the island because of overcrowding, violence, unemployment, no cars for transport and the need to care for older Aboriginal people in Whitemark, closer to the hospital. The FIAAI wants an SRA that will involve the DHHS, the DEWR and the Council of Local Government.

The FIAAI provides childcare for only three days a week for fourteen children with two workers. Every year, every place for a child is pre-booked. The centre is closed every school holiday. The FIAAI would like to integrate the FIAAI childcare centre with an Early Childhood Centre at the school at Lady Barron. There is possibility for an SRA with the Flinders Island community, involving local government and a number of government departments.

The COAG trial highlights culturally different ways of decision-making and also the difficulty of coming to shared agreement. Issues of Aboriginality, ownership, and histories of mistrust and disappointment are factors that cloud relationships amongst and between the Aboriginal community, its organisations and governments.

Just as governments may recognise that the decision-making processes of the community may differ from the governments’, the Aboriginal community may accept this difference too.

Reciprocity is the responsibility of all partners in decision-making. The impetus is for:

- every partner in a project to be strategic, responsive and responsible;
- governments to continue to offer the community opportunities and support for finding better ways to work together toward agreed outcomes; and
- the community to accept the challenge of such opportunities, take leadership and responsibility and help forge and determine those better ways for the well-being of their community.
Something works, and then it doesn’t. Why?

The new Commonwealth Government guidelines limit additional funding for Aboriginal students in grades 3, 5 and 7 who do not meet State literacy and numeracy benchmarks. Schools can no longer use these funds to engage Aboriginal students in culturally relevant curricular activities. Also the Aboriginal Student Support and Parents Association (ASSPA) no longer exists.

These changes have resulted in less Aboriginal parent involvement and less opportunities for bringing some parents whom teachers would never otherwise meet into the schools. This has been particularly disappointing for the students at a Break O’Day school on the north-east coast of Tasmania. The school can no longer financially support annual visits for grade 9 and 10 students to Launceston to find out about the services they could access in the city, including Aboriginal children’s legal aid, the Elders centre, the TAC and Raiwunna at the University of Tasmania. Also planning for a homework centre has been interrupted by the changes.

However, the consultations held for the COAG Trial in Break O’Day were fortuitous in terms of filling the gap created by the new government guidelines.

The COAG Trial, the school and other community partners including an Aboriginal Elder, the Neighbourhood House and the St Helens’ Healthy House supported a lunchtime series for secondary Aboriginal students. There was open communication with the COAG Trial project worker who was clear on what could and could not be done through the Trial. One teacher said,

We felt supported and well organised and had a strong feeling of working together. We left nothing to chance.

There was no fall-out in the number of students attending, the kids enjoyed it and it fitted in with school policy. All the students were involved in the planning. They met with lots of different community people, and family violence was a significant topic that came up. They were able to see alternative dynamic households through their friends.
During that time we had an improvement in the attendance of Aboriginal students at school. Students at risk in secondary school need to experience positive, supportive relationships.

The COAG Trial partnership had developed a good inter-governmental and community partnership model. It inspired the initiation of another interagency group, not associated with the COAG Trial. This new group was coordinated by a policewoman from Hobart and included local representatives of police, youth justice and education agencies. A good relationship developed between these agencies, parents and another community network for families. The group organised a weekend for young people, including young Aboriginal people, at Coles Bay. The weekend project did not work. Too many of the young people there had difficult problems. They were taken to Coles Bay by social workers and members of the police who were people they did not know or trust. In their mistrust, they reacted badly. One group member concluded:

The weekend needed to be planned, not rushed, and in far more detail. In this way it was different from the COAG Trial.

The COAG Trial model of project planning worked because:

- Project workers are skilled to show how partnerships and outcomes can be achieved.
- The success of partnership programs depends on detailed planning.
- It also depends on understanding the circumstances of the participants in the programs, especially the people who have difficulties in socialising non-violently. It means anticipating and preparing for disruptions, conflict, fear, emotional or irrational behaviour and violence.
- Facilitators are carefully selected, trained and supported.
- The right people, perhaps teams of the right people, are prepared for leading the particular aims of the activities.
- Strategies for dealing with disruption need to be planned, just in case.
- Community agreement and involvement with government agencies in the planning is essential so that, at the end of the day, responsibility for whatever happens is shared not judged.
**Working with Aboriginal organisations**

The lessons under this heading come from the constraints that organisations perceive from their experience with the new government arrangements, and the possibilities that they suggest for better participation by the Aboriginal community in decision-making.

Some Aboriginal organisations have the role of delivering specific services and programs, such as housing. Others deliver a number of different services and programs such as health services, family well-being, childcare, sports, land management, aged care, counseling, emergency relief, and so on. Most organisations deal with family violence within one context of care or another. When people come to the door of an Aboriginal community organisation, said a project worker, they are not going to be sent away. All the organisations develop expanded networks to help their members. In this way, organisations can always respond to calls for help.

The organisations may be drawing funding from different government sources and the ways of accessing and reporting go through different avenues. Often the format that one government body requires is different from another, though it is often similar information they want. Government personnel at points of accessing and reporting often change, albeit for natural changing departmental needs and staff movement.

One organisation worker described the experience of the new government arrangements for doing business with Aboriginal people as debilitating:

There are too many people requiring information. I send it. They ring and ask for it. I send it again. Someone else rings and asks for it and I send it again… I’d rather liaise directly with one section [of a government department].

Let organisations deal with the appropriate funding body – and not with people who have no idea of what the particular funding is about. When you’re dealing with those officers it’s like you have to educate them.
SRAs don’t support the community. They put the onus back on the community to take up issues with the other bodies who put in their percentage. The ICC should be the negotiators. With the community doing the work, there should be shared accolades, not passing the buck or blaming someone else when things go wrong. Say, Sorry, how can we fix it?

One Aboriginal organisational member believed there were not enough people who knew enough about the new structures. Other members of Aboriginal organisations said they thought SRAs were potentially great. At the same time, they said, the protocols were “dampening - being told what you will do is not on”. The perception that the implementation of the new arrangements for working with governments has added stress and frustration to the work of organisations suggests another barrier for the Trial. An Aboriginal worker shared her experience with the new arrangements in this way:

I used to love my job. I’ve denied participation in groups for the last eighteen months because it would be just to have another Aboriginal [number] involved. The playing field isn’t level. It’s not an inclusive approach. It’s dominating, disciplinary, and disrespectful. Even members of the community in government are losing their souls. People won’t go the whole nine yards again because of their family, their family’s children, and their health. I’m going back to my own.

I feel turmoil. We’re losing our identity; it’s being chipped away. We don’t know what to do about it collectively. I feel shackled that we can’t do more, new things, be creative to create employment. I can’t go through [that] again. A new person might be able to work with all this. I can’t. It’s too big a change for my generation. It was not easy before. It’s just not comfortable – practically begging for SRAs.
Improving inter-governmental coordination

Most Commonwealth and State government departments participate in the Inter-Governmental Coordinating Committee (IGCC). See Appendix 1. From the beginning of the COAG Trial in 2003, all the departments have been consistent in their support of the trial. In the beginning, heads of agencies or managers of divisions attended the meetings. With the progress of time, the personnel who represent the departments have changed and so levels of responsibility been devolved.

The Lead Agency Forum (LAF) members believe that the COAG Trial in Tasmania is coming into a new stage.

The progress of the COAG Trial has taken longer than originally hoped. The imperative is to speed things up whilst continuing to be sensitive to the concerns of the Aboriginal community. It is also imperative to respond to the Aboriginal community’s ideas and initiatives on programs to address family violence.
They believe that the project workers and the review process have built a certain level of trust in the COAG Trial. The next step is to take advantage of this and progress new ideas.

With the view that coordination of service delivery would lead to better outcomes for Aboriginal people, the IGCC mapped services across agencies that are relevant to addressing the issue of Aboriginal family violence. IGCC sees the COAG Trial as a complement to Safe at Home. Addressing family violence through the criminal code is a short-term response to family crisis. The underlying causes of family violence need to be addressed continuously over a very long period of time.

It is particularly important to highlight the IGCC view that the COAG Trial has, for the first time in Tasmania, provided a number of years of commitment by governments through COAG to addressing Aboriginal family violence. This protects the time span and progress for the COAG Trial from possible disruption by change of governments through elections.

The COAG Trial in Tasmania has at least two distinct advantages:

- a longer time span than ever before to pilot new arrangements and ideas for addressing family violence; and
- a growing level of trust by Aboriginal people in the COAG Trial.

One essential goal of IGCC is to develop a coordinated strategic approach to build upon and continue the achievements of the COAG Trial, particularly because there is growing response by the Aboriginal community to be involved.

The impetus is to progress a strategy building process that demonstrates whole of government and whole of community reciprocal effort.

The Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage Framework, endorsed by COAG, could guide such a strategy in terms of developing indicators or measures of success in reporting projects and outcomes.
3. Further lessons: Building a stronger community to overcome Aboriginal family violence

So far, this report has focused on the processes of governments working together with the Aboriginal community. The greatest difficulty perhaps for the COAG Trial in Tasmania is the theme it addresses: Aboriginal family violence, a complex and unquantifiable tribulation of the Aboriginal people.

The people who spoke for this review want governments and the Aboriginal community to come round the table, and with respect for each other’s views and perspectives, talk about and plan ways to prevent and reduce violence in the Tasmanian Aboriginal community. Some people said this coming-together would not be possible, others said it would never happen. Many believe there is a way forward to reduce family violence. Many are committed to finding that way forward.

The notion of responsibility is the cornerstone of the new arrangements for government service delivery. It is also at the heart of addressing family violence. It is about being able to respond and be counted on conscientiously and trustworthy. It is about the ethic of relationships that is responsive to the needs of others with good outcomes as goals.

What follows in this section are but a few of the compelling stories and commentaries on Aboriginal family violence and the COAG Trial. The Aboriginal people who spoke out opened their hearts and minds, intentionally, for both the
governments and the community to listen, hear and be responsible, that is, to be able to respond.

Each commentary or story raises questions relevant to future work of the COAG Trial, its governing agencies and the Aboriginal community. These people speak with a passion that has no self-interest and that only their words can convey. The stories and commentaries often reveal anxiety that the violence and the pain it causes won’t ever go away. Yet they convey a certainty born of personal experience that violence can be got through.

The people who spoke gave permission for their stories and views to be told in the hope of contributing to the Trial. Again, some interpretive questions, comments and learning are highlighted.

**Healing and safety: the COAG Trial and Safe at Home**

There are, but a few, secret places in Tasmania where Aboriginal people can go to recuperate from the bruises of family violence. A secret place is where there can be men’s time and women’s time, where Aboriginal men and women can find that non-violent living is possible, where they can improve their health and learn more about their culture. It is a place where Aboriginal Elders come and go. They are preferred alternatives to mainstream refuge shelters.

One person said,

> In Shelters you are not anonymous. Other people are there and you’re not necessarily safe. You can’t be nurtured with hugs, or have a good fire to cry around, or the bush to go for a walk in.

Another told of her experience of fleeing from violence to Victoria where a government scheme rents houses so that people in danger can move from place to place.

> If someone is seriously dangerous, a stalker, you have to continually move. Moving the kids is disruptive. Taking them away from their families is worse.
Through the criminal justice system, the Safe at Home program provides immediate relief from violence through the arrest of the perpetrator. The arrest is followed with support for the victims and their families and for the perpetrator. Safe at Home has a holistic approach towards preventing future family violence within the scope of the criminal justice system.

Aboriginal people who spoke about it in the review think that Safe at Home is a good law. Yet most are not willing to have their people in jail. The experience of having their people in jail, isolated from their families and community is too terrible and doesn’t work, they said. They want a safe place to go for healing of men and women and children.

Healing and protecting people from the emotional, spiritual and physical hurt of family violence is a long-term project.

The impetus here is for the COAG Trial to continue to bring governments and Aboriginal people together to find safe places and support the management of them.

The responsibility of those in partnership is to ensure a safe place where men and women and children can:

- reconnect with their Aboriginal community and family beliefs;
- develop non-violent relationships;
- recover dignity, well-being and self-respect; and
- gain the confidence to say no to violence in the Aboriginal community.

The COAG Trial can increase, and geographically spread, the number of activities that bring government agencies into meetings with the community to support those who willingly open their homes, hearts and minds to members of their community in crisis by following through and brokering the many suggestions for what might work that emerge from consultations and projects, such as:

- training programs, like the Family Well-being program;
- arts-based projects, like the meenah mienne and TACWAC cultural renewal projects;
- women’s and men’s gatherings;
- culturally-based curriculum activities for Aboriginal youth, especially in rural areas; and
- story-telling, writing groups, performance and arts programs.
Reclaiming dignity through education

The author of the story below gave permission to print this extract from the story of her escape from violence through education. It is a story that cost the author much pain to relive and write. It is not only a story of the desperation, life consequences and disenfranchisement caused by family violence. It is one that reflects the determination to survive. It reveals the fire of intelligence and search for self-respect and self-fulfillment of a young Aboriginal mother. It is also a story of the cultural compassion of a community Elder who supports the wife of an angry man.

Aunty, the Aboriginal Elder that lived across the road from my mother, was going to university. There was an Aboriginal Education Unit there and she had talked my mother into signing up for a course. She'd been nagging me, get off your bum and do something, she'd say. No one's gonna do anything for you in this life but yourself. I was toying with the idea, and then I just made the leap.

I had enrolled in the University of Tasmania's Aboriginal Bridging Program. I was nineteen years old, had been married for three and a half years and had two children. I was living in public housing about twenty minutes walk from the university campus in Rocherlea, a broad acre housing development. I had applied for AbStudy and was told I would get $120 per fortnight for returning to study in addition to my social security payment. My husband decided I would be allowed to attend classes on two conditions. Firstly, he would not have to care for the two children aged two years and four years; they would go into childcare. The second condition was that he would keep all the money that AbStudy paid me. It was the only way to get out of the house, so I agreed. As the commencement date for classes neared, I received a letter from AbStudy informing me that I would only be entitled to $30 per fortnight as I was not yet twenty-one years old and not entitled to the full adult payment. I hid the letter.

I would later tell the Aboriginal Elder that intervened in the incident that followed that: My husband found the AbStudy letter and was mad as hell. He accused me of using school to try to get out of looking after him and the kids. He said I was lazy and too stupid to go to university. He said I wasn't going...
anywhere for that amount of money. I told him I was already enrolled and that I still wanted to study. I just wanted the kids to have a better life and I wanted to do something with myself. He screamed at me, accused me of being stuck up, and thinking I was better than everybody else. I shouldn’t have turned my back on him as I went to leave the room; that was a mistake. The next thing I recall was the roar in my ears and my lungs burning for want of air. He had me by the throat, pinned against the wall, my feet off the ground. I struggled for air but could not breathe. I swung round wildly, kicking him in the groin and he threw me to the floor, I drew breath just before his fist crashed into my face, two, three times.

Through the large dining room window I’d caught glimpse of someone approaching the front door, I vaguely recall hearing the hammering on the door, the voice, it seemed very distant. He left through the back door, I staggered to the front door, turned the handle, caught a flash of blue light out of the corner of my eye and everything went black. Someone caught me as I fell.

I could taste blood and my eyes burned as I tried to open them. I flinched as something cold touched my face. Then I heard her voice, she spoke softly and sincerely. I just looked at her still dazed, your young’uns, they’re at my house, they came and fetched me, stay still my girl, hold them peas to your face. Everything hurt. The cops? I asked. She nodded and said, they’re ere, someone rang em, he’s outside, won’t let the cops in, you know how it is! Bloody cops can’t come in unless their invited, not to stop him killin’ his missus anyway. She looked at me real hard, that Bastard’s gonna kill you one day. She made tea and helped me to sit at the table. You have to go, have to get out of here, she told me as I tried to sip the hot sweet tea. The inside of my bottom lip stung, it was badly cut, and still bleeding. You have to go, she said again. I looked at her through swollen eyes and replied, I’m going all right. I’m getting out of here and I’m going to go to university. It was right then that the idea became fixed in my mind, I was going to university. It was going to be a long road.
This story is but one of many told during this review. It provides a real life background for reflecting on possible options for the Aboriginal community and governments to restore trust and understanding in partnerships that could contribute to the safety and well-being of Aboriginal men, women and children in Tasmania.

The story highlights the impact that post-compulsory institutions in Tasmania can make in restoring strength and dignity to the adults whose childhood education was made impossible by family violence.

In 2003, the COAG Trial began the task of researching and piloting culturally contextual training that could focus particularly on building community strength, the Family Well-being program.

There are many possibilities for building on this work. For example: bringing together TAFE and Adult Education, Riawunna Centre for Aboriginal Studies at the University of Tasmania, The Department of Education, DEST, DEWR, Registered Training Providers, Health and other Education agencies to develop the types of formal and informal learning pathways for Aboriginal adults that are most likely to lead to outcomes that could transform lives through education.

**Rebuilding trust**

Early in the review process, the *ya pulingina kani* Group were asked what they understood or knew about the COAG Trial. Their responses were reserved, yet frank.

The members of *ya pulingina kani* have accepted the tasks of:

- looking after and ensuring that the stories that Aboriginal people told in the *ya pulingina kani* - Good To See You Talk Report are returned to the people for the healing of family violence in the Tasmanian Aboriginal community;
• advising the community and governments on ways of working with the Aboriginal community with respect to the principles of reciprocity and partnership; and

• encouraging the restoration of Tasmanian Aboriginal culture, identity, knowledge and recognition through the arts as a positive alternative to their people engaging in activities, such as alcohol and substance abuse, that cause family violence.

Three Aboriginal Elders are members of ya pulingina kani. Since the 1960’s they have seen wave after wave of changed approaches by governments funded under names linked to commissioned reports or service delivery programs by - Deaths in Custody, Reconciliation, the Stolen Generation, Land Entitlement, Family Violence, and Safe at Home.

In the review focus group, they expressed the frustration that very little seems to have been properly achieved so far, with sustainable effect, to draw their community out of disenfranchisement, poverty, dependence or low self-confidence. They seemed weary. They were confused about the purpose of the COAG Trial and why the ya pulingina kani Group, appointed and supported by the State Government, had not been properly recognised and invited, as an active group, in a key advisory role to the Trial processes. They expressed doubt and lack of faith that what governments initiate will be followed through. They told of their fear of being “assimilated” again through some kind of government guile. They were worried about the capacity of their own community groups and organisations to support and sustain Shared Responsibility Agreements.

At the time of writing, the ya pulingina kani Group have been invited to come together with the COAG Trial and Safe at Home to discuss ways of working together. This is a very important event. The achievement for the COAG Trial is that invitations were accepted and people from all three groups came to the circle.
The members of the ya pulingina kani Group who spoke to the review were all women, from all parts of the state, Elders and daughters or nieces of Elders or their cousins. Collectively they hold a particular knowledge of the Aboriginal community, their land and their culture as their heritage. As a working group, they deserve governments to heed their counsel, gain their confidence and prove good faith. Till now members of the ya pulingina kani Group have generously worked for and waited for government commitment and action.

The impetus for the COAG Trial is to continue to bring governments and the ya pulingina kani Group into relevant forums regularly, and, in the faith of reciprocity, demonstrate that the wisdom, experience, connections and respect that the ya pulingina kani Group members hold in the Tasmanian Aboriginal community is recognised as a potent resource for achieving good family violence outcomes.

**Tackling alcohol addiction and mental illness: the most serious causes of violence**

The mother of an Aboriginal son is also a community leader. As she shares her experience and understanding, it is possible to discern the potential for developing a Shared Responsibility Agreement to address the most severe cause of family violence. This mother's commentary provides a life story of understanding that only she knows. It is her story, told with courage and concern.

Family violence is caused through alcohol. I grew up in the Aboriginal Community on Flinders Island. All my brothers and sisters grew up there together. I had experiences of family violence most of my life. I don't know where the Trial has got to. I don't think we have a great problem of family violence locally – I'd know if we did. The partnership we could form with COAG is a mental health partnership. When people take alcohol they get depressed and drink more. Quite a lot of the problem is not dealt with. Talking from previous experience I believe that government departments responsible for Aboriginal affairs, the Courts and the legal system could work more together, not just in Tasmania.

If the person is offending because of alcohol, they need alcohol taken out of their life, taking him to Clarke Island would be more just than to Risdon Prison. It
is better to do community work in their own communities than go to Risdon for twelve months. My son went to Risdon for violent offences. Now he is not in jail, he has another problem – alcohol. If he couldn't get [alcohol] in place like Clarke Island, he'd be fine. It would be better if he served his custodial sentence in a place where he could get help. The judge should say, Risdon plus counselling.

My son is like Jeckyll and Hyde. There are others like him. We need to deal with the cause. We deal with it at home. He has got better from day to day when we are there. We were away for five weeks and he re-offended.

Government or community agents working on the family violence problem need to go to the jails and find out what the offenders are like in custody, and how they got to be there. If they treated the cause – alcohol – there would be a lot less people doing custodial sentences. That is the sensible thing to do – help them regain self-esteem while they are in jail. You can't not treat the cause and think that it won't happen again. If only an offender with alcohol problems could get some work happening for him. If not, when he gets out, what's the first thing they do? Get into excessive drink.

It's an illness. No one is treating the illness. It's the same with depression.

In the COAG Trial there is some partnership that can be formed. In our area everybody is trying to get the mental health services increased and improved. The whole mental health response needs more money. Right now, some kids who have drug-induced psychosis live here. There is no support when you need it for family violence. The police take the offender away, but only to sober him up. Families need to have strategies in place. For example, if you choose a partner who turns out to be violent, you need support for your partner as well as when you need it. If you come to the hospital depressed and off the show and you can't talk, you get sent through to Ward E in Launceston. The hospital needs to keep you there until a professional person sees you, gets back to the person who took you in and discusses cause and treatment, instead of putting you out as soon as you've calmed down.
There is one thing I've learnt. Normally the violent ones are alcoholics. It's either beer or spirits. You have to work out what is the trigger, for example, say it's bourbon they choose, you say to them, you don't do that, and say it to their friends. It took a long time for us to work that out for our son. That is one thing that would make a lot of difference. The police would probably need more information and more understanding of how the alcohol affects different ones.

Somewhere there must be people who have recovered from violent lives. Most kids love getting to try alcohol. Let them hear the real life experiences of people who have become violent adults and then recovered. Let these people talk with the kids. Even though they grow up with alcoholics and that is something they have no control over, they have choices as adults. If someone could talk to young people before they become adults that would be a good thing. Alcohol in moderation is okay for some, but for some Aboriginal people it can become a problem before you realise it.

This community leader and mother wants the government and the community to find out more and understand better the powerful, persistent and destructive effect that alcohol can have on young Aboriginal men. She advocates research and partnership to provide a mental health response of support and cure for these young people. She advocates a lot of talk and storytelling as a big part of such a strategy.

This story suggests strongly that an SRA process should be initiated to develop a strategic response for providing mental health, drug and alcohol rehabilitation and other services, such as debt management, to promote stronger social participation by young men.

As the issues of family violence raise emotional responses, the challenge for the COAG Trial would be to facilitate the right talk between the community and agency partners in agreement processes. This could also mean facilitating the right talk amongst community members, their sons and daughters and one another.

At the same time, this raises the question of how much is expected of the project workers. What are the boundaries within which the project workers should work?
Progressing partnerships for overcoming family violence

The following is a carefully reflective commentary by the manager of an organisation. The manager said that she had prepared her thoughts carefully because she believed in the COAG Trial and that there are positive ways to be involved in healing and preventing violence.

**Early prevention**: It is important that there are partnerships between the community and organisations. It’s not about not telling how things are going to happen. Progress can be lost if there are no partnerships. Partnerships give the community ownership and participation in the decision-making. Instead of organisations being told what is needed and what they have to do, give them the responsibility to feel part of the partnership. For too long money has been thrown at departments or organisations, in only a bandaid effect. Nothing changes. The underlying problems are never fixed. Generally, after the intervention the problem stays there.

Crisis care needs to happen early with programs for parenting and children. For early prevention, you have to be aware and have appropriate programs for the community. It is not just throwing money in and it not being used to its best, whether through lack of knowledge or skills of workers.

**The right people** with the right skills have to be appointed whether Aboriginal or not, so long as they have the right skills and are capable of working with the community. Aboriginal positions have been identified and that’s great. But not always the right person gets them. They maybe Aboriginal but not have the right skills or knowledge. That worries me.

I’m a member of a government and community management committee. The people in management have skills and community awareness and the committee has worked for fourteen years.

The COAG Trial has the potential to heal some of the violence, to build up the skills of whole families and organisations. For so long, one organisation has had the voice and the power. The people wouldn’t speak out. It is as though for some people that organisation is part of their identity. To speak against it, to
take it away, would take away their identity. In some ways I have great respect for this organisation but I don’t think it has the right to make statements on behalf of the community.

A way to stop the crisis of violence is to start with young mothers, with art sessions. In playgroups for young mothers and children, they do art. They relax, they pass on parental skills, they may do basket making. A group of people sit together with professional people, participating in non-judgemental ways. It might be a child health nurse, to talk about how and when to feed their baby. It has to be the right child health nurse. Aboriginal children are often put in foster care to give mum a break. They are away for five days. When they get home nothing’s changed. There must be more positive ways of doing that. When working with families in crisis workers are alongside the mother in crisis, supporting her and teaching her how to manage the problems, not necessarily solve them. Can there be some way of incorporating the mentoring they do at Ashley in primary schools for boys? Do the work from the early start. Wait till year 8 or 9 and the problem pushes out because they can’t cope with all the stress. Even if the boys have no problems, let them know a lot about the problems: unemployment, alcohol and substance abuse and family violence.

In short-term skill-building programs, people might just begin to feel ownership, time and funds run out, then it’s all gone again. This doesn’t really help the next [program] that might happen to come along.

The COAG Trial has a lot of potential. It needs to have the right management, support, resources and a future.

Several other managers of Aboriginal organisations who have participated in this evaluative consultation have similarly expressed support for the COAG Trial and the need to be involved in the decision-making process. They want to be able to sense the joint ownership of initiatives that may deeply affect them. Many share anxiety about preparing or equipping young mothers and fathers to manage the crises in their lives and care for the children and the children’s futures.
An Elder's vision

At a women’s gathering at Hadspen, sponsored by ICC in August 2005, Aunty Phyllis shared her Aboriginal Elder’s Vision. With Aunty Phyllis’s permission it appears below.

I am a member of the Aboriginal Elders Council of Tasmania (AECT) and have been a full-time active member of my community in many areas of need: Childcare, women’s business, land return and acquisition, cultural retrieval of language, ceremony and rights and particularly education, which is one of my main passions.

Despite the many years of active community service I have been involved with, the issue of Elders’ needs is one I now see as a major priority. As you all know and we are all feeling it, there has been so much sorry business; death and grief, particularly since the beginning of this year, which our community has endured and it is taking its toll. It seems to me that there is a continuous cycle of despair from the lonely times we are experiencing. Many of my close family and extended family are dying around me. Many Elders are indeed passing on and the effects of losing all of our ‘ancient libraries’ is deep, devastating and has a major long-term effect on us as a community. It is of utmost importance that most of you as the ‘link’ generation understand that the young must be connected to the old and that we must strengthen the foundation of the bridge connecting us and keeping us together.

Elders’ issues are being neglected at the highest level. All levels of government have not yet committed themselves to assisting us with our specific needs, rather it seems to me most of the time that we are used as ‘tokens of conscience’ to engage to carry out ‘welcomes to the country and other ribbon-cutting services’ for the many government ceremonies held around the country.

More importantly though, many of the younger community don’t know their Elders, don’t understand our needs and therefore don’t understand how to help us.
WE NEED TO BE TOGETHER! This is so important for our survival in the modern world we live in. We need an Aboriginal Elders Village, which is all encompassing, to deal with the majority of our needs; a convalescence home providing both ‘high’ and ‘low’ care for the frail and aged, health professionals addressing specific mental and physical needs, spiritual and religious services, cultural and recreational activities, food and nutritional programs.

We have a range of community assets such as property and land and yet we still cannot provide this and the services attached to it, why is this?  

Aunty Phyllis hoped the issues she raised would be recognised by the ICC, Tasmania and that the Aboriginal Elders Council of Tasmania (AECT) could work with ICC to develop an SRA to address to address them.

The vision of the Elders’ Village is a possible long-term whole of community and whole of government project that could transcend barriers of mistrust through its purpose of connecting young and old, and strengthening the “foundation of the bridge” that is keeping the community together.

The Village could be built with Aboriginal assets and land. It could provide a focus for involving all generations to plan a safe home for frail and aged Aboriginal people and to participate in cultural and recreational activities, like spiritual and religious services or food and nutrition programs that would be run in the Village.

This could be a positive, sustainable focus for many years, providing both the community and many government departments (health, housing, education and training, employment and recreational services) with countless opportunities for working together to strengthen the community and overcome family violence.

This could be an enduring whole of community and whole of government partnership to guide and create a project of great cultural importance to the Tasmanian Aboriginal community.

If the COAG mode of engagement could facilitate the bringing of such a vision for the Aboriginal Elders and younger generations into processes for coming to a long-term sustainable SRA, this could re-ignite energy and hope in community working with government.

In the longer term, the model that the COAG Trial facilitates could be adopted in a whole of government strategy.
4. Building on achievements

Part 4 of this report attempts to assess the progress of the COAG Trial in Tasmania from early 2003 until early 2006 and indicates some possible ways forward in 2007-08 in which agreements between the community and governments could have measurable and achievable objectives.

When the Trial began in early 2003 there were some distinct advantages for setting the COAG Trial to address issues of Aboriginal family violence:

• Addressing family violence was already established as a priority issue for the community and government partnership with the publication of the *ya pulingina kani* - Good To See You Talk Report.

• Willingness by some community members, Elders and organisations to become involved in advisory roles and working roles to address family violence in particular.

• Commitment by Commonwealth, State and Local Governments to overcoming Aboriginal disadvantage.

Some early events in establishing governance for the COAG Trial reflected two main barriers that are historical, emotional and political:

• the divisive issue of Aboriginality in Tasmania and

• the loss of trust in government support for addressing Aboriginal needs.

In every exercise of the review, one-to-one interviews, focus groups, or in meetings with Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people who wished to speak to the COAG
Trial, these issues were brought forward, unsolicited. These issues quite possibly lie under the questions that a number of Aboriginal people who spoke with the consultant raised about the COAG Trial. Most said they knew very little about it and found it hard to understand. The most common questions were:

Who had ownership of the project?
Who gave permission for it to be about family violence and located in the north-east of the state?
Who determines who will benefit?
Could it possibly work because of the questions around Aboriginality and the loss of trust in governments?

The views expressed by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal government workers also included concerns that these issues could make it very difficult to achieve agreements between the community and governments.

Both Tasmanian and Australian Governments have three tiered criteria for eligibility to access specific government programs and services for Aboriginal persons or Torres Strait Islanders. The three criteria are: ability to prove Aboriginal lineage, identifying as an Aboriginal and being accepted as such by the community in which he or she lives or has lived. In practice, the two governments test these criteria in different ways. Though it is likely that this difference will recurrently cause unease in the processes of community and governments’ attempts to work together, participation by both governments allows the COAG Trial to spread its work more widely as opposed to less widely throughout the Trial site.

Also as this report has shown, addressing family violence is complex and emotional. It profoundly affects the community’s well-being and confidence. In the contexts of the issues of Aboriginality and family violence, it is reasonable to assume that progress would be slow, from the beginning as well as through the life of the Trial.
The IGCC view has been to keep going with the Trial and continue consulting, bringing the community and governments together, and responding to ideas for particular projects or programs with realistic strategies.

In keeping going, largely through the commitment and hard work of the project workers, the COAG Trial has built a reliable degree of confidence and trust where members of the community have agreed to work closely with government agencies and understand what is achievable. This occurred through on-site activity in the first two years of the Trial such as:

- forming consultation networks in the Midlands, Launceston, Meander Valley, Break O’Day and Cape Barren and Flinders Islands;
- forming working groups in Launceston and Cape Barren Island;
- completing an SRA with the Cape Barren Island community to address underlying causes of family violence, and implementation underway;
- building upon the *meenah mienne* partnership project for youth at risk in Launceston and leading the agreement processes for an SRA that is currently near completion;
- modelling a successful program for young Aboriginal people at St Helens to assist understanding of cultural and social issues that affect their well-being;
- developing and evaluating, in consultation with the community, the pilot of a family well-being program in Launceston; and
- initiating processes for agreement for an accredited family and well-being training program to be delivered through TAFE in Launceston.

As well, during these two years, the COAG Trial established

- a strategy for the work of the Trial to begin;
- inter-government governance structures, such as the IGCC and LAF;
- partnership agreement protocols; and
- stronger Commonwealth/State working relationships.
The on the ground work of the project officers and community members, and the facilitation and coordination of the work of the IGCC and LAF, has demonstrated ways of the community and governments working together, such as, the community and governments

• acknowledging and explaining mistakes and misunderstandings;

• gathering together, round the table, community with community, community with government;

• listening to Aboriginal community ways that work - opening to talk and story telling, building trust; and

• supporting the Aboriginal community to heal, in ways they know, in safety, with empathy and support to build a stronger community.

Way forward: A whole of government and whole of community approach

A key principle of the whole of government approach is to make it easier for Aboriginal people to access government services. For the COAG Trial in Tasmania this means services that address family violence.

The IGCC believes the COAG Trial has at least two distinct advantages:

• a longer time span than ever before to pilot new arrangements and ideas for addressing family violence; and

• a growing level of trust by Aboriginal people in the COAG Trial.

Ways forward could include both the community and governments:

• taking steps to increase the level of participation by Aboriginal people in matters of decision-making, governance and accountability;

• refining strategies for streamlining funding and reporting requirements that some government agencies, such as ICC, have already developed;

• engaging and empowering new generations of Aboriginal people to run their own social, family, cultural and financial business;
• developing a new coordinated whole of government and whole of community strategic approach to build upon and continue the achievements of the COAG Trial; and

• working with the Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage Framework endorsed by COAG, to develop indicators for baseline and performance monitoring reports.

Ways for building a stronger community to overcome family violence

Many achievements, understanding and lessons have been explored through this review. From these emerge some suggestions for addressing family violence, in particular the underlying causes. These suggestions include:

• bringing the ya pulingina kani Group, the Safe at Home advisory group and the COAG Trial workers and participants together to understand each other’s roles and contributions;

• extending and promoting the model of meenah mienne to parents, mothers, youth, men’s, women’s groups;

• extending and promoting the work of other projects related to reviving and creating culture, such as traditional ways of weaving, food gathering and getting to know the land;

• facilitating community support networks to assist victims;

• facilitating offender rehabilitation into the community

• facilitating programs for alcohol dependency, including foetal alcohol syndrome;

• organizing educational and counselling resources to enable teachers, when they recognise instances of family violence, to access and arrange counselling for children and parents;
• empowering Aboriginal children through organizing and facilitating programs run by Aboriginal people in schools to tell children that family violence is unacceptable and that they have rights to access support services;

• forwarding the vision of planning for an Elders village in the north of the state where elderly Aboriginal people can be cared for, and which would provide a focal point for Aboriginal people to talk with the Elders and connect with family histories and culture;

• developing a professional learning and well-being plan for project workers;

• funding more project workers to work locally; and

• continuing cultural awareness programs for workers throughout government agencies.

Measures of success

Some useful benchmarks emerge from the formative and qualitative nature of the review. These could contribute to a framework for testing the viability of projects and agreements, monitoring performance and reporting. Such a framework could be useful for evaluating the COAG Trial in 2007-08. For instance, some indicators could be:

The project has a whole of government and whole of community rationale.
It fits with the agreed strategy.
It has its own strategy including agreed purpose, goals, processes and outcomes.
The short-term and long-term impact of the program is discernable, viable and justifiable.
The resources can be identified and allocated.
It follows agreed protocols.
Mutually approved people are engaged.
Mutually agreed governance is in place.
The partnerships involve relevant bodies and are inclusive.
All the partners are willingly committed.
The leadership roles are clear.
It builds trust.

**Underlying principles**

This review finishes on an optimistic note. The COAG Trial in Tasmania has travelled a difficult journey. It has met barriers that seem not traversable, such as the issue of Aboriginality and loss of trust by Aboriginal people in governments. The advantage the COAG Trial has, is that these barriers are not down to the Trial. They exist in the general state of community and government affairs.

Another advantage is that through all the differences between cultures, language and protocols, the COAG Trial has demonstrated several times over, that there is a possibility of achieving shared understanding.

There are enduring principles that governments espouse and the community expresses. The Federal Charter of the Public Service in a Culturally Diverse Society summarises seven principles central to the design, delivery, monitoring, evaluation and reporting of quality government services:

- access, equity, communication, responsiveness, effectiveness, efficiency and accountability.

Words most often repeated by Aboriginal people who spoke to the review when asked about how and what to do in the future were:

- Change slowly, trustfully, surely.
- Work as equal partners in decision-making.
- Show reciprocal openness and respectful questioning.
- Invest in healing.
- Listen and take talk seriously, round the table, for sharing understandings that are not necessarily agreements.
- Find out what causes disruption and division.
- Face the issues with clear goals in mind.
- Find non-violent ways to respond.
Where one culture uses nouns to express principles, the other uses verbs. For both cultures, the words guide ethical action in relationships. The optimism expressed here is that, even in the despair of violence and difficult relationships, it is enduring hope for a better future that lies at the heart of the COAG Trial in Tasmania.¹

¹Notes related to references will be found in Appendix 3.
Appendix 1: Inter-Governmental Coordinating Committee for the COAG Trial

Commonwealth Agency Representatives

Department of Family & Community Services & Indigenous Affairs (FaCSIA)

Mr Wayne Gibbons, Associate Secretary OIPC
Mr Doug Walker, State Director DIMIA Tasmania
Mr Bryan Palmer, Assistant Secretary Performance & Budget Branch
Ms Wendi Key, State Manager OIPC, Manager ICC
Ms Robin Bowden, Project Officer COAG Trial / Deputy Manager ICC
Mr David Warrener Project Worker COAG Trial
Ms Lillian Wheatley Project Worker COAG Trial
Ms Jodie Baker Project Support Worker COAG Trial

Department of Employment and Work Relations (DEWR)

Ms Von Harrington, State Manager
Ms Llani Dixon, Manager, Performance, Analysis and Indigenous Employment Branch

Department of Education Schools and Training (DEST)

Mr Joe Furlani, State Manager

Australian Government Solicitor (AGS)

Mr Peter Bowen, Director

Family and Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaCSIA)

State Office

Ms Nicola Dakin, A/State Manager
Ms Frances Huchet, A/Assistant Manager Housing & Family Violence
Ms Ali Trefler, Manager Community Housing & Infrastructure Programs
Department of Transport and Regional Services (DoTARS)

Mr John Borojevic, Manager

Centrelink

Mr Robert Williams, Area Manager
Mr Fred Thoen, Business Manager Social Work & Community Services
Ms Caroline Spotswood, Manager Indigenous Affairs Unit

Department of Health and Ageing (DoHA)

Ms Lisa Wardlaw-Kelly, State Manager
Ms Catherine Brown, Deputy State Manager Health Programs
Ms Debra Reid, Director,
Office of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health (OATSIH)

Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS)

Liz Milewicz, Manager Indigenous Statistics Unit

State Agency Representatives

Department of Premier and Cabinet (DPAC)

Ms Linda Hornsey, Secretary
Mr Bob Rutherford, Deputy Secretary
Mr Jamie Bayly-Stark, Deputy Director, Policy Division
Mr Kerry Burns, Assistant Director, Policy Division
Ms Laurette Thorp, Senior Policy Analyst, Project Officer COAG

Department of Health and Housing Services (DHHS)

Mr Julian Joscelyne, Strategic Development Section
Ms Jeanette James, Aboriginal Policy Officer
Mr Glenn Shaw, Manager Aboriginal Housing Services

Department of Education (DoE)

Mr Greg Lehman, Manager, Aboriginal Education Unit
Department of Police and Public Safety (DPPS)
  Sergeant Gary Lusted
  Sergeant Debbie Williams

Department of Justice & Industrial Relations (DJIR)
  Ms Liz Little, Principal Consultant, Office of Secretary,
    Program Manager, Safe at Home

Local Government Representative

Local Government Association of Tasmania (LGAT)
  Ms Christine Standish, Policy Officer
Appendix 2: Aboriginal Organizations In Tasmania

Aboriginal Elders Council of Tasmania
Aboriginal Land Council of Tasmania
Cape Barren Island Aboriginal Association Inc
Circular Head Aboriginal Corporation
Flinders Island Aboriginal Association Inc
Indigenous Tasmanians Aboriginal Corporation
Jahadi
Mersey Leven Aboriginal Corporation
Palawa Aboriginal Corporation
South East Tasmanian Corporation
Tasmanian Arts and Crafts Women's Aboriginal Corporation
Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre
Tasmanian Aboriginal Childcare Association
Tasmanian Aboriginal Education Association
Tasmanian Aboriginal Land and Sea Council
Women's Karadi Aboriginal Corporation
Workforce Aboriginal Corporation
Appendix 3: Reference Notes


\[iv\] Ibid. Item 3.


\[vii\] Correspondence, November 2002.


\[ix\] Ibid. P.6.


\[xi\] Ibid. P.1

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background
This formative evaluation of the Greater Shepparton Council of Australian Government (COAG) Trial was undertaken between February and April 2006; it is one of eight Trials across Australia. The evaluation has been undertaken in the wake of two publicly available reports (which were independently commissioned) assessments of the extent to which the Trial was helping the Indigenous community or delivering clear and improved outcomes (one in 2004 and another in 2005)\(^1\).

The emphasis in all of the COAG Trials was to develop and test both new ways of working between Indigenous communities and Governments, and, whole of government approaches to finding shared solutions. Making a difference to the lives of Indigenous communities was the desired end result of these initiatives. Previous approaches were seen as inadequate and as failing to engage communities in finding local solutions.

The Greater Shepparton Trial is the only Victorian based Trial.

The Shepparton COAG Trial in summary
The lead agencies for this Trial are the Department for Victorian Communities (DVC) and the Australian Government Office of Indigenous Policy Coordination (OIPC). The Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR) was the lead Australian Government agency until October 2005. The two lead agencies and the City of Greater Shepparton worked with an Aboriginal Facilitation Group (ACFG) initially comprising thirteen members of the Greater Shepparton Indigenous community; a Steering Group was established to lead the Trial. The Steering Group included members of the ACFG, the Secretaries of the two lead agencies and the CEO of the City of Greater Shepparton.

In September 2003, a Compact (or agreement) was signed by the Australian, Victorian and City of Greater Shepparton Governments, and members of the Aboriginal community through the ACFG and the ATSIC Binjirru Council. The vision of the Compact was for:

“Strong social, economic and cultural sustainability and equity for the Aboriginal people of Greater Shepparton”. The objectives were to:

- promote and strengthen the ability of the Aboriginal community to manage its own affairs;
- develop a good working relationship between the community and governments, and
- change the way that governments work with communities.

In consultation with the Indigenous community, the Steering Group agreed to the following strategic areas for action with the family being central to all of the strategies:

- Strengthening Families
- Governance
- Strategic planning

Leadership strategy
Pride, Image, Social Connectedness & Respect Strategy
Cultural enhancement
Education and Training Strategy
Job Strategy
Economic Development Strategy
Justice Strategy
Community Health Strategy
Housing Strategy.

Key findings from the evaluation

This Trial appears to have been the subject of considerable public attention compared with most other Trial sites with the exception of Wadeye which has received extensive public attention within the last two months.

This evaluation has revealed a very complex set of circumstances and issues and some contentious ideas and views about the future of this particular Trial. However it has also revealed a very high level of expressed good will and an acknowledgement of the good intentions of all of the partners. This acknowledgement sits alongside some cynicism in the Indigenous community about whether governments are willing to do things very differently to what they have always done, and, amongst Government agencies, about whether Indigenous communities are willing to address tensions and perceived divisions within the community.

One of the key findings is that the Trial has been very focused on ‘getting things done’ often using old ways of working, with more attention needed to address how to work differently. Thus some of the Indigenous leaders and community members involved feel frustrated and disappointed at what appears to be a lack of progress. Other leaders feel that there has been progress and that this is not adequately acknowledged.

The evaluation has established that there are significant lessons from this Trial, that it is at a critical point, and that the decisions taken over the next few months, by all partners, will have significant ramifications into the future. The choices exercised by all partners need to be very well informed, very well considered, and if possible, undertaken together in an honest and open discussion about the barriers and challenges each partner will face.

The evaluation team is urging that the Trial not be abandoned but that the lessons learned are used to inform a next phase with the structures, processes and priorities jointly negotiated between the Aboriginal Community Facilitation Group and all three levels of government. The evaluation team is also of the view that an increased focus on cultural awareness training and capacity building for all partners is required to maximise both the lessons from the Trial and the goodwill and good intentions which every stakeholder acknowledges exists.

The evaluation team suggests that the process to date has in fact been a very human one and that focusing on building relationships in this next phase will be more likely to lead to shared solutions and to improving life outcomes for Indigenous people in the region. However the evaluation team cautions that this will require time, support and respectful processes with little room for blame, anger and cynicism. Developing a good formative and summative evaluation is a key recommendation for the next phase; this should be developed jointly by all partners.
Broad outcomes
The main broad outcomes identified by the evaluation are that:

- Most of the partners are still engaged in the Trial and demonstrate a high level of goodwill towards building on the lessons learned and to keeping a focus on addressing issues identified by the community as a priority and to focusing on improved outcomes for the Indigenous community.
- The Strategic Planning and Policy Unit has been established, is auspiced by the City of Greater Shepparton, and is funded for two years and commenced operation in January 2006 – this Unit is seen by the ACFG (and governments) as having significant potential to assist in building stronger community governance and engaging the community in finding solutions.
- The involvement of the City of Greater Shepparton has grown over the course of the Trial and is now quite strong. The City’s Council Plan 2006-2010, explicitly acknowledges the celebration of the cultural diversity of the region, including the involvement of the Indigenous community, as one of the strategies in the plan.
- The Youth at the Centre project has funding for twelve months.
- Considerable progress has been made in the education pathways strategy, especially the school age strand.
- Progress has been achieved in the employment priority although there is less agreement about the extent to which this is a result of the Trial.
- The business community is engaged in some employment initiatives and these partnerships can be progressed.
- Economic development is gaining some increased interest within the Trial.
- The ACFG has commenced a process through the Strategic Planning and Policy Unit to address improved community engagement and improved community governance.

Structures and how these worked
The key governance structures for the Shepparton Trial were the Steering Group and the Aboriginal Community Facilitation Group. The success of both of these groups is varied; the positive aspects include:

- Both groups meet regularly and contribute to creating forums for some difficult conversations.
- The Steering Group continues to have high level membership and leadership from all stakeholder groups.
- The various groups have contributed to some limited information sharing at least around processes and initiatives in each member’s agency.
- Some positive relationships have been forged, especially across government, through the Steering Group and between leaders.
- The City of Greater Shepparton is an active member of the Trial.
- The ACFG process has brought some tensions within the community out into the open which members want to see addressed.
- The Strategic Planning and Policy Unit is seen as having very significant potential to address issues related to community governance and greater community engagement.

However these positive achievements are moderated by some strong views within the Aboriginal community in particular that the Trial has heightened ongoing tensions within the Aboriginal community and that little has changed about how governments work with Indigenous communities.
Lessons
The key learnings we have derived from the common stories we heard from the majority of key stakeholders, and the evidence we examined, can be summarised as follows:

For governments: the key lessons are:

- It is very important to allow time to build relationships with communities and to understand those community relationships, processes and structures which facilitate community engagement in finding solutions.
- It is very important for governments to develop stronger working relationships with each other, across and between all levels, to understand the work and constraints of other portfolios and governments, and to appreciate their role in holistic responses.
- Understanding the importance of holistic responses to Indigenous issues is an important first step in working with communities.
- There is a need to increase the capacity of government officers to work in partnership and to build capacity of both their own organisations and Indigenous organisations and communities.
- Improving the skills of government staff in capacity building requires training, time to talk with Indigenous leaders, and time to understand what government's role should be in capacity building.
- Understanding the role of community leaders in Indigenous communities takes time and governments need to talk more openly with leaders about how all partners will engage the wider community and understand the constraints they face.
- It is not reasonable to assume that governments can achieve total agreement in an Indigenous community any more than one could expect to achieve that in a non-Indigenous community, what is needed is time to talk about how to manage different views and respect for different views.
- Working flexibly is not easy in an environment with a lot of rules, a culture of not taking many risks, of being publicly attacked if mistakes are made, and of being seen as not ever listening.
- The Solution Broker roles have enormous potential and need to be at a sufficiently high status to enable some local decision-making and incumbents require the negotiation skills to work with a wide range of people including Secretaries, CEOs, and people in elected positions.

For the Aboriginal members: the key lessons are:

- Governments must be assisted to understand and abide by community processes, familial structures, decision-making approaches, and how their processes might cut across or contradict these dimensions of Indigenous communities.
- Indigenous people should be very actively engaged in deciding what structures and processes will best serve a particular community in future partnership initiatives and that this should and will take time to agree.
- Taking a community leadership role in whole of government initiatives is a very difficult process and is even more difficult without good and representative processes.
- Indigenous communities need to address their own governance processes honestly and openly and reach some agreement amongst themselves – however this will need time, resources, good processes and goodwill to be able to do that.
• Having worked out agreements within communities, initiatives then need some clear processes for a strong negotiation of what governments need to do, what leaders need to do, and where leaders might need to get someone else involved when it is too compromising for leaders to play some roles.
• Partners need to be prepared to examine their own gate-keeping and barriers, to recognise and support those people who do want to engage and, to let go sometimes.
• Indigenous partners need a good process to capture the goodwill and the good intentions of those government officers who are engaged in the process.
• Establishing good representative structures is more likely to build community ownership and leaders need help to get there - establishing small working groups with some leaders as champions would achieve a more representative approach.
• It is very hard to do this work and play a leadership role without a mandate from your community.
• Having a good communication strategy at the outset is crucial to building unity and community ownership.

Initiatives, such as the COAG Trial are never easy and require a long-term commitment; they are not easy for experienced leaders in both government and Indigenous organisations. Being realistic about the extent to which the broader community is able to engage, in such a short timeframe, must be a shared lesson. As a community we do not expect the wider non-Indigenous community to agree with, engage with, or fully understand every public policy initiative. Agreeing how to better engage the wider Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities around the goals and intent, and the partnership processes which underpin the Trial, must be a focus of this next phase.

Next steps
Making good decisions together is the current challenge for this COAG Trial. The evaluation recommends that the partners jointly develop a process on how to progress the Trial to a second stage, building on the lessons learned and identified through this evaluation. The report sets out some strong reasons for maintaining the Trial in some form but emphasises the changes required, including attention to cultural awareness training, capacity building and, above all, relationship building. It identifies priorities for both the Aboriginal community and leaders, and for all three levels of government and that a key priority must be establishing an agreed evaluation framework from the outset. This evaluation framework must include attention to how relationships and methods of working together are changing, and with what outcomes, and what are achievable life outcomes for the Aboriginal community within the next agreed timeframe.

This work will need to be strategic and based in best practice - drawing on the growing body of international evidence and knowledge (including Australian based) about working in partnerships with Indigenous communities.

There is no room for blame, attacks or recriminations in genuine and evolving partnerships. Effective partnerships are underpinned by joint reflection, honest acknowledgement of mistakes and jointly finding shared solutions. The issues facing Indigenous communities are not assisted by public attacks or ill-informed public debate. The issues are too complex, too longstanding and too significant for any of the partners to walk away at this point or to engage in blame. Staying at the table, talking honestly and with respect for the challenges all partners face, is more likely to lead to improved
outcomes for the Indigenous community in the Greater Shepparton area. Drawing on all sources of evidence and current work which can inform an evaluation framework would be an important expression of goodwill by all partners. This includes existing frameworks for assessing outcomes such as that contained in Measuring Success.

Engaging in this next stage respectfully must be a shared goal for all partners.
INTRODUCTION

This evaluation of the Greater Shepparton COAG Trial was undertaken between February and April 2006; it is one of eight Trials across Australia; it has been undertaken in the wake of two publicly available reports which were independently commissioned assessments (one in 2004 and another in 2005) of the extent to which the Trial was helping the Indigenous community or delivering clear and improved outcomes for the Shepparton Indigenous community. They have been important documents for this evaluation in that the evaluation team needed to test reactions to the substance in both reports and simultaneously try to understand what had occurred during the Trial to provoke the extreme criticisms contained in both reports. The evaluation team also attempted to assess the impact on, and role of, the reports in the Trial itself.

This Trial appears to have been the subject of considerable public attention compared with other Trial sites with the exception of Wadeye which has only recently attracted considerable public attention. On March 26th 2006 the Sun-Herald published an article claiming that the Trial had been abandoned without any evaluation and made other claims about the damage the Trial is alleged to have done to the Indigenous community. From the perspective of the evaluation team, this article seems to epitomise the misinformation and confusion in the public domain regarding the very nature of the COAG Trial and how misinformation so rapidly becomes ‘fact’ in the stories which are then told about the Trial. This evaluation has revealed a very complex set of circumstances and issues and very contentious ideas and views about the future of this particular Trial.

The evaluation team interviewed most of the partners to the Trial and a number of other stakeholders, including other Australian and Victorian Government agencies, and consultants who have worked with the Trial. The team consistently found very high levels of expressed goodwill from all partners, about each other, whilst simultaneously detecting high levels of frustration, suggesting an extremely complex situation exists.

The evaluation team does not claim to know or fully understand everything that has taken place in Shepparton over the past three years. The people who live and work in that community are deeply committed to their respective communities and to doing their job as best they can, and this is true of both Indigenous leaders and government officers. What we believe we can bring is an external assessment of both the key strengths and the key challenges gleaned through the evaluation process and some carefully considered recommendations on the way forward.

What we have concluded is that the Trial has been a very human process. It is only with the benefit of hindsight and reflection, trying at a local level to do what people think will work, reflecting on this and then drawing lessons, that the barriers and challenges in whole of government and community partnerships with Indigenous communities become obvious and the need for different solutions, and the significance of addressing relationships, become clear. The most recent research on integration and collaboration demonstrates very clearly that building positive relationships, respect and trust are fundamental to effective collaboration. This recent evidence confirms the importance of trust building, respectful relationships, and little room for blame or recriminations in whole of government and collaborative initiatives, including those attempted with local communities and groups.

2 Sun-Herald 26th March 2006
The two Indigenous members of the evaluation team met first with the Indigenous Elders before commencing the field work as an acknowledgement of the tradition of seeking the agreement of Elders to visit and work in their community. This visit was a courtesy visit and was not intended to seek advice or agreement regarding the evaluation. In that task the evaluation team was guided by members the Evaluation Steering Group and members of the Aboriginal Community Facilitation Group regarding who to talk to and how people wished to contribute.

The title “Good will, good intentions and deciding well for the future?” was chosen to reflect two key messages:

1. Almost every person interviewed during this evaluation noted that they thought all of the various partners had entered and participated in the Trial with goodwill and good intentions; all argued that the challenges they faced were in translating both the goodwill and the good intentions into effective processes and demonstrable outcomes. However there was no shared agreement on what outcomes were possible from the Trial within 2-3 years, expectations may have been way too high with the result that the community in particular was invariably likely to be disappointed.

2. There remains a high level of expressed good will amongst most of the partners and a desire to do things differently by every partner. This includes those members of the ACFG who left the group in 2005. There are some very hard choices facing all of the partners now – a) to walk away from that goodwill, as it is too hard, and revert to what was in place before the Trial commenced; b) to be open to what has been learned, blame each other for the perceived failures and then decide, separately, what each partner wants to do next; or, c) to acknowledge the very human process which the Trial represents and to work together to find some shared understandings, and together, agree what this means for the future.

By a very human process we are referring to the challenges inherent in:

- efforts to build relationships between people with different expectations, life experiences, cultural backgrounds, training, and professional roles
- any efforts at trying new ways of working
- trying to play a leadership role in a complex and sophisticated initiative and within a cultural context
- dealing with external expectations and public critiques which were not always well informed or respectful of the complex and longstanding dynamics within the community and between Indigenous communities and governments.
- It is a very human implementation process of the pioneering and conceptually innovative approach to both the administration of government and building empowering relationships with Indigenous communities.

It became very clear during the evaluation that the core purpose of the Trials – to find new ways of working with Indigenous communities and across governments, and to learn from trying new approaches to achieve agreed outcomes – has to some extent been lost in the pursuit of tangible improved outcomes or even outputs such as higher numbers of Indigenous people employed, increased economic opportunities, retention rates in education, consensus in the Indigenous community, increases in funding to Indigenous communities etc. This applies to both government and Indigenous expectations. This confronted the evaluation team with two fundamental dilemmas - 1) what participants were evaluating, and 2) what demonstrable changes in the life
circumstances of the Indigenous population might be reasonable and achievable in one year, two years, and three years?

The level of cynicism about the Trial in the Indigenous community and some government agencies, encountered very early by the evaluation team, was high, although, as stated earlier, every person noted that they believed the early intentions and goodwill were both extremely high, for every partner.

The evaluation team was concerned not to feed or be deterred by that cynicism, or to be too influenced by previous reports, and was determined to explore how the Trial had got to where it was.

The evaluation team therefore chose deliberately to focus on:

- What has been learned about better ways of working and what have all partners learned about each other?
- How do each of the partners articulate those lessons and what evidence is there to support those lessons?
- What behaviours have changed over the three years and what evidence is there to support this perceived change or perceived failure to change?
- What do the partners make of those lessons for the future?

This report provides the outcomes of the evaluation, and suggests options which might be considered for the future. It aims to:

- highlight the goodwill and good intentions
- draw out what has been learned and achieved in a constructive and respectful way, and
- provide some ideas for the way forward which will build on the lessons learned over the past three years.

**Background**

In November 2000 the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) agreed that all governments would work together to improve the social and economic well-being of Indigenous people and communities. The Council agreed on a reconciliation framework, and recognised that the significant commitment by the Australian and State and Territory Governments to Indigenous issues is spread across many departments and agencies, through multiple programs, and is therefore often uncoordinated.

COAG later agreed to trial working together with Indigenous communities in eight regions (including Greater Shepparton) to provide more flexible programs and services based on priorities agreed with communities; thus the COAG Trials were conceived. The expectation of COAG is that the lessons learned from this initiative regarding how to address issues together will be able to be applied more broadly. Governments agreed that they must work together better at all levels and across all departments and agencies. Indigenous communities and governments must work in partnership and share responsibility for achieving outcomes and for building the capacity of people in communities to manage their own affairs (COAG website). The Greater Shepparton area became one of the eight original COAG Trial sites.

The evaluators of the Greater Shepparton COAG Trial, in the preparation of this report, interviewed stakeholders (Appendix One), conducted a brief literature search (Appendix Two), and examined relevant files supplied to the evaluators by the Trial Steering Group and the Victorian Government Outcomes Broker.
The Greater Shepparton COAG Trial in summary

In September 2003, a Compact (or agreement) was signed by the Australian, Victorian and Shepparton Local Governments and members of the Aboriginal community. The vision of the Compact was for “Strong social, economic and cultural sustainability and equity for the Aboriginal people of Greater Shepparton”. The objectives were to:

- promote and strengthen the ability of the Aboriginal community to manage its own affairs;
- develop a good working relationship between the community and governments; and
- change the way that governments work with communities.

In consultation with the Indigenous community, the Steering Group, established for the Trial agreed to the following strategic areas for action with the family being central to all of the strategies:

- Strengthening Families.
- Governance
- Strategic planning
- Leadership strategy.
- Pride, Image, Social Connectedness & Respect Strategy
- Cultural enhancement.
- Education and Training Strategy.
- Job Strategy.
- Economic Development Strategy.
- Justice Strategy.
- Community Health Strategy.
- Housing Strategy.

Working on the Education and Training Strategy was the agreed first priority. As the underlying theme of the Trial is strengthening families, educating children and young people was seen as central; improved outcomes in education would flow on to other areas.

Setting the Scene (The History)

a) A broad overview of the conditions and challenges at the start of the Trial.

All of the Trials commenced with an implicit understanding that relationships between Indigenous communities and Governments needed to be improved, that what was currently happening was seen as not working, and that Governments needed to find new ways of working with Indigenous communities. The commitment from all Governments (through COAG) was explicitly stated as trying to find new ways of working.

As no documentation was undertaken to establish what the problems were in Shepparton in 2003 we have examined the Trial documents and asked participants to provide evidence, retrospectively, by reflecting on what the situation was like at the commencement of the Trial, what it is like now, and what has changed.

From interviews, research and reading of files, the following can be assumed to be the most relevant conditions, perceptions, and challenges at that time:

- Shepparton is a regional town located 180 kilometres from Melbourne. It is the fourth largest provincial centre in the state, and covers approximately
2,422 square kilometres of the Goulbourn Valley. The population is approximately 59,000. Community estimates based on medical records held by Rumbalara Aboriginal Cooperative indicate that between 4,000 and 6,000 people are Indigenous. The 2001 ABS Census indicates a population of 1,460 people in Greater Shepparton LGA. This is the largest Indigenous population outside of the Melbourne metropolitan area.

- 67% of the total population is concentrated in the main urban areas of Shepparton, Mooroopna and Tatura, with the balance residing in rural areas and the surrounding small towns of Murchison, Dookie, Congupna, Toolamba, Katandra and Tallygaroopna.
- The Greater Shepparton Indigenous community was, and remains, a diverse community consisting of Indigenous people who have settled in the region for work or family reasons, and two family groups - the Yorta Yorta and the Bangerang peoples who are the traditional custodians.
- The Greater Shepparton community and all governments were perceived by some members within the Indigenous community to have little understanding of the Indigenous community - traditions, culture and families.
- A number of mainstream government agencies were delivering services in the area and there were very diverse views about how well these agencies actively worked with the Indigenous community. Some agencies were building their relationships with NGOs and leaders, others were seen as demonstrating limited awareness and interest in working differently or better with Indigenous organisations and the community.
- The major employers of Indigenous people in the community were Indigenous NGOs with a small number of employees located in (mostly) State government agencies.
- Economic independence for Indigenous communities was barely on the agenda of any government and the City of Greater Shepparton Council was perceived as not doing very much to build relationships with Indigenous organisations or to employ Indigenous people.
- The Mayor of the City was a signatory to the Compact and had an established relationship with one Indigenous organisation. However, overall, there was very little perceived action on the part of Council to actively engage with the Indigenous community.
- There were (and still are) a number of active and well-governed Indigenous-managed non-government organisations (NGOs) with different family allegiances to different organisations. One NGO had moved to open up the electoral process for the governing committee and reportedly had a slightly wider cross section of the community on the Board.
- Many of the Indigenous organisations were considered to be engaged in some innovative initiatives already, with significant potential to build on this innovation.
- Mainstream businesses were perceived as not interested, in the main, in providing employment and as being mostly disinterested in the employment of Indigenous people; there were some emerging partnerships between Indigenous organisations and a few businesses.
- At the commencement of the Trial, communication between government departments and the Indigenous community was perceived as mostly poor by the Indigenous leaders, with agencies coming into the community and ‘telling’ the community what it intended to do. ATSIC was seen by other government agencies as largely responsible for Indigenous policy and programs with small pockets of positive Indigenous initiatives in some government agencies.
• The local Indigenous community had a strong attachment to ATSIC as the elected body although there were also criticisms of this body from within the community.  

4 By the time this evaluation commenced most of the Indigenous leaders interviewed had moved beyond their sadness and disappointment about the abolition of ATSIC and just want to get on with improving conditions for their community.

• Government agencies perceived significant divisions within the Aboriginal community and experienced gaining entry to the wider community as a challenge with some perceived 'gate-keeping' by some community leaders. Many agencies said they did not know how to engage the wider Indigenous community and wanted the community to achieve some agreement about things – however it is not clear exactly what they wanted the community to agree about.

• The Yorta Yorta land title claim was in train, including an appeal process, during the Trial.

• The Aboriginal leaders from both the Yorta Yorta and Bangerang peoples entered the process of the Aboriginal Community Facilitation Group (ACFG) aware of the tensions around the issues related to the Yorta Yorta claim and the Bangerang people. They were all very determined to try and work together. Many members reported that they were unclear at the outset whether they had been appointed as representatives of the community or as representatives of their respective organisations.

• Government agencies were aware of these tensions and some expressed a belief that the community should have ‘got over’ these tensions and should be concentrating on the current issues facing the community, especially issues related to low levels of education, health status, and low employment rates.

• The COAG Trial was perceived by all members of the Aboriginal Community Facilitation Group as a very positive step, although not necessarily an initiative that they fully understood. Some members were concerned that the process would be about governments wanting Indigenous people to conform to government processes. Others were more optimistic that the Trial was a chance to do things differently.

• Similarly the government agencies which engaged with the Trial were very positive about the potential to change the way they worked and to begin making a difference to the lives of the Indigenous population in the area. Some did expect the Aboriginal leaders to develop a better understanding of government processes and to be able to work better with these processes.

• The optimism about and expectations of what could be achieved through the Trial were high.

The evaluation has assessed how the Trial addressed some of these challenges, what changes had been made over time, and what progress had been made on understanding how to work differently together.

b) The history of the Trial – key dates, agreements, significant events, specific initiatives, the establishment of governance and partnership arrangements.

In November 2000, a meeting of COAG agreed to a framework to advance reconciliation, and identified community leadership, and reviewing and re-engineering programs and services to achieve better outcomes for Indigenous people, as two of the priority areas for action

4 By the time this evaluation commenced most of the Indigenous leaders interviewed had moved beyond their sadness and disappointment about the abolition of ATSIC and just want to get on with improving conditions for their community.
In September 2002, members of the Greater Shepparton Aboriginal community commenced discussions with government with a view to establishing Shepparton as one of the Trial sites.

In early 2003, the Aboriginal Community Facilitation Group was formed as the new community governance mechanism for the Trial.

On 21st February 2003, there was a Joint Secretaries’ visit to Shepparton. The Secretaries announced that there would be transparency with data and government held information on issues such as funding. At this meeting all community members agreed to go ahead with the Trial, and that a Compact would be the basis of the partnership.

On 30th July 2003, the Victorian Premier publicly announced that Shepparton was agreed as Victoria’s Trial site.

In mid 2003, an Aboriginal Community Facilitator was appointed and commenced work with the ACFG.

On 26th August 2003, there was a meeting between the Secretaries and community to discuss the Strategic Plan, the commitment of community and government, and the importance of building on strengths.

On 4th September 2003, the Compact was signed, a collaboration between the:
- Aboriginal Community Facilitation Group,
- The Australian Government (through the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations),
- Victorian Government,
- Greater Shepparton City Council
- The ATSIC Binjuru Council.

On October 14th 2003, there was an Aboriginal Community Facilitation Group meeting to clarify role of the ACFG and of the Steering Committee.

In November 2003, a Draft Operations Manual for Shepparton Aboriginal Facilitation Group was produced.

In May 2004, the Victorian Government Outcomes Broker was appointed, based in Melbourne and began spending, on average, 3 days per week in Shepparton.


In April 2004, the Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training announced that $60,000 was allocated towards the local education strategy.

On 1st July 2004, a Link Up community workshop was held to identify strengths and shortfalls in education.

On 19th November 2004, a Community Forum was held to discuss the strategies and actions that were developed in the Education Pathways Strategy and for the community to identify the priorities for action. Through this Forum seven priorities were identified.
On 24th November 2004, an Education Pathways Summit was held involving about 100 people from the community and government and non-government agencies, including five secretaries from Australian and State Government, Regional Directors and Mayor and Councillors from the City of Greater Shepparton. The Summit fully supported the Community forum priorities.

In late 2004 there was agreement to the establishment of the Strategic Planning and Policy Unit, which was to be a resource for the community and would lead future planning processes round the strategic priorities.

During 2005 there was a long selection process for the CEO of the Social Policy and Planning Unit.

In early 2005 Rumbalara Cooperative withdrew from the Aboriginal Community Facilitation Group.

In April 2005 Victorian Department of Education and Training head office provided $30,000 for a Project Officer for the school years strategies in the Education Pathways Strategy. Over the year the regional office contributed a further $50,000 for this position.

In May 2005, the Final Education Pathways Strategy Plan was produced, with the vision: “To provide Aboriginal students with pathways to achieve higher educational aspirations and positive life choices to education, training and employment”.

On 10th November 2005, the Secretary of DEWR announced at Senate Estimates Committee that the role of Australian Government lead agency would transfer from DEWR to OIPC.

In January 2006, The CEO of the Strategic Planning and Policy Unit commenced work.

On 12th January 2006, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed between the Strategic Planning and Policy Unit Governance Committee and the Greater Shepparton City Council.

Throughout 2003 to 2006 some significant consultancies were also undertaken to assist and support the Trial. These included:

- Community development expertise in the first year of the Trial to work with the ACFG on how that group would function
- A community consultation on the nature of the resource unit to support the community governance in the Trial – this led to the decision to establish the Strategic Planning and Policy Unit
- A recruitment process for the selection of the CEO of the Strategic Planning and Policy Unit
- The development of policies for the operation of the Strategic Planning and Policy Unit
- A community engagement and communication strategy for the Trial.
At May 2006
The Evaluation team notes that:

- The work on the Education Pathways Strategy is continuing with:
  - the Regional Koorie Education Committee being funded for a project worker for one year for the school age group; the priorities for 2006 are cultural awareness for school staff, and the development of a school and community plan in each school
  - a small group of key players are continuing involvement in the Koorie Early Childhood Network; the priorities for 2006 are supported playgroups in schools, building on the work of the Best Start Project and pre-school to school transition.
- The work of the Strategic Planning and Policy Unit has commenced, with a Planning Day for the Governance Group held in April.
- The employment priority remains on the agenda with partnerships between Job Network providers and businesses growing, there is no strategy in place yet to fully implement this priority although some steps have been taken to progress this priority.
- The Steering Group continues to meet with a diminished, but very committed, ACFG, including one member who joined the group in early 2005.

- **c) Any commitments made by Governments and the community.**

The Compact was signed on 4th September 2003 and documented the commitments made by the Governments and the community.

All levels of government committed to:

- Work collaboratively and openly with each other and with the Aboriginal community to coordinate policy and services across levels of government
- Broker and help locate resources to support the community in projects associated with this Compact
- Respect existing Aboriginal community organisations and structures
- Collaborate with the Aboriginal community in securing private sector and non-Aboriginal community commitment to this Compact and the projects which flow from it
- Respond in good faith to community priorities and aspirations, and be flexible and innovative with resource use
- Collect and share with Compact partners any government-held information which could help progress the shared objectives, subject to agreed protocols.

The Victorian Government committed $500,000 over three years to resource the community’s participation in projects flowing from the Compact.

The ACFG committed to:

- Develop open and accountable processes for engaging and involving the wider Aboriginal community
- Promote and encourage outcomes under the Compact
- Work towards building a stronger, more cohesive Shepparton community able to maximise its assets and opportunities
- Work collaboratively and openly with each other, and with all levels of government
• Assist all levels of government to better understand Aboriginal culture and perspectives
• Collaborate with Governments in securing private sector and non-Aboriginal community commitment to this Compact and the projects which flow from it
• Participate in the provision of data and in planning, monitoring and reporting processes, within agreed protocols.

The ATSIC Binjirru Council committed to:
• Work openly and collaboratively with all levels of government and across the Greater Shepparton Aboriginal community
• Collaborate with governments in securing private sector and non-Aboriginal community commitment to this Compact and the projects which flow from it
• Recognise and support the local aspirations of the Greater Shepparton Aboriginal community and accommodate these within Binjirru policy decisions and planning processes.

All partners agreed to jointly develop performance indicators and benchmarks to measure progress in:
• Improvements in the Aboriginal community’s social, economic and cultural sustainability
• Improvements in community and government capacity to identify and respond to local issues
• Community-governments collaboration under the Compact.

It was also agreed that:
• Performance in each of the strategic areas would be measured
• The operation of the Compact would be reviewed collaboratively and on an annual basis, understanding that this would evolve over time.

No performance indicators or benchmarks were established prior to this 2006 evaluation being undertaken. It is our assessment that not addressing this commitment has not helped the Trial process and has contributed to the frustration and disappointment of some partners. It is also consistent with the preoccupation with ‘getting things done’ at the expense of attention to key lessons all partners might need to learn about each other.

In consultation with the Indigenous community, the Steering Group agreed to the following strategic areas for action with the family being central to all of the strategies:
• **Strengthening Families** – encouraging and supporting the family unit to maximise the opportunity of each family member to reach their potential, thereby contributing to building a healthy, vibrant community.
• **Governance** – creation of local and appropriate structures/systems that enable local Aboriginal people to collaborate and co-operate effectively in a productive and accountable manner.
• **Strategic planning** – enhanced capacity of the Aboriginal population to participate and input into the future planning of their community and the wider community.
• **Leadership strategy** – to contribute to the continuous development and renewal of Aboriginal leadership within community and organisations.
• **Pride, Image, Social Connectedness & Respect Strategy** – a strategy to protect, enhance and celebrate Aboriginal culture and identity by the community.
• **Cultural enhancement** – promote the pride, identity, culture and contribution of local Aboriginal people.
• **Education and Training Strategy** – to enable Aboriginal students to be able to complete their education, so they have choices in terms of further education, employment and life choices.

• **Job Strategy** – to increase the net number, quality and variety of jobs or job opportunities for Aboriginal people.

• **Economic Development Strategy** – to initiate and grow Aboriginal participation and ownership in the local economy.

• **Justice Strategy** – to design and implement a strategy that addresses both social and criminal justice issues.

• **Community Health Strategy** – development of a comprehensive strategy for the primary and public health requirements of Aboriginal people, including mental health.

• **Housing Strategy** - increasing housing options, quality and ownership for Aboriginal people.

It was agreed that implementing the commitments would have three broad phases over an initial period of three years. This proposed phased approach is included as Appendix 2. One of the emerging questions is whether it was realistic to have such a broad and ambitious agenda for the Trial. The Trial was not meant to fix or address every issue confronting the Indigenous community in the region. The above priorities suggest a massive agenda which no small Trial could possibly, or humanly, achieve in two or three years; it is more in keeping with a whole of government, mainstream, whole of community, and well resourced set of coordinated programs and economic initiatives which would need to involve every government agency, the business community and every Indigenous organisation available over ten to twenty years.

d) **The extent of involvement of the community in setting the objectives and priorities for the Trial.**

The ACFG, in consultation with the Aboriginal community, agreed on the strategic areas for action as set out in the Compact. It is not clear exactly how this occurred and different members (both government and Indigenous) had different memories and accounts of how these strategic areas were finally agreed. A community barbeque in 2003 appears to have been an event which attempted to engage the community in the Trial early in the process. Around 40 people attended this event. The records for the Trial, in the form of minutes of various groups, also suggest that there have been a series of community events attended by different sections of the community on different priorities. It is possible that many of these events were identified by the community as meetings or events about specific issues eg, education or employment, rather than being associated with the Trial. However it is clear that there has been a number of attempts to engage the Indigenous community; the success of these has been varied and this is addressed further in future sections of this report.

**Working together (The process)**

A major commitment of the Trial was for community and governments to work collaboratively and openly with each other.

a) **What structures were put in place for community and government to work together?**

An Aboriginal Community Facilitation Group (ACFG) was established comprising thirteen members from the different family groups. This group was established to
involve the local Indigenous community and to help form the partnership with government.

A **Community Facilitator** was employed to work for the Aboriginal community in the development of the partnership. This facilitator was to be a resource for the Aboriginal community’s use and was directed by the ACFG.

A **Steering Group**, consisting of members of the ACFG, and government agencies including the two lead agencies and the City of Greater Shepparton. The initial government representatives were the Secretary of the Australian Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR), the Secretary of the Victorian Department of Premier and Cabinet, and the Chief Executive Officer of the City of Greater Shepparton. Primary lead responsibility for the Victorian Government was transferred to the Department for Victorian Communities in September, 2003. The Office of Indigenous Policy Coordination (OIPC) assumed responsibility as the lead Australian Government agency from late 2005.

The role of the Steering Group was to negotiate and implement policy, program and service delivery responses to community priorities and strategies and to monitor progress.

**b) What structures were put in place for governments to work together?**

The Steering Group and the Aboriginal Community Facilitation Group were the key structures.


Fortnightly lead agency meetings were held until at least the end of 2004 between the State Manager of DEWR, the Deputy Secretary of DVC, and the Outcomes Brokers.

Partly as a response to the Trial and also in response to other government initiatives, Victorian Government agencies in the Hume Region started meeting together in 2003 every two months to talk about the needs of the Koorie community in Shepparton. This is called the Social Sector Agencies’ Group, formerly known as the State Government Departments’ Group. This was initiated through the Departments of Human Services and Education and Training; other key players are the Departments for Victorian Communities, Justice, Environment, Police, Regional Development and Adult Community and Further Education.

**c) How successful have these structures been?**

The Aboriginal Community Facilitation Group (ACFG) met regularly and was supported initially by a community facilitator. The Victorian Government funded the position of Community Facilitator and the Australian Government, through DEWR, funded a community development consultant at the commencement of the Trial. Later in 2004 a consultant was contracted to work with the ACFG and the wider community on the resourcing model for the Indigenous governance and community engagement strategy. The views about the success of the ACFG varied. Some members argued that the group worked hard to reach agreement in the early stages with heavy existing workloads and substantial community commitments and faced a very difficult task. Others argued that the Group never really addressed substantial issues related to
governance, that some members dominated, and that some members acted outside the agreements of the group and the Compact.

The evaluation team is aware that some members of the ACFG withdrew from the Group during 2005, although most have expressed an interest in becoming involved again. The reasons given for withdrawing included concern or perceptions that:

- The COAG process had increased divisions within the community – this included concern that ‘caucusing’ with select ACFG members by government officers - by both State and Australian Governments, outside formal meetings, cut across both Aboriginal ways of working and created a sense of there being an ‘in’ group and an ‘out’ group. Some members of the ACFG are seen to have colluded in this process.
- The government partners seemed intent on working in ways which worked for government rather than any genuine attempt to work differently with Indigenous colleagues.
- Some ACFG members were not being as open as they had all agreed to be in building bridges into the wider community, this included perceived ‘gatekeeping’ on some of the priorities.

It is our assessment that the ACFG is at a very critical stage. Without exception all ACFG members are busy, committed and very dedicated leaders. The issues they all have to deal with are complex, longstanding and often emotionally charged. The work they do in the Trial is on top of their already heavy work and community loads. The fact that almost very member, past and present, wants to stay at the table is testament to their tenacity and integrity and probably as good an outcome as could be expected at this stage in the Trial. Most have been championing the principles of the Trial and doing their best to engage their communities, as they all think best at this point in time. Those who withdrew did so for what they believe to be good reasons and sometimes for their own health and/or wellbeing.

The Steering Group met monthly until the end of 2005 and then agreed to meet bi-monthly. Stakeholder opinions on the success of the Steering Group also varied considerably. Some ACFG members argue that the meetings often felt like rubber stamping decisions made by the government members between meetings and see this as being disrespectful of ACFG members. Others argued that some ACFG members did deals outside the COAG Steering Group meeting, in the process undermining the expressed commitment to open and transparent decision making. Others believed that some significant progress had been made in getting significant issues onto the agenda and building relationships with governments.

We would argue the same about the government members of the current Steering Group as the ACFG. This is not an easy or clear cut process. All of the government members are dedicated and very committed to this being a long term and complex strategy with the potential for very significant long term positive outcomes. All of the current members are still talking, still addressing issues together and still willing to hear feedback and ideas for how to go forward. There are different views amongst these members about whether the existing Trial arrangements should stand. However all members believe that the principles and intent of the Trial should be maintained in some agreed processes.

The meeting minutes confirm that a range of topics and issues have been progressed over the past three years. However the minutes do not provide a sense of the meetings being as strategic as they could be or that issues related to new ways of working have been the subject of any substantial consideration by the Group. Being
more strategic is one of the priorities the Group should give some attention to in the next phase. The ATSIC Regional Chairperson was a member of the Committee from the outset until mid 2005. Unfortunately we were unable to contact this member of the Steering Group for comment.

What can be concluded?

d) Were community and governments' commitments met? If not, why not?

Government commitments

All levels of government committed to six processes set out in the following section. There have been very mixed responses from different levels of government and community leaders regarding the extent to which these commitments have been met.

Working collaboratively and openly with each other and with the Aboriginal community to coordinate policy and services across levels of government

The positive achievements on this commitment included:

- Every person interviewed acknowledged that, without exception, the partners entered the process with a high level of goodwill and with good intentions.
- The process has drawn together people from all levels of government who have not worked together before and many of these connections and relationships are now quite strong.
- Significant achievements have been made in the Department of Education and Training and in education strategies, with the Department identifying more consultative relationships with the community as a priority; this Department would like more open access to the wider community and agreement on how to achieve broader engagement.
- The tensions between the ACFG members, and the difficulties and confusions of being representative, are being discussed more openly within the ACFG, and within the Steering Group; the COAG process is perceived to have assisted in opening up these conversations.
- One group of regional managers of government agencies has actively engaged with the principles and intent of the COAG process and are keen to more actively engage with the Indigenous community.

The issues of concern on this commitment include:

- The withdrawal of DEWR as lead agency without informing other levels of government or the community, this was seen as disrespectful of the community
- Annoyance that a meeting in Canberra re the Trial sites, early in the Trial, had no community representatives
- Concern that few people in the wider community appeared to know about the Trial and a perception that some of the ACFG members could have done more to facilitate access to the wider community – this perception that very few people know about the Trial was expressed by both some Aboriginal and government stakeholders, we challenge this perception in the outcomes section of this report
• Concern expressed by some of the ACFG members that deals were done by government outside the mechanisms and processes of the Trial – this process was seen to undermine the openness of the Trial.

**Brokering and helping to locate resources to support the community in projects associated with the Compact**

The positive aspects were:

• The appointment of the Outcomes Broker by the Victorian Government and the Solutions Broker by the Australian Government through DEWR; both positions are seen to have played an important role in the process.
• The creative allocation of funding, through DEWR, for employment and for strategic analysis of organisations
• Funding of $60,000 allocated for the education strategy by DEST and a further $80,000 by the Department of Education and Training
• $1m allocated by the Departments Human Services and Department of Victorian Communities for the collocation of the preschool and Lidje MACS services
• $120,000 allocated for the Youth at the Centre project by FACS
• $924,000 allocated over two years for the Strategic Planning and Policy Unit, jointly funded by the Victorian and Australian Governments
• Up to $140,000 allocated to support the work of the Aboriginal Community Facilitation Group with planning, jointly resourced by the ‘resourced’ Australian and Victorian Governments.

**Respecting existing Aboriginal community organisations and structures**

The positive achievements on this commitment include:

• The Trial did work through a number of existing Aboriginal organisations
• The Victorian and Australian Governments funded several significant consultancies to assist the ACFG to contribute and to achieve broader community engagement
• All of the ACFG members stayed at the table until early 2005 in a genuine effort to stay engaged in the Trial.
• Most of the ACFG members who left the group expressed to the evaluation team, a desire to retain the principles and intent of the Trial, to continue trying to find new ways of working, and to have some of the issues addressed which led to them withdrawing. They wanted these issues addressed by both the ACFG and all three levels of government.

The following issues were identified as significant challenges in this commitment:

• There is a perception amongst many of the Aboriginal stakeholders, and some government stakeholders interviewed, that governments have demonstrated limited cultural awareness and understanding through the Trial, including not advising the Elders Group prior to commencing the Trial or coming into the community with initiatives, and of not respecting familial responsibilities and community processes. It is not clear what role the ACFG played in encouraging the practice of governments acknowledging and/or visiting Elders, nor could we find any records of cultural awareness raising conversations in meetings.

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5 We are not arguing that Elders must be consulted or that they have a decision-making role. However we are arguing that a basic cultural protocol of acknowledging the role and place of Elders is regularly ignored in the process of doing business in the area. The Elders themselves raised this with the Indigenous consultants as an issue. We stand by our concern that the simple step of visiting the Elders is an important step in the acknowledgment of cultural traditions and structures in Indigenous communities. We were asked by one of the ACFG members to make contact with the Elders Group as a courtesy prior to
• Government was reportedly slow to meet the expressed commitment to allocate the $500,000 for the Strategic Planning and Policy Unit until the community had sorted out the tensions within the community. The ACFG perceived this as unreasonable for several reasons; 1) governments would not demand this of the non-Indigenous community; 2) this assumption demonstrates a limited understanding of familial and cultural approaches to community processes and an insistence that the community does business ‘government’s way’; and 3) establishing the SPPU earlier in the Trial might have made a big contribution to the community having the resources and incentives to more broadly engage the community.

• An alternative and strong view was reported that the ACFG could not reach agreement on the proposals for the establishment of the Strategic Planning and Policy Unit and that all governments worked hard to find a solution but that this took time.

• Throughout the Trial some ACFG members struggled with the question of whether they were at the table representing their organisations or their community. Some ACFG members were not in paid positions and resented the expectation that they participate as unpaid members working alongside Secretaries and people in other executive positions who were being paid huge salaries. This remains an issue and ACFG members want this resolved in any future arrangements.

Collaborating with the Aboriginal community in securing private sector and non-Aboriginal community commitment to the Compact and the projects flowing from it.

• The City of Greater Shepparton’s Community Building trial has now identified Indigenous issues as being a priority and this has been discussed with the Steering Group.

• The work of the education pathways groups (i.e. pre-school, school age and post school) has led to a commitment from the mainstream education sector to issues for Indigenous children and young people. All levels of government are working well together on this priority; there is a view that this would not have happened without the COAG Trial.

• There is a growing awareness of the need to give higher priority to Indigenous economic independence and more businesses have started to express an interest in Indigenous employment; this is seen to have been an outcome of the Trial process and debate about the Trial.

• The early efforts of both DEWR and Victorian Department of Premier and Cabinet in responding rapidly to the Ladders to Success proposal from the community, which had been in train prior to the commencement of the Trial, was influential in achieving funding support very quickly. This responsiveness was identified by the government officers involved at the time as a direct result of desire of both the Australian and Victorian Governments to demonstrate a flexible and responsive approach through the emerging partnership. Neither government claims that this was a COAG priority or initiative, but simply that the COAG process assisted in a rapid response which representatives from both Departments are very clear would most likely not have happened without the presence and structure of the COAG initiative.

The disappointment expressed on this commitment are that:

commencing the evaluation. The Elders welcomed this approach and noted that they have never been formally or informally approached about the Trial to date by government leaders.
• There is limited evidence of significant improvement in employment of Indigenous people in mainstream businesses
• The City of Greater Shepparton does not yet have an articulated wider Indigenous employment strategy
• The Trial has not engaged the wider Shepparton community in addressing racism or building a wider commitment to understanding the Aboriginal community and recognising the contribution this community makes to Shepparton and to their relationship with the land in the region.

Responding in good faith to community priorities and aspirations, and being flexible and innovative with resource use.

The priorities pursued in the Trial were identified by the community through a consultation process, albeit seen as limited by some stakeholders, and with the support of the ACFG. However some of the ACFG members (and some government stakeholders) argued that given their time over again, they would attempt a more broadly based community engagement process. The other concern is whether having twelve priorities was too many and whether this made the Trial more difficult, this has been discussed in a previous section of this report. A strong view was expressed by many stakeholders that, in hindsight, if the ACFG had been supported by a good community governed process such as the Strategic Policy and Planning Unit, early in the Trial, this unit might have undertaken this task and established a more manageable set of priorities. This is also addressed in the outcomes section.

The education strategy has received priority and there is an increasingly flexible and open approach to how education issues are being addressed with the Indigenous community.

There is a view amongst many of the ACFG members that none of the government departments has demonstrated genuine flexibility with resource allocation and that deals are still being done outside the Trial mechanisms. An alternative view was put that the Trial had locked up the funding process, that if the ACFG did not agree then initiatives did not get funded and that some ACFG members continued to do deals outside the Trial process. It was difficult to establish the extent of the accuracy of some of these assertions as mostly stakeholders were unable to provide examples, or when these stories were followed up, by the evaluation team, we heard very different stories about the examples provided.

Collecting and sharing with Compact partners any government-held information which could help progress the shared objectives, subject to agreed protocols.

It was difficult to establish the extent to which this was achieved. Some ACFG members believe that governments did not share information and data openly, whilst other members believe that there was a sharing of information through some of the specific strategies. Early in the Trial governments jointly undertook a mapping of funding for the Shepparton Indigenous community which was shared by all partners with the ACFG. The education strategy has certainly led to more open sharing of information and the Strategic Planning and Policy Unit is currently working on several proposals to build and improve the data available including through the ABS Census. This will be an important contribution to building the evidence and local data for all agencies.

The Victorian Government committed $500,000 over three years to resource the community’s participation in projects flowing from the Compact. This funding has been allocated to the Strategic Planning and Policy Unit, combined with Australian Government funding, which has a major role in data building and information sharing.
The delay in establishing the Unit probably impacted on meeting this commitment what must be addressed in this next phase.
The Aboriginal community
The ACFG made seven commitments which are addressed in this section.

Developing open and accountable processes for engaging and involving the wider Aboriginal community
When asked specifically about what had been achieved on this commitment some government stakeholders and some ACFG members asserted that little has been achieved and that the Trial had not involved the wider community at all. This seemed to the evaluation team to be very unlikely, and also deeply troubling when the records of the various Trial processes were examined. These records suggested that a number of processes had been implemented to address this commitment. This questioning was confirmed after interviewing all of the consultants engaged over the course of the Trial. In fact a number of community consultation efforts were implemented over the life of the Trial. The Community Facilitator employed early in the Trial endeavoured to engage the community, she reported some successes but also reported that at some of the community events attendance was very low and could have been improved with more open processes.

Some stakeholders, from both the ACFG and governments, were more positive in their responses but still qualified their responses with concern that the engagement of the wider Indigenous (and non-Indigenous community) needs to be more open and that this needs to be more openly discussed by all stakeholders.

Challenging the notion of no engagement with the Indigenous community
The evaluation team believes that the assertion of there being no broader engagement needs to be seriously questioned; the records of the Trial are clear that there has been some broader engagement. All of the consultants interviewed reported efforts at engaging the community on different topics, with some meetings being well attended and others not so well attended.

The evaluation team was left questioning whether people attended some events without realising that the event was connected to the Trial, for example the education or employment forums. It is not unusual for any community (Indigenous and non-Indigenous) to be attending meetings or events without realising who the host agency might be. This is not to deny that the concerns about some gate-keeping and room to improve on community engagement are also valid. However, without some agreement about what would represent a reasonable level of community engagement, it is inaccurate, and probably unfair to both the ACFG and government agencies, to argue no progress on this element of the Trial. Whole of government initiatives are hard for highly skilled and informed government officers and community leaders to fully comprehend and engage with; expecting extensive engagement from the broader community to understand and engage in such new ideas may be very unrealistic in this time period.

The positive achievements on this commitment include:
- The ACFG held a number of community meetings where the community set priorities early in the process.
- Many attempts were made to involve the wider community through barbeques, family days and meetings.
- Independent facilitators were used in some key meetings and priorities to try and bring some impartiality into the Trial processes and to build community engagement, the success of these varied considerably.
• The records of the Trial indicate that there were a number of summits and forums with reasonably high attendance in a community the size of Shepparton – for example an Education Strategy mapping workshop in August 2004 and Education Summit in November 2004 with 100 members attending, training of 5 young people in consultation and community discussion in January 2005, a meeting of 135 people representing business and industry in 2005, a meeting of the Job Network providers in November 2005, initiated by Wurreker and DEWR, with a commitment to meet again to progress issues.

There is another view in the Aboriginal community, and that is that the ACFG members have been agreed to as representatives and that the representatives need to get on with the job.

It is not clear what the Trial partners (or the wider community) expected would represent a good level of achievement on this outcome. We suggest that, whilst there is always room for partners in such initiatives to do better, there has been a reasonable level of community engagement in what constitutes quite a complex public policy process. The growing body of international evidence on whole of government and collaborative initiatives identifies engaging communities or population groups as a very difficult task and as one of the most challenging aspects of collaborative initiatives. The partners in the Trial need to explore this as a shared challenge rather than as a failure of the Trial to date.

Promoting and encouraging outcomes under the Compact
All members of the ACFG tried to engage with the Compact and stayed involved in the Trial until early 2005. Some members were more active than others and worked at trying to encourage a better understanding of government processes. Some members had a high level of support from their organisations and some felt frustrated at the slowness of change within governments, some felt frustrated with what was perceived as gate-keeping by some members of ACFG. Others expressed a view that it was difficult to know what to promote within their community and to say what was being achieved. Another view was expressed that it was difficult to promote COAG because the ACFG did not have an office or a specific resource unit. Promotion is seen to be easier now that Strategic Planning and Policy Unit is established.

Working towards building a stronger, more cohesive Shepparton community able to maximise its assets and opportunities
It is our assessment that every member of the ACFG genuinely tried to meet this commitment and did what they thought and believed was their best within the structures and processes of the Trial. The community members who are (and were) part of the ACFG all work extremely hard for the community, both in paid and unpaid roles. However it is also our assessment that there was not, and still is not, agreement within the group, including from those members who have chosen to leave the process, about how to achieve this commitment, together, rather than as 13 individuals. The Strategic Planning and Policy Unit will play a key role in delivering on this commitment and most members of the ACFG, including those who have withdrawn, are optimistic about this potential.

Addressing the community governance issues will contribute to meeting this commitment. Culturally these community governance issues need to be understood and respected by all government agencies. The issues and challenges reflect the cultural contexts of familial and community traditions and practices within Indigenous communities which community leaders try to straddle as they engage with mainstream government processes. The community on the other hand will need to support its
leaders in their partnership efforts. This will require some healing and resolution of longstanding, difficult and sometimes traumatic events and experiences. A total preoccupation with bureaucratic solutions will be just as unhelpful as a community’s refusal to engage in a healing resolution process.

**Working collaboratively and openly with each other, and with all levels of government**

At the commencement of the Trial all of the ACFG members engaged in the process in the hope that the Trial would be an opportunity to work together for the benefit of the whole community. The evaluation team talked with 11 of the original and one new member of the ACFG and were deeply impressed with the level of commitment and the genuine desire to see the COAG Trial be a success.

There was a strong view across some members of the ACFG members that the Trial itself has deepened divisions between family groups; this view was strongly reinforced by the two reports. The sadness regarding the process around both of these reports is that neither of these reports were owned by the whole community either and may have, paradoxically, equally added to and perhaps worsened the divisions. Some members of the ACFG remain deeply angry at the role these two reports have played in undermining the commitment to work within the Trial processes whilst purporting to speak on behalf of the whole community. Both reports may have perpetuated the community expectations that the Trial would be able to achieve much bigger changes in life and health outcomes than was humanly possible in three years. Both also failed to fully understand or reflect the primary purpose of the Trial being about finding new ways of working together for improved outcomes. On the other hand those members who supported the reports believe that the reports have played a role in raising major issues and bringing issues regarding data and success to the fore. Measuring Success contains a framework for assessing outcomes for the Indigenous community and this should not be lost in the next phase of the Trial. This is addressed further in the Next Steps section of this report.

The other issue identified by government stakeholders was the difficulty of some of the key ACFG members heading organisations with specific interests and being part of a group that needs to prioritise issues and address funding. This posed a potential conflict of interest and was a difficult balancing act for some of the members.

All of the ACFG members interviewed expressed an ongoing commitment to and belief in the core principles of the Trial, that is to finding ways of doing things differently and to working together in partnership with government to find solutions. Several of the members who had withdrawn from the Trial expressed an interest in returning if some of the governance issues are addressed and also expressed a hope that the Strategic Planning and Policy Unit would assist in facilitating solutions to some of the longstanding divisions in the community. Members who have remained at the table similarly expressed optimism that this would be the case. The team was deeply impressed with the graciousness with which many of the members still at the table acknowledged the need to work differently and to stay engaged in the process.

**Assisting all levels of government to better understand Aboriginal culture and perspectives**

It is not at all clear how this commitment was to be met by the ACFG or by the government stakeholders. As stated earlier, one of our most critical observations is that this Trial appears to have been very preoccupied with getting ‘quick wins’ or ‘runs on the board’ by way of community outcomes such as education improvements and increased employment rather than focusing on how the stakeholders would work together and agree on what they were seeking as shared outcomes. We could find no
records of cultural awareness training, cultural competence training, yarning sessions, oral history sessions, meeting discussions of ways of working in culturally relevant and appropriate ways or bridge building across sectors, or any discussions about how governments work and what might need to be changed. The meeting agendas and minutes are largely 'project' or activity focused.

When we asked government stakeholders what they had learned about working with Indigenous communities the answers invariably focused on:

• Needing to make sure adequate time was allowed
• Managing tensions within communities
• The importance of getting to the wider community
• Being more flexible.

Whilst all of these are important we were looking for evidence of:

• An improved understanding of the role of Elders and community protocols and processes
• Respecting and understanding better the familial and community responsibilities of community leaders and how government structures and processes might cut across or assist those
• Increased awareness of how to adapt government processes to respect culture and tradition
• Increased awareness of how challenging whole of government initiatives can be and what support is required to foster such initiatives
• Increased awareness of how, by working together, partners can find solutions to most issues, what skills all members might need to develop and encourage in staff, and what training might be required to achieve sustainable culture change across both governments and the Indigenous community
• What action was required at different levels to achieve change
• The need to work alongside the community leaders in supporting the difficult role they have to play.

From the ACFG we heard the following on what they had learned about governments:

• More about government processes albeit still having much to learn
• That they (government) still want to control the process
• That government processes are not very flexible
• That there was a lot of goodwill and good intentions but no real action.

We expected to hear:

• An improved understanding of the requirements of governments and of where there was room for flexibility
• An increased appreciation of the different roles of state/regional and nationally based government agencies
• Ways of bringing communities along and helping them understand governments better
• That by working together and increasing understanding of each other’s roles and cultures they can find good solutions together
• That time is needed to gain a better understanding of government and of finding new ways to work collaboratively
• That the process had enabled the ACFG to promote a better understanding of Aboriginal culture and familial/community traditions and practices amongst government agencies.
Collaborating with Governments in securing private sector and non-Aboriginal community commitment to the Compact and the projects which flow from it
All members appear to have worked on this commitment, and it remains one of the major disappointments of the Trial, for some partners, that few private sector resources have been achieved and that the non-Indigenous community has so little engagement in the Trial. Racism has been identified as an ongoing issue for the local Aboriginal population and there is a strong perception that all three governments have been unwilling to have this conversation, in fact that they positively reject the notion of racism as a significant factor. Racism is seen to manifest in reduced employment and business opportunities, anger and alienation, and missed opportunities.

Communication strategy
This strategy is important to the Trial and two strategies were produced; one early in the Trial and the second in 2005. The strategies were to assist in communicating the vision of the Trial to the community. The most recent communication strategy is still being considered by the Steering Group and should now be reviewed in the context of this evaluation, including by the Strategic Planning and Policy Unit.

Participating in the provision of data and in planning, monitoring and reporting processes, within agreed protocols.
Most members attended and contributed to the various planning meetings and attended a multitude of meetings, especially in the first two years of the Trial. Some of the ACFG members withdrew from the Trail around mid 2005. Some of the consultants interviewed for this evaluation noted that they thought the ACFG members had not always delivered the support to which they committed at the outset. However they also noted the frustration many members expressed about the process of the Trial being ‘more of the same’ and of having to carry too much responsibility for their communities. The Strategic Planning and Policy Unit is picking up this commitment to build an improved data and evidence base.

Governments and Community
All partners made joint commitments and these are summarised here.

Joint development of performance indicators and benchmarks.
This was not achieved but the Strategic Planning and Policy Unit will be developing these for the Trial as a core element of the Unit’s work plan. The framework in Measuring Success is a comprehensive outcomes framework and considering the use of this in this next phase should be part of the negotiation process, if this has not already commenced.

The education strategy has produced some performance indicators for this strategy.

Review of the operation of the Compact collaboratively and on an annual basis.
The work plan for the Trial did set some targets for an evaluation plan which were not achieved. This 2006 evaluation is one of the steps in this process although the minutes also indicate that one of the ACFG members raised the need to review where the Trial was up to in early 2005. The Strategic Planning and Policy Unit will also be looking at the issues of representation as part of the Unit’s work and build this into a review of the Compact.

Evaluation and review will be crucial in the next phase of the Trial, whatever form the partnership takes.
LESSONS LEARNED (INTERIM OUTCOMES)

a) What new ways of working together better have been identified through the Trial?

The focus of the COAG Trials was explicitly about how to work differently with Indigenous communities with the end goal being working together to improve life outcomes for Indigenous people and communities. We have already identified what we perceived to be a major difference in expectations amongst both the Aboriginal community and government agencies involved in this regard. In our view this preoccupation with ‘getting things done’ has, detracted from the full potential of the Trial to test and establish different ways of doing business together. We made a deliberate decision to ask different questions of all of the partners mid-way through the evaluation which forced some focus of how all of the partners had addressed or implemented the element of the Trial which was about learning how to work together differently.

Many stakeholders found it very difficult to answer the question regarding what they had all learned about new ways of working together; some were very cynical about whether they, or other stakeholders, had learned anything. It is our assessment that this is in part because the primary focus appears to have been on ‘getting things done’. Thus we perceived that some people were engaged in what they thought was about finding new ways of working, others were engaged in trying to ‘get things done’ using old ways of working (on all sides), and others were uncertain about what the Trial was about and were really struggling conceptually with the purpose of the Trial.

Since one of the assumptions behind the Trial was that what had been done in the past was not working, it is not surprising that as the momentum grew to ‘get things done’, without the very clear step of addressing ‘how will we work together differently’ to ‘get things done’, the frustration and angst about the Trial increased especially amongst members of the ACFG who have an enormous stake in improving their communities.

Some stakeholders saw the two independent reports as having no relevance to the Trial. We disagree with this assessment and, to the contrary, believe that both of these reports placed an undue emphasis on the Trial achieving unrealistic results around such big challenges as improved health outcomes, changes in unemployment and education status within very short and unrealistic timeframes. Thus the reports seem to have further entrenched some unrealistic expectations of the Trial; the recommendations of the first report are more like a work plan for the new Strategic Planning and Policy Unit and for every government agency at all three levels, for 20 years, rather than alternative directions for the Trial.

On the other hand the reports also contain some very significant work on measuring outcomes. The negative tone of their presentation has probably detracted from their usefulness considerably. The tone is not consistent with the growing body of international evidence and knowledge regarding collaborations and partnerships. This body of knowledge emphasises respect, trust and time to develop mutual understandings, recognition of difference, clarifying roles, and the redundancy of blame and ‘othering’. Very recent evidence gained from the growing body of evaluations of
collaborative initiatives emphasises the importance of interpersonal skills and relationships in collaborative initiatives.  

The key learnings, derived from the common stories we heard from the majority of key stakeholders, can be summarised as follows:

**For governments:** the key lessons are:

- It is very important to allow time to build relationships with communities leaders and to understand the community relationships, protocols, processes and structures which facilitate community engagement in finding solutions.
- It is very important for governments to develop stronger working relationships with each other, across and between all levels, to understand the work and constraints of other portfolios and governments, and to appreciate their role in holistic responses.
- Understanding the importance of holistic responses to Indigenous issues is an important first step in working with communities and that whole of government initiatives are important and not easy to achieve.
- There is a need to increase the capacity and capability of government officers and agencies to work in partnership with each other and to build the capacity of both their own organisations and Indigenous organisations and communities in partnership skills.
- Building the skills of government staff in capacity building requires training, time to talk, and time to understand what government’s role and community partners can offer.
- Understanding the role of community leaders in Indigenous communities takes time and governments need to talk more openly with leaders about the challenges and how all partners will engage the wider Indigenous community.
- It is not reasonable to assume that governments can always achieve total agreement in an Indigenous community any more than could be expected in a non-Indigenous community; what is needed is time to talk about how to manage different views.
- Working flexibly is not easy in an environment with a lot of rules, a culture of not taking many risks, of being publicly attacked if mistakes are made, and of being seen as not ever listening.
- The Broker roles have enormous potential and need to be at a sufficiently high status to enable some local decision making and negotiation with a wide range of players including Secretaries, CEOs, and people in elected positions.

**For the Aboriginal members:** the key lessons are:

- Governments must be assisted to understand and respect community processes, familial structures, decision making approaches, and how their processes might cut across or contradict these dimensions of Indigenous communities.
- Indigenous people should be very actively engaged in deciding what structures and processes will best serve a particular community in future partnership initiatives and that this should and will take time to agree.

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6 Building interpersonal relationships – particularly ones with a high level of trust – are as important as formal procedures in collaborations, particularly where collaborations aim to develop innovative solutions to complex problem situations Gajda, 2004, Scott, 2005, Hodges, 2005, Das, 2002; Hattori & Lapidus, 2004; and Vangen & Huzham, 2003)
• Addressing their own governance processes honestly and openly and reaching some agreement amongst ourselves is not easy, this needs time, resources and good processes to be able to do that.
• Having worked out their own agreements on structures, these structures then need good clear process for a strong negotiation of what governments need to do, what leaders can do, and what leaders might need to get someone else to do when it is too compromising for leaders to play some roles.
• Leaders need to be prepared to examine their own gate-keeping and barriers, to recognise and support those people who do want to engage, and, to let go sometimes.
• Communities need good processes to capture the good will and the good intentions of those government officers who are engaged in the process.
• Establishing good representative structures is more likely to build community ownership and leaders need help to get there - establishing small working groups with some leaders as champions might achieve a more representative approach.
• It is very hard to do this work and play a leadership role without a mandate from your community.
• Having a good communication strategy at the outset is crucial to building unity and community ownership. Including how initiatives are described and discussed publicly.

b) What have been some of the limitations of the Trial, and what are examples of things that work well?

Limitations
The identified limitations of the Trial were relatively common across stakeholder groups with important lessons for governments and community.

The important limitations identified are:
• Significant policy changes or decisions made centrally can have an adverse impact on partnerships. The change from DEWR to OIPC as the Australian Government lead agency without any consultation or notification disappointed the community and some other government agencies in the region. However the State Manager of DEWR was seen as managing that very well by openly acknowledging the impact of the process on the community. This helped the community deal with the situation and to move on.
• Project time frames not driven by the local community; the 12 month funding agreement for Youth at the Centre is seen by some as too short to be useful
• The time taken to build trust and relationships is considerable; changes in personnel impact on trust building.
• Shared accountability is an issue for governments – there needs to be a structure among and between government players to cope with this.
• Achieving representative processes which have community support is a challenge and an important part of establishing mechanisms and processes which have strong community engagement.

This has been addressed in some detail in earlier section of the report.
In summary the key aspects which worked well included:
• The Steering Group met regularly and has built relationships between some key Indigenous leaders and managers across the levels of governments.
• Relationships across levels of government are reported to have improved significantly.
• The Trial structure has created opportunities for governments to work closely on common issues.
• The Trial has raised awareness of issues within the Indigenous community which need to be dealt with for genuine progress to be achieved in community governance.
• The education priority appears to have been the most successful at achieving some demonstrable long term outcomes such as changes in truancy etc.
• All partners have an increased understanding of the complexity of the issues facing each partner and have built a commitment to keep working together.

c) What have been the outcomes of the Trial?
There are very divergent views across the stakeholder groups regarding the outcomes achieved from this Trial. These range from a view that there have been no outcomes, that the outcomes have not been very tangible and too much time had been wasted on internal politics, or that there had been too many poor government processes. Others argued that the outcomes were really only becoming obvious now such as a growing awareness of the need to address relationships, some tangible improvements in education and some slow progress on increased employment. This question about outcomes brought the evaluation team back to the issue of what is was that partners were wanting to evaluate.

One of the key outcomes should have been identifying what new ways of working had been achieved. Stakeholders struggled to clearly articulate what had been achieved on this outcome, confirming our early assessment that the primary focus had been on ‘getting things done’. This must be one of the most significant lessons from this Trial.

Whilst there had been considerable attention paid to supporting the ACFG to address internal issues and to considering how to engage the wider Indigenous community, we have been unable establish what deliberate effort went into exploring new ways of working together around being culturally appropriate and open.

We have identified the following outcomes from this Trial.

Process outcomes:
There has been a very genuine effort and goodwill at all levels of government in working with the community, as well as goodwill from the Indigenous participants in the Trial.

The development of a Communications Strategy that included strategies to ensure a shared understanding of government and community members of the Trial. This included such issues as the role of the overseeing groups, how information should be communicated to all, and how community members could give their ideas to the ACFG.

All three levels of government and community partners are still at the table although there has been a loss of some key community members – those still in the process want to keep working on finding new ways of working together.
Community members who have left the process want to stay involved – some community leaders want new ways of being involved.

The appointment of a Solutions Broker by the Australian Government and an Outcomes Broker by the Victorian Government are seen as very positive outcomes.

The Employment Forum in late 2005 brought a range of key players together and the Job Network Providers have agreed to meet regularly to address support and services to the Indigenous community

Structures:
The Strategic Planning and Policy Unit has been funded for two years from January 2006, is auspiced by the City of Greater Shepparton, has developed a work plan, and has employed a CEO.

The model for the Unit was developed on the basis of extensive community, government, and Indigenous organisations’ input and a comprehensive literature review on issues of community capacity, building communities and community governance. Issues raised during the development of the model included:

- the importance of the community starting with a simple and flexible organisational model which has the capacity to evolve
- the need for an auspicing arrangement that builds on the existing asset base and infrastructure of the Aboriginal community and enhances the chances of sustainability
- the need for a Communications Strategy and activities that address the community education and engagement issues that have been raised in consultations
- the need to develop a long-term management and governance plan in tandem with other strategies such as cultural enhancement, leadership and pride, image, social connectedness and respect.

The Strategic Planning and Policy Unit is a resource for the community and will lead future planning processes round the strategic priorities; there will be a focus on the following priorities in the first 12 months:

- Community education and general promotion of COAG, the Compact, the Aboriginal Community Facilitation Group and the Strategic Planning and Policy Unit
- Further development of the governance structures, systems and processes needed for the Aboriginal community to deliver its commitments under the Compact
- Development and implementation of a community engagement and planning process
- Review of planning and development to date of the strategic priorities from the Compact
- Mapping of Aboriginal and mainstream resources, services and assets including building improved data and information
- Development of a social connectedness, pride and respect strategy.

Education outcomes:
Significant progress has been made in the education priority including the following:

- development of performance indicators for the strategy
- development of a draft protocol for sharing data across governments and with community members
• work on transition to school transport issues
• development of a model of supported playgroups.
• establishment of an integrated family children’s service hub in Shepparton
• development of Koorie individual learning plans for schools
• development of part time work while at school, support and post school transition.
• implementation of attendance kit - “Be Deadly and Cool” which engaged schools, families and kids. This has been redeveloped from material which was utilised in another part of Victoria
• the process of developing the attendance kit has been important – raising awareness and everyone having a role to play – schools, family, and community
• the process has also assisted the Regional Koorie Education Committee to get moving – the process had started, but gained focus through the Education Pathways Strategy Planning
• in 2006, DEST has funded the Regional Koorie Education Committee for a project worker for one year for the school age group – the priorities for 2006 – cultural awareness for school staff, and developing a school and community plan – what needs to happen in each school
• the role of Koorie educators in schools has become better supported. The role in has a higher level of respect and recognition than before
• there is now more Indigenous community input into schools
• the Koorie Early Childhood Network is established – there is strong buy in from agencies, but the network has struggled to get community members. In 2006 there is still a small group of key players, who also want to involve Rumbalara. Three priorities have been established; supported playgroups in schools (VACCA have contributed resources to this); building on the work of the Best Start Project (an established home visiting program in Maternal and Child Health) with support from the hospital and Council; and pre-school to school transition.
• The following impact outcomes have been identified in the education priority:
  • Increased attendance – some of the data is showing a slight improvement. Three years ago, data was only collected from a sample schools, but two years ago full data was collected for the first time.
  • In late April a comparison was made with data collected last year.
  • Higher level of awareness of issues with principals and some of the key staff in schools. E.g. at a meeting on post-school options in April 2006, all schools except one were represented by Principals or Assistant Principals.
  • The education working group has commenced work on the cultural respect and are trialling new materials.

Employment:
The fast tracking of funding for Ladders to Success was a direct outcome of the COAG process bringing both the Victorian and Australian Governments together and agreeing that it would be a demonstration of good faith to expedite this decision even though it did not go through the COAG structures which emerged – these were still being agreed.

Several employment forums have been held and in late 2005 Job Network providers made a commitment to meet regularly and to address their services to the Indigenous community. DEWR is clear that the Trial process has assisted this achievement.
Young People:
Youth at the Centre has been funded and established. This Project is contributing to the COAG initiative goals for young people which are to:

- Engage young Aboriginal people in identifying organisational, family and individual assets and resources that may be brought to projects under the COAG initiative
- Broaden the range of individual and family groupings who have direct involvement in the COAG initiative.

Five young people are now involved through this initiative. The young people have had a range of training opportunities and some have made decisions to take up further tertiary study, including a young mother engaged in the initiative.

Next steps

a) What suggestions are there for further progressing the Trial?

There are very diverse views about how to continue the Trial; the only real agreements are that something needs to continue and that whatever that is needs to be done very differently over the next few years. Opinions expressed on the future of the Trial have included:

- Start again by holding a community meeting and electing a new governance group who are trained in governance issues
- The Strategic Policy and Planning Unit renders the COAG Trial non-existent
- The SRA process should be the way to go – led by OIPC – this should be the way that governments do business with the community
- If the processes changed maybe we could take it somewhere
- The Trial is on the brink of seeing some significant and positive changes and outcomes in the relationships and engaging the wider Indigenous community; the Strategic Planning and Policy Unit will give a much bigger and stronger voice to the Indigenous governance in the Trial
- The Trial is about where some of us thought it would be this far progressed; just beginning to see real change on the horizon.
- Giving up now would not send a good message.
- It is our assessment that there is some ‘truth’ in all of these views. However we disagree strongly that the Trial should be abandoned at this point. The purpose of this formative evaluation was to identify what all of the partners had learned and what lessons could be applied in the future. We acknowledge that not everyone will agree with our assessment of the lessons learned. However if the Trial was to be abandoned at this point, it is our assessment that the loss of faith with the community, and with the Indigenous leaders who have stayed engaged, or want to re-engage with better processes, would be substantial and would significantly compromise future efforts at collaboration and partnership with the Indigenous community in Shepparton. Either this was a Trial which allowed all partners to try working together and to learn from that – or it was just another pilot which potentially goes nowhere.
- We strongly support the views expressed by some government and Indigenous leaders, and summarised by Dr Peter Shergold,
that this process must be a long-term commitment and that culture change requires a much longer time horizon than two and a half years. Every attempt should be made to take the lessons of the Trial and adapt the initiative for the next three years. Without exception everyone interviewed wanted to continue in some form of partnership and almost everyone wants the next phase to be better conceptualised with more attention to good processes. The messages regarding the need to do that together with more attention to the how are almost unanimous.

This next section provides suggestions for how to improve the Trial.

b) What improvements can be made?

Improvements are suggested in three major areas; community, government and the process. The following ideas are presented for consideration.

Community

The Strategic Planning and Policy Unit is perceived by the ACFG members as having a crucial role in supporting the community’s engagement with the Trial. The ACFG cannot do this work alone or within their existing work loads. The Unit is the vehicle they see as enabling them to perform their role within the Trial and in other relevant initiatives within the region. The work of the Unit should receive high priority in the community governance discussions and be supported to implement the proposed directions and agreed priorities. This process should involve priority attention to how new ways of working might be implemented. This includes attention to:

- The ACFG, through the Unit, working with key government leaders on the best structures and processes to foster partnerships and the goals of the trial for the next three to five years
- Exploring the lessons and messages from this evaluation and what the implications are for how the community leaders work and are supported in the next phase of the partnership
- Cultural awareness training for all government staff engaged in the Trial and any of the Trial processes or projects
- Consideration of how to build improved understandings across the Indigenous community and family groups
- Training for the Indigenous community in understanding government processes and exploration of how these processes might be changed, adapted or improved to be more culturally responsive
- Open and frank discussions about how to build the capacity of the wider community to understand and contribute to government policy processes and to contribute to the Unit’s work and to any future partnerships.

Governments

The three levels of government should:

- Make a commitment to continue with the Trial in some negotiated partnership arrangements with the Indigenous community; this should occur through negotiations with the Aboriginal Community Facilitation Group
- Develop a strong and unequivocal commitment to engage in a program of cultural awareness training taking the lessons of this evaluation and advice from the Aboriginal Community Facilitation Group
- Consider how they acknowledge the role of Elders in the community and discuss this openly with the Elders’ Group and through the Aboriginal Community Facilitation Group

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• Develop some shared processes for the three levels of government to address issues related to how to improve how they all work together and to give priority to addressing barriers to being more open and responsive to ideas from the Indigenous community
• Actively seek advice from the ACFG regarding how governments need to work differently.
• Undertake a skills audit of all staff engaged in the activities within the Trial to date to assess the skills in capacity building, community engagement, partnerships and working in whole of government approaches of all staff, at all levels, and develop a training strategy to improve these skills
• Encourage all government and non-Indigenous non-government organisations agencies in the region to undertake cultural awareness training and to engage in partnerships with the Indigenous community
• Develop an employment strategy to increase the employment of Indigenous staff in all three levels of government in the region as an expression of good faith and as a model of good practice in building the cultural relevance of the three levels of government.8

Process
All three levels of government should work collaboratively with the ACFG through the Strategic Planning and Policy Unit to:
• Agree on the best representative and open structures and processes for the future partnership arrangements
• Consider using one of the Partnership Assessment Tools now available to assess and review regularly the quality of the partnership
• Develop and implement an evaluation framework for the next phase of the Trial and ensure that this is a priority for immediate implementation
• Work with the wider community to review the objectives and establish a more realistic and achievable set of integrated priorities and include progress towards sustainable financial/economic independence for the Indigenous community as one of the priorities – see Footnote 8 below
• Ensure partnerships with business are a core part of the next phase
• Ensure an integrated approach with and for other government initiatives in the region
• Address how to build wider community awareness across the non-Indigenous community of the achievements of the partnership
• Include the potential for public events which build partnerships and understandings across all sections of the community, this could include local cultural events led by the Indigenous community. The City of Greater Shepparton could support the process.

c) What structures, processes and support would be needed?
The structures and processes should be negotiated collaboratively by all partners and this is recommended in the previous section.

Support

8 In the course of this evaluation employment of Indigenous people in all mainstream businesses and agencies, including governments, was constantly identified as an issue by almost every member of the ACFG. There is high concern that most Indigenous employment still occurs in indigenous agencies. Economic independence sits alongside this issue for many Indigenous stakeholders interviewed.
The role of Strategic Planning and Policy Unit in supporting the ACFG will be pivotal in the next phase. It will provide support to the Indigenous community and community leaders and also for the governments involved by having a dedicated and identified process for engaging with the Indigenous community. It is urgent that Indigenous leaders address the longstanding tensions and divisions within the community; all governments must support and foster processes and strategies to achieve this and allow time for this to happen in the best and most respectful way. Privileging government time frames and constraints reinforces the sense that this is a one-way partnership.

Any future initiative needs to provide appropriate resourcing for the key people in the community and in government to participate as full partners.

Improved cultural understanding within governments are also essential and will assist in supporting government efforts and ensure that all staff understand how to work with Indigenous communities. Similarly training of Indigenous leaders in government processes will assist in building improved understandings of what change is possible and what the constraints and limitations are for governments.

d) Suggest possible approaches to ensure that governments and the Greater Shepparton Indigenous community are well placed for further evaluation of the Trial site in 2008

The development of an evaluation framework must be developed jointly between governments and the Aboriginal Community Facilitation Group (through the Unit) and implemented immediately as a formative and summative evaluation. Key indicators should be developed around:

- Assessing and measuring agreed impact and process outcomes
- The effectiveness of the partnerships agreed in this next phase including how the work of governments is coordinated, streamlined and improved
- Community engagement and representativeness
- Cultural relevance and competence
- Capacity building of both the Indigenous community and Governments.

It would be a strong statement of goodwill to engage with some of the more positive elements in Measuring Success including the outcomes framework. The framework outlined in Measuring Success contains some very significant work. As this framework was developed by some members engaged in the ACFG, the intent and content should be the focus of future discussions rather than the process which led to the publication of the report and subsequent public statements. There would need to be an acknowledgement of past processes and a negotiation regarding future public statements and how the framework might be used.

However this must not displace the need to simultaneously focus on working with governments regarding learning more about how to work differently.
Conclusion

This Trial has been a contentious and difficult experience for many of the partners. However, we believe that this is a sign of the strengths and energy of the community and a testament to the goodwill and good intentions of all of the stakeholders, including governments. It has been a very human process; a process which is also consistent with what is known and understood about group and community processes working in partnerships for the first time. Mistakes have been made, some processes could have been developed and implemented more effectively and an earlier evaluation strategy may have had a significant positive affect. There is evidence that the goodwill and good intentions are still current. There is also a very strong message that this can only be captured and built upon if some very significant changes occur including addressing the ‘how’ of the Trial, the representativeness of all of the processes and building more culturally relevant approaches to the partnership.

Revisiting the identified priorities is crucial. It is our view that the priorities, whilst excellent in intent and as outcomes to which all partners might aspire, were way too ambitious and probably added to the sense of frustration with the Trial, this raised unrealistic expectations of the Trial. It was in no way possible for the Trial to achieve or even address all of those priorities in just under 3 years, this will also be true for the next phase.

The Evaluation Team supports the concept that issues facing the Indigenous communities are interrelated. However that does not imply that the local partnership can or should ‘solve’ all of these issues within 2 or even 5 years. The best an initiative such as this Trial might be able to achieve is to influence progress towards some improved outcomes, agree on what needs to be done and how it needs to be done, agree on some indicators to evaluate progress, and then work together to address some strategic priorities around the how. Making such big goals the responsibility of a single Trial is guaranteed to disappoint and frustrate every stakeholder. A 20 year agenda might be more realistic and only then as a whole of government, whole of community and well supported package of social and economic initiatives. All things considered, the achievements of the Trial are probably more than reasonable within the timeframe and can be built upon very quickly with the right process and shared commitment.

All of the partners now have critical decisions to make; there is little room for blame and recriminations in genuine partnerships. There is room for reflection, acknowledgement, openness to learning genuine lessons, and for recognising the high level of good intent and goodwill which still exists. Making good decisions on where to from here is the shared responsibility of all of the partners. Returning to what existed prior to the Trial, ignoring the lessons learned, blaming each other and walking away, and/or allowing cynicism and irritation to prevail will all be poor decisions and will not change the life outcomes of the Indigenous community.

A body of knowledge on whole of government initiatives and building partnerships has grown considerably over the past two years. The lessons from this Trial are confirmed in this body of evidence, especially the importance and relevance of building respectful and trusting relationships and agreeing on achievable outcomes together and taking time to allow this to evolve.

The partners to this Trial have some clear choices to make. The first is to decide whether all partners will invest the time required to further build these relationships in the long term interests of the Indigenous community in the region. Those interests will
still best be met through collaboration and a shared commitment to addressing them together. Agreement about how to talk publicly about the Trial, what messages all partners want to convey, and what is not helpful, will greatly assist the community to develop confidence in all of the partners and support community leaders who share the load of building stronger communities and government leaders who have the task of managing competing priorities and of contributing to improved outcomes for communities.
ATTACHMENT 1: WHO WAS CONSULTED

Aboriginal Community Facilitation Group members
Adrian Appo
Geraldine Atkinson (Chair)
Marlene Atkinson
Neville Atkinson
Rex Atkinson
Vicki Atkinson
Paul Briggs
Joyce Doyle
John Martin
Justin Mohamed
Robbie Britten

Community Facilitator (2003/04)
Joanne Atkinson

Strategic Policy and Planning Unit
Michael Tynan

Community Members
Elders Group

Victorian Government
Terry Healy (DVC)
Nick Beckingsale (DVC)
Ian Hamm (DVC)
Angela Jurjevic (DVC)
Lisa Moore (Justice)
Kati Krsevan (State Government Outcomes Broker)
Jeanne Norling (DE&T)

Australian Government
Dr Peter Boxall (DEWR)
Bob Harvey (DEWR)
Ann Smith (DEWR)
Kerren Thorsen (DEWR)
Catherine Wildermuth (OIPC)

City of Greater Shepparton
Ian Martin and Anne McCamish

External Consultants
Ann Markiewicz
Michael O’Meara
Peter Kenyon
Deb Blaber - EMS Consulting
Salina Bernard – EMS Consulting
Christine Nunn
Rowena Allen
Attachment 2: Project Phases and Timeframe Agreed in 2003

Phase 1  Projects, Responsibilities and Timelines

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TASK</th>
<th>WHO</th>
<th>WHEN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Government Service mapping</td>
<td>Governments</td>
<td>Draft August 03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Vision and Strategic Plan</td>
<td>Community</td>
<td>Draft Sept 03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community asset mapping</td>
<td>Community</td>
<td>Sept/Oct 03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community engagement strategy</td>
<td>Community</td>
<td>Oct 03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication strategy</td>
<td>Community &amp; Government</td>
<td>October 03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing and progressing initiatives under the strategic plan</td>
<td>Community, Government &amp; ATSIC</td>
<td>ongoing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation strategy, indicator development and baseline data</td>
<td>Government &amp; Community</td>
<td>December 03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local data, community survey</td>
<td>Community &amp; Government</td>
<td>December 03</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Phase 2  Initiation

Establishment of new approaches and reshaping of existing services to deliver improved outcomes around the 11 strategic areas identified above

Continued engagement, capacity building, and leadership enhancement.

Phase 3  Consolidation

Making the initiative ongoing and sustainable joint government-community collaboration for identifying and responding to community needs and aspirations.
Appendix 3: References

Reports and research papers


Arabena, Kerry (2005) Not Fit for Modern Australian Society: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and the new arrangements for the administration of Indigenous affairs: Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, Canberra

Bulis, Helen and Stehlik, Daniela (2004) Expanding the boundaries of health – a ‘whole of government’ case study


Cutcliffe, Tony (2004) Take It or Leave It, How the COAG Trial is Failing The Shepparton Indigenous Community, The Eureka Project, Melbourne


Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, The Australian National University, Canberra

Web Sites

ABC - www.abc.net.au/message

ATSIC Commissioner SA Zone Newsletter
Key government and community documents

COAG Aboriginal Community Initiative in Shepparton. Strategic Planning and Policy Unit. Memorandum of Understanding between the Strategic Planning and Policy Unit Governance Committee and Greater Shepparton City Council (12th January 2006)

Compact (4th September 2003)


Education Pathways Strategy (Draft 14th October 2004)

Education Pathways Strategy:
   Achievements to Date
   Outcome Measures
   Progress Report February 2006
   Structures for Implementation
   Supporting Implementation Options

Funding agreement between the State of Victoria, with the Australian Government and Greater Shepparton City Council (January 2006) for Strategic Planning and Policy Unit funding

Harvey, Bob (21 May 2004) Lessons Learnt Shepparton COAG Trial. PowerPoint presentation

Joint Secretaries Visit (21st February 2003): Notes of Discussions

Notes of the Conversation between Secretaries and the community (26 August 2003)

Shepparton Aboriginal Community Facilitation Group. Communication Strategy

Steering Group minutes:
   2004 - May, June, August, September, October, November, December
   2005 – March, May, June, July, September, November, December
   2006 – February

Youth at the Centre Project
   Achievements to date
   Project Proposal
## Attachment 4: Table of significant dates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DATE</th>
<th>COAG INITIATIVE</th>
<th>OTHER INDIGENOUS OR SHEPPARTON INITIATIVE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>November 2000</td>
<td>COAG agrees to framework to advance reconciliation.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>April 2002</td>
<td>COAG agreement to Trial a whole of government approach in up to 8 communities around Australia Commissioning of Steering Group for the Review of Australian/State Service Provision to produce a regular report against key indicators of Indigenous disadvantage.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 2002</td>
<td>Members of Shepparton Aboriginal community commence discussions with government with a view to establish Shepparton as one of the Trial sites.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>October 2002</td>
<td>COAG circulates paper setting out set of proposed headline and strategic indicators of Indigenous disadvantage.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Late 2002</td>
<td>Appointment of locally based Australian Government Solution Broker by DEWR</td>
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<tr>
<td>Early 2003</td>
<td>Aboriginal Community Facilitation Group formed as the new community governance mechanism.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>February 2003</td>
<td>Joint Secretaries visit to Shepparton.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>July 2003</td>
<td>Victorian Premier announces that Shepparton has been selected as Victoria’s Trial site.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Mid 2003</td>
<td>Appointment of Aboriginal Community Facilitator</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>August 2003</td>
<td>Secretaries and community meeting. Issues discussed included the Strategic Plan, community and government commitment, importance of building on strengths.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>September 2003</td>
<td>Victorian Premier, Federal Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations, Mayor of City of Greater Shepparton and members of the Aboriginal Community Facilitation Group formally sign Compact.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>August, 2003</td>
<td>Position of Victorian and Australian Government Outcomes Brokers agreed</td>
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<tr>
<td>October 2003</td>
<td>Aboriginal Community Facilitation Group meeting.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Aboriginal Community Facilitation Group meeting.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Steering Group meeting</td>
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<tr>
<td>December 2003</td>
<td>Aboriginal Community Facilitation Group meeting. Open, clear and productive and other COAG Trial</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>DATE</td>
<td>COAG INITIATIVE</td>
<td>OTHER INDIGENOUS OR SHEPPARTON INITIATIVE</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Community BBQ</td>
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<tr>
<td>June 2004</td>
<td></td>
<td>COAG endorses a National Framework of principles for government service delivery to Indigenous Australians</td>
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<tr>
<td>April 2004</td>
<td>Steering Group Meeting.</td>
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<tr>
<td>May 2004</td>
<td>ACFG and government members of Steering Group met with DEST. Confirmed that DEST has $60,000 to employ a project officer.</td>
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<tr>
<td>June 2004</td>
<td>Steering Group Meeting.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Meeting of Education Taskforce</td>
<td>Employment summit in Melbourne</td>
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<tr>
<td>July 2004</td>
<td></td>
<td>Transfer of ATSIS programs to OIPC, and Australian Government line agencies</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Funding available for Youth at the Centre program</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Steering Group Meeting.</td>
<td>Employment and Education Post Compulsory Age forums held</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Meeting with school principals</td>
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<tr>
<td>August 2004</td>
<td></td>
<td>ATSIC Victorian Regional Plans launched</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Steering Group Meeting.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Education Strategy mapping workshop</td>
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<tr>
<td>September 2004</td>
<td>First Steering Group Bulletin issued.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SPPU Project Team meeting</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Steering Group Meeting.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>School Years Working Group session with School Principals</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Employment workshop with employers</td>
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<tr>
<td>October 2004</td>
<td>Steering Group Meeting.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Draft Education Pathways Strategy document outlining what is already in place.</td>
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<tr>
<td>November 2004</td>
<td>Steering Group Meeting.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Aboriginal Community Facilitation Group meeting</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Agreement on the model for the Strategic Planning and Policy Unit</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Education task force meeting</td>
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<td></td>
<td>DE&amp;T Secretary and Deputy Secretary, Principals and Regional Director meet to discuss the Education Strategy.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Community Forum at Rumbalara Aboriginal Cooperative to discuss the strategies and actions that have been developed in the Education Pathways Strategy and for the community to identify the priorities for action.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Education Pathways Summit held involving about 100 people from the community and government and non-government agencies, including five secretaries from Australian and State Government, Regional Directors and Mayor and Councillors from the City of Greater Shepparton.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 2004</td>
<td>Youth at the Centre funding finalised.</td>
<td>City of Greater Shepparton community capacity building project.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Meeting of State government agencies re Yalka Farm. Attendees included representatives from Justice, Human Services (Child Protection, Juvenile Justice and Regional Director), DE&amp;T, COAG Outcomes Broker, John Martin and Justin Mohamed.</td>
<td>City of Greater Shepparton Council resolve to recognise traditional owners/custodians of the land at the beginning of each formal meeting of Council.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>First Action Team meeting for the Youth at the Centre Project</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Steering Group Meeting.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Agreement on establishment of Strategic Planning and Policy Unit</td>
<td>Establishment of Department for Victorian Communities Local Presence Teams. Brief for the Team to linking up approaches and developing partnerships; works like brokers to Promote whole of government working. Hume Team located in Wangaratta.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 2005</td>
<td>Meeting re Yalka Farm – included State Departments, OIPC, DEWR, FaCS, DEST</td>
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<tr>
<td>March 2005</td>
<td>Steering Group meeting.</td>
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<tr>
<td>May 2005</td>
<td>Establishment of Koorie Early Childhood Network</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>February 2005</td>
<td>Withdrawal of Rumbalara Coop from the Facilitation Group</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>May 2005</td>
<td>Final Education Pathways Strategy Plan produced. Vision: “To provide Aboriginal students with pathways to achieve higher educational aspirations and positive life choices to education, training and employment”.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Steering Group Bulletin issued.</td>
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<tr>
<td>June 2005</td>
<td>Steering Group meeting.</td>
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<tr>
<td>June 2005</td>
<td>Meeting of Education Pathways Steering Group</td>
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<tr>
<td>June 2005</td>
<td>Meeting of Post School Implementation Group</td>
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<tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Forum held by Wurreker involving 135 people representing business and industry. 22 jobs offered as a result.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 2005</td>
<td>Contract for Strategic Planning and Policy Unit finalised with Project Partnerships.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Steering Group meeting.</td>
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<tr>
<td>August 2005</td>
<td>Steering Group meeting</td>
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<tr>
<td>September 2005</td>
<td>Young people from Youth at the Centre attend Youth Enterprise Conference in New Zealand and meeting with Maori elders and young people.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Workshop with more than 40 parents at Kids Town.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Youth at the Centre Steering Group meeting</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Post School Group met with Koori educators to provide briefing on post school options.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Steering Group meeting.</td>
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<tr>
<td>October 2005</td>
<td>Steering Group meeting</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>EMS Consultants produce COAG Trial Communications and Community Engagement Strategy.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 2005</td>
<td>Secretary DEWR announced at Senate Estimates Committee that role of Australian Government lead agency would transfer from DEWR to OIPC.</td>
<td>Steering Group meeting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>DEWR/Wurreker Employment Forum – key outcome. Job Network providers have agreed to meet before end of year.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 2005</td>
<td>Steering Group meeting.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Youth at the Centre meeting in Canberra with Dr. Boxall.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Steering Group Bulletin.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lidge MACS and Batdja Preschool obtain $500,000 capital grant from DHS to assist in the colation of the services in Shepparton.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Advisory Team meeting – Youth at the Centre Project</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 2006</td>
<td>Michael Tynan commences work as CEO of Strategic Planning and Policy Unit. Michael is accountable to the SPPU Governance Committee.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Memorandum of Understanding signed between the Strategic Planning and Policy Unit Governance Committee and Greater Shepparton City Council.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 2006</td>
<td>Funding agreement signed between State of Victoria (DVC) with the Australian Government (DIMIA) and Greater Shepparton City Council for funding of the Shepparton Aboriginal community Strategic Planning and Policy Unit. Total funding is $923,816 (exclusive of GST) for two years. Six monthly progress and financial reporting.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>Draft Greater Shepparton Community Action Plan presented to COAG Steering group.</td>
<td>Based on four key priority visions which capture the visions/aspirations of the community. Priority Visions are Connected Greater Shepparton; Skilled Greater Shepparton; Diverse Greater Shepparton; Reconciling Shepparton. Aims to start in April 2006.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 2006</td>
<td>Steering Group meeting.</td>
<td>ACFG meets as governance group for Strategic Planning and Policy Unit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ACFG meets as governance group for Strategic Planning and Policy Unit</td>
<td>The ACFG, through the Unit, should give priority attention to working with key government leaders on the best governance structures and community engagement processes to foster partnerships and the goals of the trial for the next three to five years.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 2006</td>
<td>ACFG meets as governance group for Strategic Planning and Policy Unit</td>
<td>Steering Group meeting with evaluators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 2006</td>
<td>Steering Group meeting planned</td>
<td>ACFG meeting planned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 2006</td>
<td>Steering Group meeting planned</td>
<td>ACFG meeting planned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 2006</td>
<td>Steering Group meeting planned</td>
<td>ACFG meeting planned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 2006</td>
<td>Steering Group meeting planned</td>
<td>ACFG meeting planned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 2007</td>
<td>Proposed Yachad International Conference in Melbourne</td>
<td>ACFG meeting planned</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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### Attachment 5: Glossary Of Abbreviations

<table>
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<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ATSIC</td>
<td>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islands Commission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ATSIS</td>
<td>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COAG</td>
<td>Council of Australian Governments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DET</td>
<td>Department of Employment and Training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEST</td>
<td>Department of Education, Science and Technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DVC</td>
<td>Department of Victorian Communities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICC</td>
<td>Indigenous Co-ordination Centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OIPC</td>
<td>Office of Indigenous Policy Co-ordination</td>
</tr>
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Executive Summary

The evaluation

In conjunction with the Western Australian Government, the Office of Indigenous Policy Coordination engaged Quantum Consulting Australia to conduct a formative evaluation of the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) Indigenous trial site in the East Kimberley of Western Australia. The evaluation was conducted over the period October to December 2005.

The primary purpose of this evaluation was to find out what’s working well and what could be improved in order to learn from and develop the trial.

The scope covered was as follows:

- **Setting the scene (the history):** An overview of the region, conditions and challenges at the start of the trial and significant events that have occurred;
- **Working together (the process):**
  - Extent of coordination between and within governments;
  - Extent of partnership between the government and community partners;
- **Interim Indigenous outcomes:** Examples of improved service delivery arrangements and outcomes achieved so far; how these outcomes are to be measured and whether baseline data is available;
- **Lessons learnt:** Identification of best practice models and/or approaches to improve the way communities and government agencies work together, which may potentially be applicable to other sites around Australia; and
- **Next Steps:** Evaluation of whether the trial has progressed as far as originally hoped, and if not what the critical barriers were; evaluation of whether the agreed objectives and priorities need revision; and determination of whether the trial will be ready for evaluation in 2007-08.

**Setting the scene**

The Western Australian COAG trial site is situated in the East Kimberley region and encompasses the communities of Balgo, Billiluna, Mulan, Ringer Soak and Yagga Yagga (this community is currently abandoned by residents). The communities reside within the Tjurabalan-Kutjungka Region.

The government partners to the trial are the Australian Government (through the Department of Transport and Regional Services), the Western Australian Government (through the Department of Indigenous Affairs), and the Halls Creek Shire Council. The Indigenous community partners are the Tjurabalan Native Title holders, represented on the Regional Reference Group by the Tjurabalan Native Title Land Corporation, and residents of the trial communities, who are represented at key decision making forums by community chairpersons or community nominated representatives.

The trial site region was identified as a priority area by the Department of Indigenous Affairs (DIA) and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) prior to the trial’s commencement. In addition, the Tjurabalan native title determination (along with other community strengths such as a strong traditional
culture and commitment from community members) presented an opportunity for the region to be selected as a COAG trial site.

However the region was also an area with particularly high social and economical disadvantage. Key challenges at the commencement of the trial included:

- Limited internal capacities in communities in terms of governance and leadership, and the ability to engage with government.
- Communities having to liaise with three tiers of government, with potential ‘silos’ at each tier and limited joint planning across agencies.
- A high level of turnover of personnel within government, communities’ administration and communities’ leadership.

A number of these issues are interdependent.

**Working with government**

A key part of the COAG trial approach is the delivery of government services in a coordinated and flexible way, and some progress has been made in enhancing coordination between government agencies during the trial.

A strategic framework (the Munjurla Scoping Study) has been developed to progress the objectives of COAG. Derived from the Munjurla Scoping Study is a draft Joint Action Plan (‘the roadmap through the spinifex’). A selection of joint agency planning documents (the 100 Day Plan and the Ringers Soak Community Plan) has also been produced in recent times. This has improved program coordination by identifying activities that each of the key agencies is responsible for in the one document, and providing a status report, which facilitates identification of progress and monitoring.

The engagement of Community Initiatives Coordinators from DoTaRS and a Place Manager from DIA at Halls Creek has also improved the coordination of government programs and services.

The following matters have been identified as challenges to government during the implementation of the trial:

- The priority of the COAG trial initially differed between the Australian and state government agencies.
- Operationalising the Munjurla Scoping Study and the Joint Action Plan derived from the study has been a challenge as they are essentially high level strategic frameworks providing a long term (5-10 year) vision, and the means to translate this into activities is not always readily recognisable.
- As governments (at both Australian and state level) predominantly operate through portfolio-specific agencies/departments, instances still arise where one particular agency/department can struggle to effectively deal with matters which may cross a number of portfolios.

**Working with communities**

A number of efforts have been made during the trial to improve partnerships between governments and the trial communities.
The establishment of the Regional Reference Group and the involvement of community representatives and senior government (Australian, state and local) personnel represents a key step towards partnership building. The engagement of Community Initiatives Coordinators from DoTaRS and a Place Manager from DIA at Halls Creek to form a Place Management Team further enhances this partnership building. The officers provide an important linkage between government agencies and the four communities.

Eleven Shared Responsibility Agreements (SRAs) have been successfully negotiated as at December 2005. While they are predominantly single issue SRAs, they are instrumental in facilitating readily observable changes in the communities, which in turn assist in building momentum and support for the shared responsibility partnership approach. SRAs have delivered tangible benefits, particularly in the areas of youth activities and improvement of community environments.

Despite the progress outlined above, the consultant has observed limited understanding by a number of community members as to what the COAG trial is and how the new arrangements in Indigenous affairs operate.

A number of issues have been identified as challenges to government working in partnership with the communities:

- Limited understanding by a number of community members as to what the COAG trial is.
- Limited capacity of communities to effectively engage with governments.
- Turnover of key staff within governments, communities’ administration and communities’ leadership, which has adversely impacted on momentum and the retention of experience and ‘corporate memory’.
- Differing opinions held in government agencies as to the type and extent of consultation required with communities in the formulation and delivery of responses to priority areas.

Lessons learnt

Lessons learnt during the trial include the following:

- Regional presence of reasonably senior government personnel is important for successful engagement with communities.
- Non-government organisations are important players, and should be consulted during planning and implementation of whole of government approaches.
- Clear planning should be undertaken which enables identification of agreed actions and monitoring of progress.
- Building relationships between governments and communities is critical for success.
- It is important to build on existing structures and models when developing new initiatives.
- Appropriate selection, capacity building and support are required for representatives of communities to participate effectively in shared responsibility initiatives.
- For any new initiative, agreement should be sought from the outset on expectations and how success is to be measured.
• Planning should be consistent with priorities identified at the community level and comprehensively identify specific actions that each organisation will undertake.

• Developing sufficient internal capacity within communities is crucial for them to effectively engage with governments.

• Determination of priorities should be undertaken with the close involvement of communities.

• Priorities need to be agreed across all three tiers of government.

• The number of contracts between governments and communities needs to be streamlined.

• It is important to ensure that the process by which government and communities interact/make decisions is clearly identified.

Next steps

The majority of government stakeholders consulted are of the opinion that the framework of objectives, priorities and commitments for the East Kimberley COAG trial are sound, and expressed in-principle support for the approach taken.

Given that a number of community and NGO stakeholders have expressed limited understanding or confusion about the COAG framework, it is important that resources be devoted to clarify for them the objectives, priorities and parties involved in COAG.

The consultant is of the view that there is merit in undertaking the following:

• Further developing the planning process (refer to Section 5.4.2);

• Developing a partnership agreement for the region to facilitate planning at a regional level;

• Further developing internal capacity within the communities (refer to Section 5.4.3);

• Building on work done so far to determine priorities with the close involvement of the communities (refer to Sections 3.2 and 5.4.4);

• Streamlining the number of contracts between governments and communities (refer to Section 5.4.6); and

The consultant is of the opinion that there is merit in an evaluation occurring of the trial site in 2007-08. It is acknowledged however that sustainable improvement of the lives of Indigenous Australians in the East Kimberley COAG trial site requires a long term planning perspective that extends beyond 2007-08. The evaluation in 2007-08 would accordingly focus on process indicators and intermediate term outcome indicators (refer to further comments in Section 6.4), which are better placed to measure the changes made by 2007-08 than the headline indicators. This is because the headline indicators require a longer horizon for changes to be measurable. Section 6.4 provides comments on issues that should be examined in the 2007-08 evaluation.
1 Introduction

1.1 This evaluation

In conjunction with the Western Australian Government, the Office of Indigenous Policy Coordination engaged Quantum Consulting Australia to conduct a formative evaluation of the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) Indigenous trial site in the East Kimberley of Western Australia. The evaluation was conducted over the period October to December 2005.

On-site community consultation, face-to-face meetings and telephone consultation were conducted with key stakeholders. Provided in Appendix A is a list of stakeholders consulted. Provided in Appendix B is a copy of the discussion papers framing the consultation with stakeholders.

A visit to the communities within the trial site was undertaken on the following dates:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community</th>
<th>Date of Visit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ringer Soak</td>
<td>1 December 2005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Billiluna</td>
<td>1 December 2005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mulan</td>
<td>2 December 2005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balgo</td>
<td>2 December 2005</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

During the visit to each community, input was obtained from Community Council representatives and CEOs on the following key matters:

- challenges at the start of the trial, in terms of how government agencies worked together and with the Indigenous communities;
- changes in the way government agencies and Indigenous communities do business or work together since the trial’s commencement;
- views on the level of awareness/understanding and support for the trial within the community; and
- views on Shared Responsibility Agreements.

In the case of the Balgo community, the meeting was held with heads of local agencies as the community council is currently under administration and key community figures were unavailable at the time of the visit.

1.2 Wider COAG trial context

On 3 November 2000, COAG committed itself to an approach based on partnerships and shared responsibilities with Indigenous communities, program flexibility and coordination between government agencies, with a focus on local communities and outcomes. It was agreed that the following would be priority areas:

- investing in community leadership initiatives;
• reviewing and re-engineering programmes and services to ensure they deliver practical measures that support families, children and young people. In particular, governments agreed to look at measures for tackling family violence, drug and alcohol dependency and other symptoms of community dysfunction; and

• forging greater links between the business sector and indigenous communities to help promote economic independence.

On 5 April 2002, COAG announced it would trial a new approach for working with Indigenous communities in a selection of locations. The aim of the trials was as follows:

“To improve the way governments interact with each other and with communities to deliver more effective responses to the needs of Indigenous Australians….and apply the lessons learnt more broadly.”

COAG agreed a new approach was necessary as both outcomes and management processes in Indigenous policy and service delivery needed to be improved. The new approach was twofold:

• Governments must work together at all levels and across all departments and agencies; and

• Indigenous communities and governments must work in partnership and share responsibility for achieving outcomes and for building the capacity of people in communities to manage their own affairs.

An evaluation of the trial sites will be undertaken as a two stage process, with the first stage (in 2005) focused on learning from and developing the trials, and the second stage (in 2007-08) on a more comprehensive assessment of trial outcomes and achievements.

1.3 The East Kimberley trial site

The Western Australian COAG trial site is situated in the East Kimberley region and encompasses the communities of Balgo, Billiluna, Mulan, Ringer Soak and Yagga Yagga. The communities reside within the Tjurabalan-Kutjungka Region. The Yagga Yagga community has been abandoned by residents and has not applied for ICC funding since 2003-04. A risk assessment meeting was held in 2005 to ascertain State and Commonwealth views on the possibility of re-establishing the community. After discussion, agencies concluded that the risk was too high to warrant reinvestment in the community. Subsequently, some of the Yagga Yagga people were advised of this outcome at a meeting in the COAG region.

The government partners to the trial are the Australian Government (through the Department of Transport and Regional Services), the Western Australian Government (through the Department of Indigenous Affairs), and the Halls Creek Shire Council. The Indigenous community partners are the Tjurabalan Native Title holders, represented on the Regional Reference Group by the Tjurabalan Native Title Land Corporation, and residents of the trial communities, who are represented at key decision making forums by community chairpersons or community nominated representatives.

The aim of applying the COAG trial concept in the East Kimberley is to improve outcomes through better and more flexible coordination of government resources, rather than through the provision of increased levels of resources into the trial site region.

Prior to the implementation of the COAG trial site initiative, individual agencies of state and Australian governments undertook planning and service delivery activities
predominantly as individual agencies. There was limited linkage between the three tiers of government across mainstream agencies in service delivery to the Indigenous communities.

In October 2001, the Western Australian Government and ATSIC signed a Statement of commitment to a new and just relationship, which stated an agreed set of principles (including shared responsibility and accountability of outcomes) and a process for the parties to negotiate a framework that would facilitate negotiated partnership agreements at the local and regional level.

The Tjurabalan-Kutjungka region was selected as a priority area, and the terms of reference for a pilot scoping study were developed to facilitate the development of an agreement for the region under this framework.

The developments thus far were in agreement with the COAG November 2000 principles for the trials, and contributed to the selection of the region as a COAG trial site. Following the selection in 2003, the partners to the trial agreed to progress the scoping study as part of the COAG trial (this developed into the Munjurla Scoping Study).
2 Setting the scene

2.1 Overview of the region, conditions and challenges at the start of the trial

The East Kimberley COAG trial site is approximately 200-300 kilometres to the south and south-east of the town of Halls Creek in north-western Australia. It is also known as the Tjurabalan-Kutjungka region.

The trial area covers the following communities:

- Balgo (Wirrimanu);
- Billiluna (Mindibungu);
- Ringer Soak (Kundat Djaru);
- Mulan; and
- Yagga Yagga.

2001 Census data indicates a total of 1022 people in the following community areas, of which 888 were indigenous. The populations for each community were:

- Balgo (Wirrimanu) 448 (388 indigenous);
- Ringer Soak (Kundat Djaru) 117 (106 indigenous);
- Billiluna (Mindibungu) 213 (175 indigenous);
- Mulan 168 (149 indigenous); and
- Yagga Yagga 76 (70 indigenous – now abandoned by residents).

Balgo is the largest community accounting for approximately half of the population of the region.

Prior to the trial, the above communities did not operate on a regional basis and primarily worked with government independently.

It was acknowledged at the commencement of the trial that there was a need for rapid intervention to address a number of serious issues within the communities. These included incidents involving self-harm of young people and substance abuse, particularly within the Balgo community. This prompted government stakeholders to initiate crisis intervention action in the Balgo community.

The initial intervention by government focused on stabilising the underlying crisis issues, to enable the objectives of the COAG trial to develop and the subsequent implementation of the trial to occur.

Opportunities and Challenges at the start of the trial

Key opportunities and community strengths at the commencement of the trial include:

- a strong traditional culture
- committed community members; and
- Native Title for the region had been determined prior to the commencement of the trial.
However, the communities within the trial site appear to be more socially and economically disadvantaged when compared to the total population of all Indigenous Australians. Supporting data indicates\(^1\):

- extensive household overcrowding is experienced;
- significantly poorer health outcomes are achieved than other Indigenous population areas;
- there is no private sector employment;
- only 66% of people speak English well;
- only 4% of students (out of 560) achieve year 12; and
- 93% of the labour force is on CDEP.

The above indicators reflect some of the key challenges at the commencement of the trial, including:

- fundamental issues which place communities in 'crisis mode':
  - substance and alcohol abuse;
  - domestic violence and other justice issues;
  - youth issues;
  - unmet housing need and associated infrastructure problems; and
  - low economic sustainability.
- limited internal capacities in communities in terms of:
  - governance and leadership; and
- communities having to liaise with three tiers of government, with potential 'silos' at each tier and limited joint planning across agencies.
- a high level of turnover of personnel within governments, communities’ administration and communities’ leadership.

A number of these issues are interdependent. For example, substance and alcohol abuse are a cause of domestic violence and youth issues. Poor conditions in the communities can also lead to turnover of staff.

The primary purpose of the trial is to address the communities’ capacities and facilitate improved coordination across government agencies, and thereby enhance community engagement and coordination of service delivery. This should in turn assist in addressing the fundamental issues identified.

**Contextual events**

The following events, though not trial activities as such, form an important context for the trial:

- The Balgo community was at crisis point in 2003, as evidenced by the frequent incidences of self-harm and violence, and financial mismanagement. This resulted in the need for rapid intervention by

\(^1\) Attachment B, Joint Action Plan for the communities in the COAG East Kimberley project, “the roadmap through the spinifex”, February 2005.
agencies across tiers of government, which subsequently led to the formation of the Balgo Local Response Group and the appointment of an administrator to Wirrimanu Aboriginal Corporation (Balgo).

- Significant structural change occurred in the Indigenous affairs sector in July 2004, subsequent to the commencement of the trial (abolition of ATSIC and ‘new arrangements in Indigenous affairs’).

In summary, the Australian Government transferred responsibility for ATSIC-ATSIS programs and services to mainstream agencies from 1 July 2004. The ATSIC Board and ATSIC Regional Councils were also abolished. A National Indigenous Council was formed to provide expert advice to a Ministerial Taskforce on Indigenous Affairs. The Australian Government also established an Office of Indigenous Policy Coordination and Indigenous Coordination Centres around Australia to facilitate coordination of mainstream agencies’ involvement in provision of services to Indigenous Australians.

While it is acknowledged that provision of services was generally not disrupted as a result of the abolition of ATSIC, momentum of planning activities and continuity of relationships were affected. As with the implementation of most new models where different agencies and departments provide individual staff to operate from co-located offices, there was a transitional period for the ‘new arrangements’ to become fully functional and operate in a fully coordinated manner.

2.2 History of the trial

The following provides an overview of some key actions and events for the East Kimberley COAG trial. A more detailed timeline is provided in Appendix C.

On 5 April 2002, COAG announced up to ten trial sites for a ‘whole of government’ approach to Indigenous affairs. Soon after, in November that year, the Western Australian Government released *Action plan for addressing family violence and child abuse in Aboriginal Communities* in response to the Gordon Inquiry. The subsequent implementation of this plan forms part of the Western Australian Government’s contribution to the East Kimberley COAG trial site.

Native Title for the region had been determined prior to the commencement of the trial. It was submitted to the consultant that there existed a separation between the traditional owners and non-traditional owners in the communities in the ability to consult with the communities from an overall perspective.

FaCS[^3] funded a position in the Kimberley Land Council (KLC) to facilitate community development work and capacity building in the region. That position was used as a link into the communities to contact all five communities and garner support for a meeting to discuss the feasibility of them participating in the trial. On 14 April 2003, Ken Matthews (Secretary, Department of Transport and Regional Services) and Richard Curry (Director General, Department of Indigenous Affairs) attended a Tjurabalan prescribed body corporate meeting in Billiluna. The KLC assisted in achieving a balance of interests from traditional owners and non-traditional owners at the meeting. At that meeting, approximately 90 traditional owners met with the KLC & ICCT/ATSIS, and agreed for the communities in the

[^3]: From February 2006 FaCS has become the Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaCSIA).
region to participate in the COAG trial, subject to five conditions. The five conditions were:

1. **Staffing resources**: it was agreed that funding through FaCS be continued for the community capacity building position. It was also agreed to establish community consulting agents who were to act as liaison people in each community to help the flow of information between the government and community and vice versa;

2. **A temporary/interim regional centre**: the communities requested for office accommodation to be provided at Billiluna. A local mining company was approached to sponsor some funding towards the establishment of the centre, and funds were matched by government.

3. **Regional Reference Group**: a reference group was established that formed the basis upon which subsequent decision making was done. The group consisted of two representatives from each community (one male, one female) together with the heads of the lead agencies, and representation from the Traditional Owners of the Prescribed Body Corporate who were resourced by KLC.

4. **A basis of agreement between government and the communities be developed**: a regional Shared Responsibility Agreement (SRA) was drafted, and was tabled at the second meeting of the Reference Group. However the agreement was not finalised, due to differing opinions by various government agencies on the appropriateness of a regional SRA.

5. **The Munjurla Scoping Study**: It had been agreed following Native Title determination that there would be some efforts to undertake research into the needs of the area, and the communities felt it was important that a study be carried out. The study examined the needs and gave a ‘snapshot’ of what the social and economic needs were for the region.

These conditions were principally agreed, and facilitated the progression of the trial.

In June 2003, the Munjurla Scoping Study, which was one of the five conditions, commenced. A Reference Group was formed for the Munjurla Study (this Group later evolved into the Regional Reference Group after the completion of the Munjurla Study). The Reference Group subsequently met twice a year to discuss the progression of the Munjurla Study. The Study was completed in April 2004.

Also in June 2003, the first DoTaRS Community Initiatives Coordinator commenced work on the trial, based in Halls Creek.

On 2 July 2003, a formal announcement was made in Billiluna of the selection of the East Kimberley COAG trial site.

Subsequently, a management group (consisting of ATSIS, DoTaRS and DIA joint secretariat) was formed and the group met to progress agenda items for the Reference Group.

The Western Australian Government formed a Balgo Local Response Group in October 2003 to support community initiatives that address the needs of at-risk youth. A month later, an Administrator was appointed by the Registrar of Aboriginal Corporations to the Wirrimanu Aboriginal Corporation (Balgo).

In February to March 2004, discussions and negotiations of the first SRAs commenced with Mulan, Billiluna, Balgo and Ringer Soak communities. On 12 May 2004, the first single issue SRA in Australia was signed, providing $3000 towards the purchase of equipment to enable the Mulan Community to organise after-school activities for Mulan youth. The benefit of the initial SRAs was that they provided
tangible outcomes at the community level and demonstrated that government was committed to this new way of working together.

In April 2004, the Australian Government announced the abolition of ATSIS/ATSIC. Indigenous Coordination Centres were to replace ATSIS Regional Offices (one to be located in Kununurra and to have oversight of the Tjurabalan region). ATSIS ceased operating as of 30 June 2004, and ATSIC Regional Councils ceased operating as at 30 June 2005.

In May 2004, the DoTaRS women’s leadership program facilitated the attendance of East Kimberley women at a COAG Women’s Gathering in Alice Springs. This program also facilitated attendance at two further leadership conferences – in Sydney in June 2005, and Canberra in November 2005.

A ‘Grog and Justice Summit’ was held in Mulan on 30 September 2004 to address alcohol-related issues. The summit assisted in determining the priorities for each community and in informing future directions. An action plan to implement initiatives identified in the summit, and a separate Grog and Justice Action Plan for Halls Creek were subsequently developed.

The Grog and Justice Summit was one of a number of strategies to improve health and wellbeing. Others include the ‘Stores for Better Health’ and ‘Fixing Houses for Better Health’ initiatives.

In January 2005, two new DoTaRS staff were recruited in Halls Creek as Community Initiatives Coordinators. A key role of the coordinators is to connect stakeholders from different government agencies and the communities.

Following up on the Munjurla Study, a Joint Action Plan ‘the roadmap through the spinifex’ was completed (February 2005), to provide a blueprint for the trial.

In July 2005, a multi-functional police facility was completed and staffed in Balgo as part of Western Australian Government’s response to the Gordon Inquiry. A permanent police presence in the East Kimberley COAG region has been credited for improvement of law and order in the region.

The development of a 100 Day Plan commenced in August 2005. It was initially developed as a reporting mechanism to a Ministerial taskforce sub group to outline the respective responsibilities by DoTaRS, other Australian Government agencies and Western Australian Government agencies in progressing a number of priority areas identified by the Regional Reference Group. It was extended to link with the Joint Action Plan at a more operational level, and subsequently updated at regular intervals. DoTaRS’s recent engagement of a communications consultant will further facilitate presentation of the plan to representatives of the communities.

A Regional Reference Group Meeting held on 20 October 2005 involved only community representatives and not the representatives from the lead government agencies. This was arranged at the request of the community representatives as they wanted to take the opportunity to discuss priority matters amongst the communities prior to further involvement of governments. This can be interpreted as evidence of progress in the development of leadership capacity in the communities.
3 Working together

3.1 Working with governments

The East Kimberley COAG trial has provided a forum within which the three tiers of government can undertake planning and service delivery functions in a fully coordinated manner.

Provided below is an overview of key findings/comments on what’s working well and what’s not working well in the way governments work together.

3.1.1 Are goals and objectives shared and clearly articulated

The overall goal of the COAG trials is “to improve the way governments interact with each other and with communities to deliver more effective responses to the needs of Indigenous Australians”.

Identification of more detailed goals and objectives specific to the region has developed over time. Part of this process was the commissioning of the Munjurla Scoping Study (refer to Section 2.2). The purpose of the study was to “inform the process of negotiating a Tjurabalan-Kutjungka Regional Agreement”, and to identify the key “issues that confront the region, especially the social situation”. The intended focus of the report was “the establishment of new structures and processes that will enable the region to effectively address its own issues and concerns in a sustainable way”.

The study proposed a framework comprising of a ‘main table’, a forum for partnership, engagement and negotiation, and ‘side tables’, which are working parties to discuss and plan actions addressing a number of issues:

1. Alcohol ‘Grog’ (including other forms of substances misuse)
2. Safety
3. Education, Training and Youth
4. Health
5. Housing and Infrastructure
6. Land Issues
7. Cattle

The Munjurla Scoping Study provides a framework for the identification of goals and objectives at a strategic level. The ability to translate those goals and objectives into implementation strategies has been a challenge.

Following the Munjurla Scoping Study, a Joint Action Plan was developed to outline a way forward for the trial. It is a document that outlines strategies aimed to address each of six key result areas identified in the Munjurla Scoping Study, with key actions identified under each strategy. Lead agencies, other agency partners and target (start) dates are identified for the key actions; however performance indicators have not yet been identified.

The absence of identified and agreed target completion dates and performance indicators in the Joint Action Plan represents a weakness in assessing progress. It is acknowledged however that the Joint Action Plan has a long term planning horizon (10 years), and that the need to address day to day crisis issues as they arise has made it difficult to establish dates and performance indicators. The rolling 100 Day Plan which has been subsequently developed assists in addressing some of the Joint Action Plan’s weaknesses. There are also advantages in using a
shorter term plan for detailed monitoring, as it can more closely reflect the evolution of the trial over time. The 100 Day Plan (including progress update) was distributed at the February 2006 Regional Reference Group meeting and was well received by the community representatives according to Regional Reference Group meeting minutes. Future plans will continue to be updated after each Regional Reference Group to keep the priorities and reporting against previous actions current.

Another significant challenge is that the activities required to address the identified priority areas are extensive in terms of both resources and timeframe. Other sources of challenges are further discussed in 3.1.9.

For effective progress to occur in addressing the priority areas, particular attention is required to ensure that all relevant agencies/departments and other organisations identified within action plans, are clearly aware of the tasks to be undertaken and monitoring of progress implemented. This process can be facilitated through cross-agency forums such as the Kimberley Interagency Working Group and the ‘Commonwealth Heads Group’ meeting.

3.1.2 Are the needs of the communities clearly understood

A number of community and NGO stakeholders in the region have expressed concern that effective community consultation was limited during the preparation of the Munjurla Scoping Study, and that little or insufficient feedback has been provided to the communities and agencies within those communities. In the case of some NGOs, this has resulted in a sense of ‘disengagement’ with the framework proposed in the Munjurla Scoping Study. In such an environment, it is difficult to assess whether the needs of all communities are clearly understood.

The ability to convey the needs of the communities resides within the effectiveness of the Regional Reference Group and local DoTaRS and DIA staff.

An effective communication strategy to liaise with community stakeholders is to be developed following DoTaRS’s recent appointment of a communications consultant to assist in this matter. The consultant’s responsibilities include developing a communications plan and set of ‘tools’ for communicating to the communities:

- the work being undertaken in the East Kimberley COAG trial;
- the Joint Action Plan and 100 Day Plan; and
- the findings of the Munjurla Scoping Study;

It is anticipated that this process will facilitate the verification by community Council members, elders, and community CEOs, of the needs and priorities as identified in the Munjurla Scoping Study, the Joint Action Plan and the Regional Reference Group.

3.1.3 Is there a ‘theory of action’ – is the program logic explicit

The Munjurla Scoping Study and a subsequent Joint Action Plan provide a ‘theory of action’ in which to progress systematic change in the trial area. This is illustrated in the diagram below:
The result we are trying to achieve

- Indigenous Australians enjoying equity of access and opportunities for participation in Australian society and economy
- Evidence from measured improvements in the communities that Indigenous communities are seeing and sustaining results
- • Common outcomes, rationalisation of resources
  • Increased capacity (leadership, control, involvement…)
  • Changing role for government – brokerage or facilitator role in partnership with communities

Better programs and services delivered through better planning processes owned by the community
- Data collection, setting objectives, agreeing resources etc

Agreed whole-of-government outcomes for government program and service delivery to Indigenous communities

Building coherence and capacity in Indigenous communities so they can run themselves and engage productively with government

Government service delivery and engagement with indigenous communities is fractured and not effective

Indigenous communities have variable coherence and capacity to engage with government

The challenge

- Links with existing groups operating in the region, such as the Kimberley Interagency Working Group and the WA Human Services Regional Managers’ Forum, could be explored further to enhance the effectiveness of the ‘side table’ framework.

Figure 3.1 Program logic outlined in the Joint Action Plan

There has, however, been a limitation in the ability to translate this ‘theory of action’ into agreed and well understood activities and outputs.

Stakeholder consultation indicates the Munjurla Scoping Study’s recommendation of a framework of ‘side tables’ is difficult to fully operationalise as it is resource intensive, in terms of both community members’ capacity and willingness to participate and operational resources. A progressive approach to addressing ‘side table’ issues has therefore been adopted, rather than addressing all issues at once. Links with existing groups operating in the region, such as the Kimberley Interagency Working Group and the WA Human Services Regional Managers’ Forum, could be explored further to enhance the effectiveness of the ‘side table’ framework.
The significant resource implications, long term nature and absence of agreed target completion dates and performance indicators in the Joint Action Plan make it difficult for the implementation of the plan to gain momentum.

The recent development of the more detailed 100 Day Plan to supplement the Joint Action Plan should assist in this regard.

3.1.4 Are there agreed resource allocation arrangements

It is important to note that the aim of the COAG trial concept is to improve outcomes in each trial site through better and more flexible coordination of government resources, rather than through increased levels of resources injected into the trial site areas. However, it is understood that both the Australian and state governments did provide funding to commence some projects.

While there is no ‘umbrella’ agreement on resource allocation arrangements in relation to the trial site, there are a number of developments within the trial site area:

- The Australian Government (through DoTaRS) has allocated Community Initiatives Coordinators and the State Government (DIA) has appointed a place manager to form a Place Management Team based in Halls Creek (as agreed in the Joint Action Plan). The team’s role is further discussed in Section 5.1.1.

- A Community consultation fund has been established with joint contributions from DoTaRS, DIA and the Shire of Halls Creek. The fund is held at the Shire of Halls Creek and is used to enable effective participation by members of the communities through activities such as provision of transport, accommodation and meals for meetings and consultations. The funding may also be used to purchase translation services, facilitation expertise and other enabling services to assist governments to effectively engage with community members.

- State and Australian Government agencies have made joint contributions to projects on a project by project basis; examples include funding for the regional ‘Grog and Justice Summit’, and an environmental health program by Palyalatju Maparnpa Health Committee.

- The Western Australian Government’s response to the Gordon Inquiry forms a large part of its commitments to the trial. Resourcing has been provided for the establishment of a multifunctional policing facility and permanent police presence, and the appointment of a child protection worker.

There are also a number of portfolio-specific Indigenous bilateral agreements/programs and mainstream (non-Indigenous specific) agreements/programs which are not specifically negotiated for the East Kimberley COAG trial site, however fund services delivered in the region. Examples include the Indigenous Housing and Infrastructure Agreement between the Australian and Western Australian Governments and joint funding for Fixing Houses for Better Health.

The Halls Creek Shire Council decided to allocate an additional $50,000 in their 2005-06 budget for activities/projects in the East Kimberley COAG trial region, to demonstrate their commitment to the region. The Council is open to submissions by communities as to the purposes for which the funding is to be used. For example, these may include the organisation of youth or community activities and projects that improve the physical environment in the region.
The Shire Council is also factoring the East Kimberley COAG area into its planning, and we understand has changed boundaries for election of councillors to create greater Indigenous representation. This is a positive result which was facilitated by the trial.

A key action planned is the mapping of all funding resources and services going into the trial site. This will facilitate a better understanding of the roles of government and services within the trial site and may facilitate the development of future agreements.

3.1.5 Are roles and responsibilities of agencies involved understood (including Commonwealth and State lead agency arrangements)

The level of understanding of the roles and responsibilities of agencies involved in the trial site has increased significantly in recent times. This has been assisted by the development of the 100 Day Plan which:

- identifies DoTaRS responsibilities (as lead agency), input to be provided by Australian Government agencies and possible roles to be undertaken by the State Government, across 12 priority areas (to be finalised);
- contains timelines for certain priorities; and
- includes reporting of progress.

The 100 Day Plan is a relatively recent (August 2005) initiative and was initially developed as a reporting mechanism to a Ministerial taskforce sub group. It has been extended to link with the Joint Action Plan at a more operational level. Hence, the role of Halls Creek Shire has not been explicitly included in the plan, and the roles of WA Government agencies have been included in the February 2006 update. DoTaRS’s planned engagement of a communications consultant will further facilitate presentation of the plan to representatives of the communities.

While job descriptions have been developed for the individual Place Management Team members, the roles and responsibilities of agencies can benefit from further clarification in the delineation of responsibilities between the DoTaRS Community Initiatives Coordinators and the DIA Place Manager in the Place Management Team.

3.1.6 Are there clear and explicit evaluation criteria to determine success

It has been generally agreed by the trial partners that the Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage (OID) framework will be used in evaluating outcomes achieved in the COAG WA trial region.

The OID framework was endorsed by COAG as a tool to drive positive changes to policy and service delivery with the specific intention of reducing levels of disadvantage for Indigenous Australians. The framework includes a combination of headline indicators and strategic areas for action.

Further comments on the measurement of success are provided in Section 6.

3.1.7 Are there mechanisms for joint decision making

The Regional Reference Group provides a forum for joint decision making in the East Kimberley COAG trial site. During meetings, the Regional Reference Group jointly agree on priority issues to be resolved (agencies, community members or
existing committees responsible for undertaking action to resolve issues are also identified during the meetings).

The Joint Action Plan also outlines priority areas and necessary actions jointly agreed by a number of agencies, based on priorities identified by the Regional Reference Group as well as the Munjurla Scoping Study. The 100 Day Plan then tracks the progress on these priority areas.

While the Regional Reference Group includes the WA Government and Australian Government lead agencies and the Shire of Halls Creek, the consultant notes the absence of an inter-agency forum across all three tiers of government extending beyond the trial partner agencies and OIPC. Currently, government agencies at both Australian Government and state levels each have an inter-agency forum (the ‘Commonwealth Heads Group’ meeting of all Australian Government agency state managers, and the Human Services Director Generals Group for WA Government agencies). There are also cross government committees such as the Kimberley Interagency Working Group. However, the primary outcome at these forums has been for agencies to update other agencies on recent developments, rather than as a comprehensive joint-decision mechanism.

Given existing forums are not intended to be joint-decision mechanisms, there is benefit in using inter-agency forums to facilitate improved coordination and possibly joint decision making:

- at the programs/processes level – each agency identifies if there are impediments to the effective implementation of their respective programs delivered to the trial site, and identifies strategies to overcome, if possible, the impediments.

- at a joint planning level – facilitate forums across all three tiers of government focusing on how agencies can be better coordinated in the delivery of services. These may be portfolio-specific, e.g. one forum for health, another for housing and employment, etc.

### 3.1.8 Positive changes to date

Following is a summary of positive changes in the way government agencies work with each other in the trial site:

- A strategic framework (the Munjurla Scoping Study) has been developed for progressing the objectives of COAG. Derived from the Munjurla Scoping Study is a Joint Action Plan (‘roadmap through the spinifex’).

- Progress has been made in developing a regional approach to the delivery of services to the communities by governments.

- Joint planning processes have occurred between key Australian and state government agencies (for example, the ‘100 Day Plan’ and the Ringers Soak Community Plan).

- Active involvement of local government with the communities is occurring.

- Community Initiatives Coordinators from DoTaRS and a Place Manager from DIA based at Halls Creek are facilitating the coordination of government agencies and liaison with the COAG communities.

- A community consultation fund has been established with joint contributions from DoTaRS, DIA and the Shire of Halls Creek. The fund is held at the Shire of Halls Creek and is generally used to reimburse community representatives for expenses incurred in attending meetings.
• State and Australian government agencies have made joint contributions to projects on a project by project basis.

• A concept workshop involving Department of Housing and Works, DoTaRS, DIA, FaCSIA, DEWR, Shire of Halls Creek and community representatives was held in February 2006 to examine housing management and maintenance issues in the region.

• State managers of Australian Government agencies meet each fortnight, and review progress in the East Kimberley COAG trial site as a standing agenda item for the meeting.

• The Indigenous Coordination Centre in Kununurra was established as part of the new arrangements in Indigenous affairs, meaning representatives from a number of Australian Government departments work together in one location.

3.1.9 Challenges

The following matters have been identified as challenges to governments working together during the implementation of the trial:

• The priority of the COAG trial initially differed between Australian and state government agencies. For a number of state government agencies, negotiations and collaboration occurred at program and regional levels, however high level commitment was yet to occur. A State Indigenous Strategy (in draft form pending sign-off during this evaluation) will hopefully elevate the priority of service delivery to Indigenous Western Australians for state government agencies in general.

• Operationalising the Munjurla Scoping Study and the Joint Action Plan derived from the study has been a challenge as they are essentially a high level strategic framework, and the means to translate this into activities is not always readily recognisable. In addition, the focus in the first years of the trial was on getting engagement processes in place, stabilising communities (in particular Balgo) and responding to community priorities.

• Given that governments (at Australian and state level) predominantly operate through portfolio-specific agencies/departments, instances arise where one particular agency/department struggles to effectively deal with matters which may cross a number of portfolios. Though progress has been made, these government ‘silos’ remain a challenge.

3.2 Working with communities

A number of efforts have been made through the trial to improve partnerships between governments and the trial communities. These are discussed in detail below.

3.2.1 The extent of partnership built between government and community partners and how this is affecting the operation of the trial and community outcomes.

The establishment of the Regional Reference Group and the involvement of community representatives and senior government (Australian, state and local)
personnel represents a key step towards partnership building between government and the communities.

The engagement of Community Initiatives Coordinators from DoTaRS and a Place Manager from DIA at Halls Creek to form a Place Management Team further enhances the partnership building. It is noted that the current model of locally based Community Initiatives Coordinators has evolved over time during the trial.

The officers provide an important linkage between government agencies and the four communities. The team’s role is further discussed in Section 5.1.1.

3.2.2 How well the concept of shared responsibility has been understood and adopted by both governments and communities and how Shared Responsibility Agreements have worked

Eleven SRAs (one in Balgo, four in Mulan, four in Billiluna and two in Ringers Soak) have been successfully negotiated as at December 2005. While they are predominantly single issue SRAs, they are instrumental in facilitating readily observable changes in the communities, which in turn assist in building momentum and support for the shared responsibility partnership approach.

The Western Australian Government was not a signatory to the eleven SRAs signed, primarily because the Western Australian Government was in bilateral discussions with the Australian Government on new arrangements for Indigenous Affairs, including SRAs. However, activities that fell within the core responsibilities of state agencies were identified in some SRAs and were implemented.

In general terms, communities expressed the view that the SRA framework clarifies both the governments’ and the communities’ responsibilities. Benefits identified included:

- Government actively involving communities in the formulation of solutions; and
- Communities having an opportunity to take ownership and be ‘in the driving seat’ for addressing matters within the community.

Concerns about the SRA framework were expressed by some NGOs in community. These included:

- SRAs will be expanded to include provision of essential/core services rather than discretionary funding alone; and
- Too many SRAs can become unwieldy to manage.

In regards to the above concerns, the consultant has been advised that governments have no intention of expanding the scope of SRAs to include essential/core services, and that the intended direction of SRA development is away from ‘single issue’ SRAs to more comprehensive agreements.

3.2.3 Whether governments have delivered on their commitments/undertakings and whether community has delivered on its commitments/undertakings

Feedback from community and government stakeholders suggests that generally both parties (government and community) have delivered on their commitments/undertakings pursuant to SRAs. Comments were however received that on occasions, delays have been experienced due to practical delivery issues. For example, delays in installing fuel bowsers in the Mulan Community (pursuant to
an SRA) were experienced because of time taken to select the appropriate type of fuel bowser, longer than expected negotiations on a contract with the supplier, changes in CEOs in the community and undertaking ‘on-the-ground’ preparation work necessary prior to the fuel bowser installation.

The absence of a target completion date for most of the identified key actions in the Joint Action Plan does not readily facilitate assessment of governments’ progress in delivering its undertakings as outlined in the plan. However, in general it is considered that the government agencies have made progress in a number of areas. These are summarised in Section 3.2.5.

### 3.2.4 The extent of understanding of and support for the trial within the broader Indigenous community and how this has been demonstrated and the extent to which the new Indigenous affairs arrangements are understood and/or accepted by the communities.

The consultant has observed limited understanding by a number of community members as to what the COAG trial is and how the new arrangements in Indigenous affairs operate. The consultant notes that DoTaRS has engaged a communications consultant to develop a communications strategy, which will facilitate and enhance the communication framework in this area.

Stakeholders from a number of communities have expressed a desire to clarify who the agencies are and how they fit into the ‘big picture’.

In this regard, turnover of personnel in community administration and community leadership was also an important factor as this adversely affected the retention of experience and knowledge.

### 3.2.5 Positive changes to date

A number of positive changes have been achieved in the way government agencies work in partnership with the communities:

- The Regional Reference Group - a forum of community representatives and senior government (Australian, state and local) personnel – has been established. This enables community views and priorities to be discussed.
- Community Initiatives Coordinators from DoTaRS and a Place Manager at Halls Creek function as linkages between government agencies and the four communities. They also provide secretariat and project support to the Reference Group.
- Community CEOs and Chairpersons meetings and government lead agency meetings are held between Reference Group meetings to set the agenda for Reference Group meetings.
- A joint agency heads meeting occurs regularly in Balgo.
- Eleven Shared Responsibility Agreements (SRAs) have been signed and are operational. As at December 2005, thirteen other SRAs are also under development.
- The Shire Council is factoring the East Kimberley COAG area into its planning, and we understand has changed its boundaries for election of councillors to create greater Indigenous representation.
• A commitment has been made to obtain more and better trained interpreters working on the ground, properly remunerated and utilised consistently, to work with proposed community development workers.

• A community governance program has been developed as part of the community development initiative. The purpose of this program is to assist communities and their leaders to self-govern and to negotiate effectively with governments and service providers. The program includes skills development to improve legal entity governance, financial and human resource management capability and leadership training.

• ‘Stores for Better Health’ and ‘Housing for Better Health’ initiatives are being implemented.

• Activities have been undertaken to broker and guide the development of an environmental health program for the region.

• Some streamlining and coordination of field visits to communities has been facilitated by collaboration between the Kununurra ICC, CICs and the communities, including through ICC field visit schedules. ICC staff brief other agencies in the ICC on any issues of importance arising from field visits. This approach has enhanced communication and cooperation within the ICC and with the communities in the region.

• Discussions are currently being held between the Kununurra ICC and the Shire of Halls Creek regarding the consolidation of the delivery of municipal services to the trial region. Options being considered include rationalisation of service delivery for all communities in the trial region under the auspices of the Shire.

• Committing resources to assist the Balgo Community. Efforts have been made to stabilise Balgo’s administration through engagement of a CEO and Deputy CEOs, and a Community Watch Program. The budgets/resources were negotiated with the community in a non-prescriptive and flexible fashion. The community was able to choose specific areas to target with the funding and use its local knowledge to address crisis issues. This approach has been successful and the continuous funding over three years has allowed the community to maintain its efforts and elicit positive change. Establishment of a multi purpose policing centre has also significantly assisted in stabilising Balgo.

• A review of the Kundat Djaru Aboriginal Corporation and Kundat Djaru Community Store has occurred. A whole of government strategy to address the outcomes and recommendations of the review is currently being developed with input from the community.

3.2.6 Challenges

A number of issues have been identified as challenges to governments working in partnership with the communities:

• Limited understanding by a number of community members as to what the COAG trial is.

• Lack of a formal community committee or forum to engage with government In Balgo, as Wirrimanu Aboriginal Corporation is currently under administration.
• Limited capacity of communities to effectively engage with government. The consultant notes that DoTaRS has facilitated attendance of women from the East Kimberley COAG region communities to a number of leadership development conferences in May 2004, June 2005 and November 2005. ORAC has also designed a governance training course which is to be delivered in 2006. These initiatives form an important first step in building the communities’ capacity.

• Key staff turnover within government, communities’ administration and communities’ leadership has adversely impacted on the continuation of momentum and the retention of experience and ‘corporate memory’.

• Differing opinions are held in government agencies as to the type and extent of consultation required with communities in the formulation and delivery of responses to priority areas.
4 Interim Indigenous outcomes

It is important to note that the review, the subject of this report, is a formative evaluation. It does not attempt to undertake a detailed analysis of outcomes. However, while the focus is not on identifying outcomes, interim evidence of outcomes identified is included below.

4.1 Are there examples of better coordination of government programs and services and have these led to improved service delivery arrangements and outcomes

The engagement of Community Initiatives Coordinators from DoTaRS and a Place Manager from DIA at Halls Creek has provided improvements in the coordination of government programs and services.

A selection of joint agency planning documents (the 100 Day Plan and the Ringers Soak Community Plan) have recently been produced, which have improved program coordination by identifying activities that each of the key agencies is responsible for in the one document, and providing progress updates, which facilitates identification of progress and monitoring.

The effectiveness of the Place Management team is, in part, determined by its ability to ‘marshal’ an appropriate response to issues as and when they arise at the communities within the trial site. This role requires the Place Management Team to have an adequate level of authority when coordinating a response involving other government agencies/departments. It is therefore important that both DoTaRS and DIA (the responsible agencies for the Place Management Team) regularly assess and resolve agency to agency impediments should they be encountered by the Place Management Team.

4.2 How are outcomes being measured or intended to be measured and have baseline data been established as the starting point for measuring progress

The OID framework will be used to measure outcomes achieved.

Further particulars on suggested matters that should be examined in the 2007-08 evaluation are contained within Section 6.4 of this Report.

4.3 Any interim outcomes from Shared Responsibility Agreements

Eleven SRAs have been successfully negotiated and signed-off:

- Provision of youth equipment and youth activities in Balgo;
- Provision of youth equipment and youth activities in Mulan;
- Upgrade of an existing Women’s Centre and the development of a women’s resource project in Mulan;
- Installation of fuel bowsers to strengthen community economy in Mulan;
- Upgrade of basketball court in Mulan;
• Provision of youth equipment and youth activities in Billiluna;
• Interim regional administration and resource centre in Billiluna;
• Installation of fuel bowsers to strengthen community economy in Billiluna;
• Improvement in airstrip lighting in Billiluna;
• Provision of youth equipment and youth activities in Ringers Soak; and
• Provision of community maintenance equipment in Ringers Soak.

The following table provides more details on each of these SRAs and commentary on interim outcomes.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community</th>
<th>Project Description</th>
<th>Date Signed</th>
<th>Govt Agency Signatories on the SRA</th>
<th>Interim Outcomes – Stakeholder feedback</th>
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</thead>
</table>
| Balgo     | Youth equipment and youth activities - $10,000 (AGs) | June 2005 | DoTaRS | • Funding has been utilised to purchase sporting and music equipment and to repair the lights on the basketball court.  
• Youth participated in activities using the equipment. The goal stated within the SRA was for 40% of young people are to participate. No data was kept by the community to allow verification of the participation rate achieved.  
• The youth centre is open and used regularly, with good participation by the young people of the region. Two bands have also formed in the community and they regularly use the youth centre and equipment to practice. |
| Mulan     | Youth equipment and youth activities - $3,000 DIMIA – FFP | June 2004 | DoTaRS | • Sporting equipment was purchased and a volleyball court has been built.  
• Youth activities are still conducted with CDEP participants involved in the organisation and supervision of activities. Participation from young people has been significant. |
| Mulan     | Upgrade existing Women’s Centre; develop a women’s resource project - $6,000 DIMIA – FFP | July 2004 | DoTaRS | • A demountable building has been provided to the community and some equipment and furniture has been provided.  
• The women have begun to store cultural artifacts in the centre, however more resources and support is required for the centre to be fully functional. |
| Mulan     | Install fuel bowsersto strengthen community economy - $172,260 DIMIA - FFP | March 2005 | DoTaRS and OIPC | • The bowsers have been installed and tanks filled with Opal fuel. Responsibilities on both sides have been met and are having a positive impact on the community.  
• Improvements have occurred in environmental health and hygiene through regular rubbish collection and many families are washing their children’s faces daily and the importance of daily face washing is being heavily promoted within the community. The school also runs a daily hygiene |
<table>
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<th>Location</th>
<th>Project Description</th>
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<th>Details</th>
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| Mulan    | Upgrade basketball court - $60,000 (ATSIC funds provided to state) | June 2005  | DoTaRS and OIPC  | - Basketball court has been upgraded and is used regularly. Five CDEP workers were involved in the upgrade and received on the job training in building construction.  
- A regional basketball competition was arranged with Balgo and Billiluna.  
- Other social activities have been held on the basketball court, taking advantage of the undercover area. |
| Billiluna | Youth equipment and youth activities - $3,000 | March 2005 | DoTaRS          | - Funding has been utilised to purchase sporting equipment  
- Equipment is used by children & youth two to three times a week on the community recreation oval.  
- The activities are supervised by two Garnduwa (a community organisation) ‘Be Active’ officers, who organise activities 3 to 3.5 hours a day  
- The community CEO has stated that antisocial behaviour by young people decreased after the implementation of the program. |
| Billiluna | Temporary accommodation - $135,000 DIMIA – FFP | March 2005 | DoTaRS          | - Remaining construction (landscaping around buildings) will resume after wet season.  
- The community centre is regularly used by COAG staff and other contractors present in community. It is also used for meetings of both government and non-government organisations.  
- Community members met to plan the project. The CEO believes the capacity of the community to engage with government is increasing.  
- The centre is used every day and maintained in good working order. |
| Billiluna | Install fuel bowsers to strengthen community economy - $155,000 DIMIA – FFP | June 2005  | DoTaRS and OIPC | - The fuel bowsers are not yet installed due to wet season. Negotiations are underway between the community and the provider regarding the installation.  
- The community has organised for Opal fuel to be delivered with the diesel.  
- Work is regularly attended by CDEP participants and all machinery and vehicles are locked up at night.  
- The community is already undertaking their obligations. Community awareness of environmental health issues has improved and a pest eradication program is in operation and rubbish is being disposed of in the community. |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Project Description</th>
<th>Start Date</th>
<th>Funding Agency</th>
<th>Comments</th>
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</table>
| Billiluna  | Improve airstrip lighting - $33,013 DIMIA – FFP  | June 2005  | DoTaRS and OIPC | - The lights have been installed and since their installation there have been no planes that are unable to land due to the condition of the airstrip.  
- The airstrip is being maintained regularly through the CDEP program and a community member has undertaken CASA approved training.  
- The clinic has been implementing the following programs: a mother’s cooking group, a school nutrition program and a kids camp.  
- HACC staff report any health problems amongst the elderly to the clinic nurse. The clinic nurse has stated that there appears to be a reduction in health and nutrition problems in younger people however slower progress for older people. |
| Ringer Soak | Youth equipment and youth activities - $3,000 DoTaRS | March 2005 | DoTaRS         | - Approximately $1,300 has been expended to date to purchase sporting equipment.  
- It is anticipated that the balance of the funds will be expended shortly.  
- Approximately 30-40 young people participated in the activities. Some of the equipment is still used by the young people. The basketball court is used almost every night. |
| Ringer Soak | Community maintenance equipment – $6,973 DoTaRS  | June 2005  | DoTaRS         | - Funding has been provided to purchase a heavy duty lawn mower and two brush cutters.  
- Purchased equipment is used regularly by approximately 30 CDEP and non-CDEP community members to cut and clear grassed areas around the community, create fire breaks and improve the overall appearance of the community.  
- Safety equipment such as vests, visors and helmets has also been purchased and safety training given to all users of the equipment.  
- The equipment is stored and maintained correctly. |
4.4 Whether the proposed commitments and undertakings are likely to achieve the agreed objectives and priorities

After examination of the eleven signed SRAs, which are single issue SRAs, the consultant is of the opinion that the proposed commitments and undertakings in these SRAs are sound in terms of placing the communities in a position to achieve the agreed objectives and priorities. The objectives have been set at realistically achievable levels for the undertakings prescribed in the each of the eleven SRAs.

The consultant notes however that in the SRAs, undertakings for government are discrete, and that a number of SRAs aim to stimulate on-going activities in the communities (such as SRAs for the provision of youth equipment and youth activities).

Whilst not the subject of an SRA, a community stakeholder indicated as an example that temporary funding for a youth worker in Balgo was provided by the State Government at one stage, however when the funding was discontinued, gains achieved by the youth worker could not be sustained. It is acknowledged that government intended the youth worker funding to be an interim measure, and it was followed up by a number of support mechanisms, such as the establishment of the permanent police presence, a child protection worker, and appointment of recreation officers by Garnduwa.

The consultant suggests that on-going support mechanisms be considered in future SRAs to ensure that gains achieved by the SRAs can be sustained.

4.5 Other Interim outcomes achieved

The trial has facilitated discussion between the four communities on matters of mutual interest within the region. This facilitates the identification of strategies to address problems/matters from a regional approach. A number of government stakeholders have also observed an improved level of input and ownership by communities in the management of affairs in the trial site.

Interim outcomes achieved to date include the following:

- The communities held a ‘Grog and Justice Summit’ in September 2004, looking to address alcohol-related issues. The summit assisted in determining the priorities for each community and in informing future directions. An action plan to implement actions identified in the summit, and a separate Grog and Justice Action Plan for Halls Creek were subsequently developed. Actions progressed to date include:
  - a cross community sporting program;
  - a functioning Community Watch (community wardens);
  - general beautification of communities;
  - more active inclusion of communities in various existing initiatives, e.g. Best Start
  - a well functioning Halls Creek Action Group; and
  - discussions between DIA and the Kimberley Land Council about future arrangements for some of the Aboriginal Lands Trust properties in the site.

- Through ‘Fixing Houses for Better Health’, the community-identified priority of housing progressing through a program of audit and emergency repairs
and developing a mobile regional maintenance team. Through Fixing Stores for Better Health, infrastructure upgrades are scheduled to take place in 2006 and recommendations regarding regional governance of stores have been developed. The Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing is also developing a nutrition program for the area.

- DoTaRS sponsored schools visit to Canberra and attendances by women from East Kimberley communities at leadership forums (including the first National Indigenous Women’s Conference in Sydney and the COAG Women’s gathering and leadership development course in Alice Springs and recently in Canberra).

- A youth summit for the communities is currently being planned for 2006. A number of other youth initiatives have been identified for support in the interim: Yiriman (for country & culture), Garnduwa (for recreation) and Palalyatju Marpapan (for health and youth workers).

- Governance training is being delivered by the Office for the Registrar of Aboriginal Corporations (ORAC) in the trial site, designed to build capacity to understand and manage the responsibilities and requirements of Aboriginal corporations.

- DoTaRS is engaging a consultant to assist DoTaRS staff in communicating more effectively with the trial communities and other government and non-government organisations active in the region. A plan and tools will be developed for communicating current trial work, any planned activities, the findings of the Munjurla Scoping Study, and the content of the government Joint Action Plan.

- A concept workshop involving Department of Housing and Works, DoTaRS, DIA, FaCSIA, DEWR, Shire of Halls Creek and community representatives was held in February 2006 to progress the establishment of a Tjurabalan Regional Housing Association. The Association aims to target long standing issues with housing management and maintenance in the region.
5 Lessons learnt

Some lessons learnt identified from the consultation and research for this evaluation are discussed in Sections 5.1 to 5.4. Three key themes run through these lessons. These themes are:

- Adequate planning to enable all parties involved to agree on approach and expectations for the trial from the outset;
- Building of relationships between government agencies and communities; and
- Capacity building of communities.

Another key theme is the importance of good record keeping to readily enable monitoring of ‘lessons learnt’. It is suggested that record keeping procedures in the trial are reviewed, particularly as good record keeping can mitigate the negative impact of staff turnover on trial progress.

5.1 Are the mechanisms established to improve coordination adequate, where are the gaps, what could be further improved

The recently developed trial site 100 Day Plan (refer to Sections 2.2 and 3.1.5) represents a key mechanism to facilitate a coordinated approach by government.

The effectiveness of this mechanism may be enhanced by the following:

- Determining timeframes for completion of all priorities identified within the plan (a number of the secondary priorities do not have timeframes for completion).
- Incorporating local government as a tier of government within the plan (the copy provided to the consultant only lists Australian and state governments in its allocation of responsibilities).
- Establishing a monitoring and corrective action process to ensure agreed priorities and associated actions are progressed and completed within the agreed timeframe.
- Developing protocols to improve communication between different government agencies. In particular, articulating to all government agencies that the Place Management Team needs to be informed/appraised of agencies/departments’ actions in the trial site.

For example, at Billiluna, a safety audit conducted by a Worksafe Officer declared a number of power tools to be unsafe (and cut the equipment’s power cable in order to make them inoperable). This resulted in the community being unable to continue its repairs and maintenance activities undertaken pursuant to the CDEP program. In instances such as this, a ‘whole of government’ approach should provide a communication channel to enable the Worksafe and/or CDEP Manager to notify the Place Management Team of the consequences of making the equipment inoperable. The Place Management Team would then have the opportunity to initiate a solution to facilitate the community obtaining temporary power equipment (e.g. borrow or rent) to continue with community repairs and maintenance activities.
Feedback from a combination of stakeholders from communities and state and Australian governments have also identified the following (discussed in Sections 5.1.1 to 5.1.2) as key success factors to improve coordination of service delivery to the East Kimberley COAG trial site.

5.1.1 Regional presence is important for successful engagement with communities

The majority of community, Australian Government and WA Government stakeholders consulted have agreed that locating the Place Management Team in Halls Creek has been a significant factor in progressing a more coordinated approach in the trial site.

The geographical remoteness of the East Kimberley COAG trial site has been recognised as a significant challenge in servicing the region. A lesson learnt during the development of the East Kimberley COAG trial is that managing the trial with Canberra and Perth based staff was not sufficiently effective in building a relationship with the communities, a task which was subsequently facilitated by establishing staff presence based in the region.

The Place Management Team’s roles generally include

- Facilitating effective communication between the community and governments, including the development, maintenance and enhancement of relevant networks and linkages (it is expected that the DoTaRS Community Initiatives Coordinators are primarily responsible for liaison with Australian Government agencies and the DIA Place Manager is primarily responsible for liaison with WA Government agencies);
- Supporting the Regional Reference Group by providing secretariat services (facilitating community agenda setting, recording meetings and communicating discussions and decisions to all stakeholders);
- Assisting in the implementation of new and existing projects through brokering opportunities across sectors and fostering coordination between government agencies (again, team members are primarily responsible for liaison with agencies from their respective level of government);
- Providing advice to the relevant lead agency about Indigenous issues and services in the region to ensure the particular needs of the communities within the East Kimberley region are taken into account in government planning and policy making; and
- Working with Indigenous people and communities, government and non-government agencies to facilitate community-based capacity building and regional development activities, support and strengthen local governance arrangements and be able to apply what they have learnt to future approaches both at the community level and across the three levels of government.

5.1.2 Involvement of non-government organisations

A number of non-government organisations (NGOs) are also key agencies providing services to the communities (in some cases providing them on behalf of government agencies). Feedback from certain NGOs indicates they were not actively included at the commencement of the trial, because there was not a clear understanding of their roles and potential contributions.
A number of community, NGO and government stakeholders have since expressed a view that it may have been of benefit to involve NGOs during the planning phase of establishing and implementing the ‘whole of government’ approach within COAG trial areas.

A number of comments received from NGO stakeholders indicated that they have not been adequately consulted in relation to the COAG process. They consider that the “roles, scope and function of the COAG and ICC process” should be clarified so they can “understand where they fit into and participate in the system”.

There are practical difficulties in achieving this, as COAG is a general framework for all activities in the site, rather than a specific and discrete program. A chart or diagram illustrating roles and relationships may assist in this regard.

5.2 What is new or better in the trial that has resulted in a new way of working together that we can now apply in the way we do business in other areas

Provided below is an overview of key success factors that could apply in other contexts.

5.2.1 Clear planning which enables identification and monitoring of progress

A success factor is the development of a clear planning process which enables the identification of activities that each relevant agency (across all three tiers of government) is responsible for and the time frame within which the activities are expected to take place. This enables:

- a more coordinated approach between activities of different agencies;
- the identification of possible synergies from coordinated service delivery; and
- ready monitoring of progress according to the plan.

The consultant notes that the joint planning process (the 100 Day Plan and the Ringer Soak Community Plan) is a recent initiative and development of this process is still continuing. In developing the plan, it is important to ensure that a manageable number of priority areas are identified for action in the short term. Given limitations in resources available to address a range of issues, outcomes can be maximised by identifying principal issues of focus and prioritising resources towards those areas.

It is also considered important that the process by which government and communities interact/make decisions is clearly identified. This facilitates the relevance/effectiveness of any planning document developed.

5.2.2 Building relationships between governments and communities

Developing solid relationships between governments and communities is crucial for the success of the trial. The importance of good relationships is particularly pronounced in Aboriginal communities.

The establishment of, and provision of secretarial support to, the Regional Reference Group furthers the development of partnership/relationship building between governments and the communities. The establishment of a Place Management Team based in Halls Creek has also been an effective mechanism to facilitate the relationship building.
Fundamental to relationship building is, as submitted by a community stakeholder, “government people spending more time understanding/getting to know the community and its people”. Stakeholders from another community also indicated that field visits by staff from a number of agencies such as Kununurra ICC, FaCS, DoTaRS, and the Department of Housing and Works were well received by the community. They appreciated the fact that government staff were spending time to get to know their clients. Investing sufficient time to get to know the communities is identified to be a key factor underpinning the success of building government-community relationships.

5.2.3 Building on existing structures and models

Consultation with NGO and community stakeholders indicates that it is important for government to identify existing structures and forums which are already operating with some success in the region (for example the Kimberley Land Council and the Kimberley Aboriginal Health Planning Forum) to enhance coordination.

5.3 Whether there have been any (good or bad) unintended consequences, outcomes or changes.

5.3.1 Appropriate selection, capacity building and support is required for community consultation agents

An initiative developed during the trial which did not achieve sustainability was the appointment of community consultation agents. Two representatives were selected from each community to form the conduit through which government consulted with the community.

Feedback from community stakeholders indicates that an effective selection process is required (one which has community support) together with additional capacity building and support (to equip and motivate selected individuals for the role) if the initiative is to be sustainable.

The identification and selection of appropriate individuals is a key factor. If the individual appointed already has a number of responsibilities in the community, the time and effort they can devote to the community consultation agent role is reduced. It is also important that the individual's representative status is 'approved' by senior members of the community, in order for the community consultation agent role to be effective.

5.4 Suggestions for any other changes that could be made to improve the work of the trials.

Following are some suggestions for achieving the full objectives of the trial.

5.4.1 Agree from the outset expectations and how success is to be measured

It is important for key stakeholders to agree from the outset their expectations of the trial, and how success is to be measured. This may include identifying key priorities and projects, as well as acknowledging the need to be responsive as critical situations arise. This agreement can then ensure that activities and initiatives are aligned with the fundamentals of what the trial aims to achieve, and enable ready monitoring of progress.
It is acknowledged that community capacity is likely to improve over time. Given this, the expectations may also change over the period of the trial and will accordingly need to be reflected in the measures of success.

### 5.4.2 Further develop key planning documents

Having reviewed the Munjurla Scoping Study, Joint Action Plan and 100 Day Plan, the consultant considers that the current planning framework can be enhanced by ensuring the following are done for both the 100 Day Plan and the Joint Action Plan:

- Reaffirm that the priorities listed are consistent with those identified at the community level;
- Identify across all three tiers of government and NGOs those entities which can contribute to progressing the agreed priorities;
- Comprehensively identify specific actions that the respective organisations will undertake together with identifying the responsible person from each organisation;
- Allocate a timeframe for each of the specified actions to be completed; and
- Involve the Place Management Team in facilitating the implementation of plans and reporting on progress at:
  - the Regional Reference Group;
  - the Commonwealth heads group meeting (relevant forum for Australian Government agencies); and
  - the Human Services regional managers meeting (relevant forum for State Government agencies).

It is acknowledged that the Joint Action Plan has a longer (5-10 year) timeframe and more ambitious scope, meaning that identification of specific actions, timelines and responsibilities is more difficult. The shorter, more detailed 100 Day Plan has adopted a number of these suggestions already, which has greatly improved the overall planning framework.

### 5.4.3 Develop internal capacity within the communities

Key to the trial’s success is the development of internal capacity within the communities. Improved capacity in the communities can:

- enable communities to gain a greater understanding of the COAG trial site initiative and the ‘new arrangements in Indigenous affairs’ and therefore have improved capacity to engage with government;
- facilitate improved governance of the communities; and
- enable communities to collectively prioritise their needs as a region.

The consultant notes that strategies are being developed to facilitate this. The ORAC governance training, for example, has been developed and scheduled for delivery in 2006.

The consultant also notes that DoTaRS has a leadership program, for women in the East Kimberley COAG region, which facilitated some community women’s attendance at three different leadership conferences and programs:
• COAG Women’s Gathering - Alice Springs, May 2004 (four women attended);

• National Indigenous Women’s Leadership Conference - Sydney, June 2005. (16 women attended representing all four communities); and

• COAG women’s leadership program - Canberra, November 2005 (Seven women attended representing all four communities).

The level of engagement at each conference varied. The feedback on outcomes from the conference is informal, resulting from personal conversations with the women and feedback from the community CEOs. Some key points are:

• The content of each conference varied, but a common theme was how to set and achieve goals and engage the community.

• The women who attended each event provided feedback that the networking opportunities were particularly beneficial. The participants found it useful to talk to other women from other states and territories. The knowledge that other people are experiencing the same problems was reassuring for all women and the opportunity to hear about how other people are dealing with certain problems was very useful.

• Following the leadership program in Canberra, two of the women involved returned to their community and commenced discussions on options for re-establishing a child care centre.

• Following the Women's conference in Sydney, some participants became more involved in the COAG trial reference group and other community-only COAG trial meetings.

Below are a number of key factors that could enhance the effectiveness of capacity building for the region:

• All capacity building should be tailored to individual community needs and desires (for example, governance training for Balgo can be linked into the re-establishment of a representative structure in the community).

• Capacity building should allow communities to train other communities (for example, youth activities training proposed by Garnduwa involves more than developing the trainees to coordinate the activities but to also deliver training within their community and other nearby communities. While the particular training in Garnduwa has not taken place, the concept of utilising community trainers to deliver training courses to nearby communities has achieved success in other locations such as the ‘Regional Building Project Training Model’ in the Northern Territory).

• Capacity building should take a regional focus. Once an individual community’s needs are identified and prioritised, they can be placed into a regional plan for capacity building to achieve economies of scale and develop a regional skills profile (for example, CDEP training may be delivered to a cross-communities group on a more consistent basis).

• Mentoring and on-going support following the delivery of training is important to reinforce the learning by community members. Consideration should be given to engaging leaders from communities with demonstrated internal capacity (e.g. the Ngaanyatjarra Region) to mentor leaders in the East Kimberley COAG trial communities.

• ‘Cultural fit’ and local relevance – it is important that the training material be developed in a form which is culturally appropriate, and the application of the material to the local environment be apparent (for example, it has been
suggested that a key success factor associated with the New South Wales Aboriginal Housing Office’s accredited training course in housing management was that the course was “designed by Aboriginal people for Aboriginal people” and the “training was delivered by Aboriginal people”, as opposed to the utility of generic mainstream community housing management training material).

- Consideration should be given in delivering the training in the trainees’ native language through interpreters to facilitate greater learning opportunities, and facilitate the involvement of senior members in the community who may be less fluent in English.

Community Initiatives Coordinators and Place Managers also have a key role in developing capacity, as does the recent engagement of a communications consultant in the region.

A number of other important factors can be found in Appendix D, *Lessons Learnt to be Applied throughout ORAC’s Remote Corporate Governance Training Program*.

A number of factors in the development of Indigenous internal capacity identified in international research are provided in Appendix E.

A suggestion from an Australian Government stakeholder which might be considered further is the involvement of community development experts experienced in international aid work to assist in the capacity building process for Aboriginal communities.

It is the consultant’s view that the cornerstone for ensuring the priorities of the trial remain relevant (and actions designed to address the priorities are sustainable) is the development of effective capacity within the communities through training and support (refer to Section 5.4.3)

**5.4.4 Determination of priorities should be undertaken with the close involvement of the communities**

Part of the COAG trial site approach includes ‘building the capacity of people in communities to manage their own affairs’. When communities are actively involved and develop a sense of ownership, this enhances the sustainability of outcomes. It follows that once the communities have developed sufficient capacity, they should be afforded the opportunity to:

- determine the priority areas relevant for the communities;

- undertake a planning process to identify how government, NGOs, the private sector and the community can progress the identified objectives/goals. The plan should clearly identify the timeline and entity (whether it be government, NGO, private sector or the community) which is responsible for the agreed action;

- provide input into the allocation of funding to the agreed actions designed to progress the objectives/goals identified in the plan (i.e. joint decision making between communities and government).

It is suggested that the total of all funding provided by government into the trial site communities be identified with the view that the communities will, in time, have input into determining the allocation of funds across the various priority areas.

A component of the planning exercise will be the identification of those activities which the community has the desire to be involved. There will, conversely, be services or activities which are best undertaken by government and do not require the communities to undertake planning or service delivery obligations. A component
of the priority identification exercise will accordingly be for government and the communities to collectively negotiate those activities or services which should be delivered by government.

5.4.5 Agree on the priority of the trial site across the three tiers of government

It was submitted to the consultant that the priority afforded to the trial site initially differed between Australian and state government agencies (refer to Section 3.1.9). To optimise the outcomes which can be achieved through the trial, it is important that all three tiers of government agree on the priority of the trial site from the outset.

5.4.6 Streamline the number of contracts between governments and communities

Organisations providing services to Indigenous communities often enter into multiple funding agreements with Commonwealth, state and local governments which may require a variety of different banking, performance monitoring and financial acquittal requirements. Streamlining these reporting requirements would reduce the burden on these organisations, freeing up resources currently devoted to administration, and redirect them to enhanced service delivery.

In July 2005, OIPC commissioned a study into the nature and extent of any undue administrative burden in the reporting and other requirements in contracts and funding agreements between governments and service providing organisations. The report of this ‘red tape’ evaluation will highlight a number of areas for further consideration to reduce any undue administrative burden and maximise the resources allocated to service delivery.

There would also be benefit at the commencement of future initiatives in mapping government agencies and their services to communities/organisations. This could provide a useful reference document so that all relevant government agencies and departments are included within the strategies and actions developed to achieve a fully coordinated response. It should also help streamline the variety of agreements required.
6 Next steps

The majority of government stakeholders consulted are of the opinion that the framework of objectives, priorities and commitments for the East Kimberley COAG trial are sound, and expressed in-principle support for the approach taken. This chapter provides commentary on suggested priorities that should form the focus of the trial in the future.

6.1 Progress of the trial to date and identification of barriers, if relevant

In determining whether the trial progressed as far as hoped, stakeholder responses were considered and a review of planning and outcome documents was undertaken.

The general view of a number of community as well as WA and Australian government stakeholders is that for a period of time there was not a clear understanding of how the concept of a ‘whole of government’ approach was to be operationalised within the trial site. A process was undertaken early in the trial (Munjurla Scoping Study) to determine priorities, develop a strategic framework to progress the actioning of the priorities and obtain baseline data which would assist in monitoring progress over a medium to long term horizon. A Joint Action Plan was developed to translate this strategic framework into actions to be undertaken. However, the Joint Action Plan also covered a medium to long term horizon and was difficult to operationalise. This was recently supplemented by a 100 Day Plan with clearly identified actions and timeframes.

The breadth and extent of the social and economic disadvantage of the communities within the region contributed to the difficulty in developing an operational action plan which could be adequately progressed with the available resources. A number of other barriers also existed, for example (these are discussed in further detail in Sections 3.1.9 and 3.2.6):

- Limited capacity of communities to effectively engage with government;
- Day to day crises in the communities; and
- Staff turnover within government, communities’ administration and communities’ leadership.

Another barrier, identified at the trial’s inception, is governments predominantly operating through portfolio-specific agencies and departments. This means that instances will arise where one particular agency or department can struggle to effectively deal with matters which may cross a number of portfolios.

To maximise the benefits of the East Kimberley trial, it is important for all agencies/departments to apply a ‘solution’ approach to the priorities and challenges of the communities within the trial site. This in certain instances requires the agency to deliver services/approaches which are not within existing procedures/programs of that agency, but nevertheless have a nexus to the agency portfolio. The challenge of this approach is that it requires officers of that agency to potentially work outside existing procedures/programs.

Effort has been made by government agencies to work outside existing procedures with an aim for better results. While the efforts have not been in all instances, it is acknowledged that difficulties were encountered in trying to adopt a ‘solution’ approach and in some cases this has been done successfully.
For example, a sporting program for the region had a budget shortfall, and contributions were solicited from a number of agencies. A difficulty faced was that the program did not fit within the funding guidelines for existing programs. Furthermore, different agencies had different application and reporting requirements, duplicating the workload required. To the agencies’ credit, this issue has been recently resolved by a DoTaRS Community Initiatives Coordinator and OIPC who acted as brokers to facilitate a ‘solution’ approach.

For this approach to be responsive and timely it requires delegation of authority from DoTaRS and DIA to enable the respective Place Management Team officer to formulate an appropriate response and liaise with other agencies as a solution broker. It also requires flexibility from other government agencies in the way they conduct their business to accommodate the solutions proposed.

6.2 Whether there would be benefit in revisiting the agreed objectives, priorities or commitments for the trial

The majority of government stakeholders consulted are of the opinion that the framework of objectives, priorities and commitments for the East Kimberley COAG trial are sound, and expressed in-principle support for the approach taken.

Given that a number of community and NGO stakeholders have expressed limited understanding or confusion about the COAG framework, it is important that resources be devoted to clarify for them the objectives, priorities and parties involved in COAG. The recent appointment of a communications consultant by DoTaRS should assist in the development of a communication strategy and culturally appropriate information tools and documents for this purpose. It is anticipated that this process will facilitate the verification by community stakeholders of the needs and priorities as identified in the Munjurla Scoping Study, the Joint Action Plan and the Regional Reference Group, which can inform the lead agencies regarding the currency and relevance of the trial’s objectives, priorities and commitments.

6.3 Whether the trial will be ready for evaluation in 2007-08 and whether agreements have measurable and achievable objectives and priorities

The consultant is of the opinion that there is merit in an evaluation occurring of the trial site in 2007-08. It is acknowledged however that sustainable improvement of the lives of Indigenous Australians in the East Kimberley COAG trial site requires a long term planning perspective that extends beyond 2007-08.

The evaluation in 2007-08 would accordingly focus on process indicators and intermediate term outcome indicators (refer to further comments in Section 6.4), which are better placed to measure the changes that the trial has made by 2007-08 than the headline indicators. This is because the headline indicators require a longer horizon for changes to be measurable. Further comments are provided in Section 6.4 on issues that should be examined in the 2008 evaluation.

The consultant notes that the SRAs have developed over time and have improved in the inclusion of measurable and achievable objectives and priorities.
6.4 Suggestions for issues that should be examined in the 2008 evaluation

In terms of baseline data collection, the Munjurla Scoping Study collected data that contributes to the baseline data set. It is understood DIA is currently in the process of compiling a socio-economic profile of the communities using this and other data sets.

The headline indicators in the ‘Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage’ framework form a useful component with which to assess the progress on addressing the fundamental issues (such as health, education, low economic sustainability etc) affecting the communities over time, beyond 2008.

The consultant notes that the headline indicators are unlikely to reflect outcomes from the COAG trial at this point; as a longer horizon is likely to be required before changes in these areas can be readily observable. The consultant therefore supports the use of a combination of process indicators and intermediate term outcome indicators in addition to the headline indicators, to measure the changes that the trial has made on the coordination between governments and the level of partnership between governments and the communities.

Process indicators which the consultant suggests should be examined in 2007-08 include:

- Level of internal capacity (represented by extent of community involvement in planning, priority setting, allocation of resources to priority areas, effectiveness of bargaining outcomes etc) in communities compared to that at the beginning of the trial;
- Extent to which an effective representation model operates;
- Level to which all three tiers of government are involved in joint planning for the trial site;
- Occurrences where government brokers a solution for a problem which did not neatly ‘fit’ within the responsibility of any one agency/department; and
- Status of a Regional Partnership Agreement for the region.

Given the frequency in the appointment of external administrators to communities in the region, there is also benefit in the measurement of the communities sustainability through qualitative intermediate term outcome indicators such as the presence/absence of negative events (for example, Aboriginal Corporations being placed under administration). Other intermediate term outcome indicators which can be considered include:

- Extent of overcrowding in households;
- Utility of dental services in the region; and
- Attendance rates for the schools in the region.

The consultant also suggests that it would be of benefit to consult with the communities to obtain input into the suite of indicators adopted to assess improvements the trial has made on their lives.
## Appendix A – List of organisations consulted

### East Kimberley COAG Trial Formative Evaluation – Stakeholders Consulted

#### Australian Government

**DoTaRS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Position</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Michael Taylor</td>
<td>Secretary</td>
<td>National Office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daniel Owen</td>
<td>General Manager, Regional Services</td>
<td>National Office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catharina van Moort</td>
<td>Director (A/g) Indigenous Trial and Policy</td>
<td>National Office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Love</td>
<td>Manager, Perth Regional Office</td>
<td>Perth Office</td>
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**DoTaRS Halls Creek Community Initiatives Coordinators**

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<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Position</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Carrie Hannington</td>
<td>EK COAG Trial Community Initiatives Coordinator</td>
<td>Halls Creek</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mark Sewell</td>
<td>EK COAG Trial Community Initiatives Coordinator</td>
<td>Halls Creek</td>
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**OIPC**

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<tr>
<td>Gary Powell</td>
<td>Partnerships and Shared Responsibility Group</td>
<td>Canberra</td>
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<tr>
<td>Alistair Sherwin</td>
<td>ICC Manager Kununurra</td>
<td>Kununurra</td>
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<tr>
<td>Meegan Schell</td>
<td>ICC Kununurra</td>
<td>Kununurra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laura Beacroft</td>
<td>Head of the Office of the Registrar of Aboriginal Corporations (ORAC)</td>
<td>Canberra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kerrie Nelson, Joe Mastrolembo, Janet Millar</td>
<td>Managers Office of the Registrar of Aboriginal Corporations (ORAC)</td>
<td>Canberra</td>
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**Other Australian Government Agencies**

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<tr>
<td>Commonwealth Heads Group</td>
<td>State Managers of Commonwealth Agencies</td>
<td>Perth</td>
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<tr>
<td>Allan Padgett</td>
<td>Indigenous Land Corporation</td>
<td>Perth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colin Nagle</td>
<td>Department of Employment and Workplace Relations</td>
<td>Perth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susan Finnigan</td>
<td>Department of Family and Community Services</td>
<td>Perth</td>
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<tr>
<td>Michael O’Kane</td>
<td>Department of Health and Ageing</td>
<td>Perth</td>
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<tr>
<td>Athol Prior</td>
<td>National Native Title Tribunal</td>
<td>Perth</td>
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<tr>
<td>Geoff Bowley</td>
<td>Department of Education Science and Training</td>
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### WA Government

*Department of Indigenous Affairs*

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<tr>
<th>Name</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mary Cowley</td>
<td>Principal Indigenous Advisor</td>
<td>Perth</td>
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<tr>
<td>Brenda Garstone</td>
<td>Place Manager</td>
<td>Perth/Halls Creek</td>
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<tr>
<td>Charles Vinci</td>
<td>Director Business and Strategic Services</td>
<td>Perth</td>
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*Department of Housing and Works*

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<tr>
<td>David Carpenter</td>
<td>Manager, CWESMP, Aboriginal Housing and Infrastructure Community Construction and Essential SVC’s</td>
<td>Perth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Hoskins</td>
<td>Manager Special Projects (Aboriginal Housing)</td>
<td>Perth</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Other contacts*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Location/Address</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Murray Jones</td>
<td></td>
<td>Department of Mental Health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>PO Box 1348 Kununurra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George Hamilton</td>
<td></td>
<td>Sobering up Shelter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>PO Box 162 Kununurra</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Halls Creek Shire Council*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Location/Address</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Peter McConnell</td>
<td>CEO</td>
<td>PO Box 21 Halls Creek 6770</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patricia MacKay</td>
<td>President</td>
<td>PO Box Halls Creek 6770</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lynette ‘Jim’ Craig</td>
<td>Past Shire President</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liz Kelly</td>
<td>Team Leader</td>
<td>PO Box Halls Creek 6770</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David Skeen</td>
<td>Shire Councilor</td>
<td>PO Box Halls Creek 6770</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Community Organisations

### Balgo (Wirrimanu)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Location /Address</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Noel Mason</td>
<td>CEO</td>
<td>PMB 7 Via Halls Creek 6770</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rod Carpio</td>
<td>Community Development officer</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father Matt Digges</td>
<td>Catholic Organisation</td>
<td>PMB 7 Via Halls Creek 6770</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christopher Cresp</td>
<td>Coordinator</td>
<td>Palyalatyu Maparnpa Health Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sergeant Lindsay Greatorex</td>
<td>Balgo Police</td>
<td>PMB 7 Via Halls Creek 6770</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ian Swan</td>
<td>Administrator</td>
<td>PMB 7 Via Halls Creek 6770</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jane Thomas</td>
<td>Child Protection Officer</td>
<td>PMB 7 Via Halls Creek 6770</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brother Bernie Cooper</td>
<td>Principal, Lumpa School</td>
<td>PMB 7 Via Halls Creek 6770</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: At the time of the Review, Wirrimanu Aboriginal Corporation was under administration, so there is no current community council, and no Chair

### Mulan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Location /Address</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mervyn Maher</td>
<td>CEO</td>
<td>PMB 14 Via Halls Creek 6770</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shirley Brown</td>
<td>Chair Person</td>
<td>PMB 14 Via Halls Creek 6770</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peter Yoomarie</td>
<td>Council Member</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anna Johns</td>
<td>Council Member</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doreen Boxer</td>
<td>Council Member</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrew Foskett</td>
<td>CDEP Coordinator</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elizabeth Lulu</td>
<td>Council Member</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Billiluna (Mindbungu)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Location /Address</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>John Reudavey</td>
<td>CEO</td>
<td>PMB 13 Via Halls Creek 6770</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary Darkie</td>
<td>Council Member</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tony Chungulla</td>
<td>Council Member</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Ringer Soak (Kundat Djaru)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Location /Address</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chris Wilkin</td>
<td>CEO</td>
<td>PMB 301 Via Halls Creek 6770</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tomato Gordon</td>
<td>Ringer Soak Community</td>
<td>PMB 301 Via Halls Creek 6770</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gordon Itbeeari</td>
<td>Ringer Soak Community</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Non Government Organisations**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Location /Address</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sandra Brogden</td>
<td>Catholic Education Office</td>
<td>Broome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan Lewis</td>
<td>Kimberley Aboriginal Health Planning Forum</td>
<td>Broome</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Evaluation of the Western Australian COAG Trial Site – East Kimberley

General Discussion Paper

24 November 2005
1. Introduction

In conjunction with the Western Australian Government, the Office of Indigenous Policy Coordination has engaged Quantum Consulting Australia to conduct a formative evaluation of the WA Council of Australian Governments (“COAG”) Indigenous trial site in the East Kimberley.

The primary focus of this evaluation is on what’s working well and what could be improved. It is anticipated that at this stage of the trial, most of the lessons learned will relate to the processes of the trial, and capturing community and government perceptions of these processes will be an important part of the evaluation.

On-site community consultation and telephone consultation will be conducted with key stakeholders.

In order to maximise the input of the relevant stakeholders, this Discussion Paper has been prepared to:

- Facilitate stakeholders’ understanding of the purpose of the review;
- Facilitate stakeholders comments in preparation for meetings with the consultants conducting the review; and
- Enable stakeholders to provide written submissions/comments to the consultant.

Your participation in the Evaluation of the WA COAG Trial Site will assist in enhancing the Trials.

Should you wish to clarify or further discuss any aspect of the Evaluation, the relevant contact for the consultants are as follows.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Consultant</th>
<th>Contact number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Simon Hood</td>
<td>(08) 9325 3233</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alan Beattie</td>
<td>(08) 9256 4911</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2. **Background**

2.1 *Wider COAG Trial Context*

On 5 April 2002, COAG announced they would trial a new approach for working with Indigenous communities in up to ten regions. The aim of the trials is:

“To improve the way governments interact with each other and with communities to deliver more effective responses to the needs of Indigenous Australians….and apply the lessons learnt more broadly.”

COAG agreed a new approach was necessary as both outcomes and management processes in Indigenous policy and service delivery needed to be improved. The new approach was twofold:

- Governments must work together at all levels and across all departments and agencies; and
- Indigenous communities and governments must work in partnership and share responsibility for achieving outcomes and for building the capacity of people in communities to manage their own affairs.

To contribute to the framework of continuous learning on Indigenous Affairs, the Australian Government is looking to ensure that all the COAG trial sites are evaluated by independent evaluators. This will be a two stage process, with the first stage (in 2005) focused on learning from and developing the trials, and the second stage (in 2007/08) on a more comprehensive assessment of trial outcomes and achievements.

2.2 *The WA Trial Site*

The WA COAG Trial Site is situated in the East Kimberley region and encompasses the communities of Balgo, Billiluna, Mulan, Ringers Soak and Yagga Yagga.

The partners to the trial are the Australian Government (through the Dept of Transport and Regional Services and the Office of Indigenous Policy Coordination), the WA Government (through the Dept of Indigenous Affairs), the Halls Creek Shire Council and the Indigenous communities in the trial site.

The WA site is still developing, however trial partners have looked at a number of issues so far, including substance misuse, justice, housing, environmental health, regional stores and leadership.
3. **Evaluation Overview**

3.1 **Scope of the evaluation**

The primary focus of this evaluation is on what’s working well, and what could be improved.

The focus is not on identifying outcomes, though any interim evidence of outcomes should also be included.

The scope to be covered by the evaluation report is as follows:

- **Setting the scene** (the History): An overview of the regions, conditions and challenges at the start of the trial and significant events that have occurred;

- **Working together** (the process):
  - Extent of coordination between and within Governments;
  - Extent of partnership between the Government and community partners;

- **Interim Indigenous outcomes**: Identify any examples of improved service delivery arrangements and outcomes achieved so far; examine how outcomes are to be measured and whether baseline data is available;

- **Lessons learnt**: Identify best practice models and/or approaches to improve the way communities and Government agencies work together, which may potentially be applicable to other sites around Australia;

- **Next Steps**: Evaluate whether the trial has progressed as far as hoped, and if not identify critical barriers; evaluate whether the agreed objectives and priorities need revision, determine whether the Trial will be ready for evaluation in 2007-08 and suggest issues for examination in 2008.
3.2 **Key dates**

The key dates applicable to the Evaluation are provided below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Dates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Project commencement</td>
<td>31 October 05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Face to face on-site stakeholder consultation</td>
<td>1-2 December 05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus group to review initial findings</td>
<td>13 December 05 (tentative)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Draft Report</td>
<td>16 December 05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Report</td>
<td>23 December 05</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.3 **Stakeholders**

The stakeholder groups to be consulted during the Evaluation are as follows:

**Australian Government**
- Department of Transport and Regional Services National Office
- Department of Transport and Regional Services Perth Office
- Halls Creek Community Initiatives Coordinators
- Office of Indigenous Policy Coordination National Office
- Office of Indigenous Policy Coordination Perth Office
- Kununurra Indigenous Coordination Centre staff (including the ICC Manager)
- Commonwealth Heads Group Perth
- Office of the Registrar of Aboriginal Corporations

**WA Government**
- Department of Indigenous Affairs
- Up to three other WA government representatives

**Other Government Organisations**
- Halls Creek Shire Council
- Balgo Police

**Non Government Organisations**
- Catholic Education Office Perth
- Mercy Care Perth
- Kimberley Aboriginal Health Planning Forum (Head Office – Broome)
- Kimberley Land Council (Head Office - Derby)

**Community Organisations**
- Chairs and CEOs of the Aboriginal Corporations in Billiluna, Mulan, Ringer Soak and Balgo
- Palyalaḻju Maparnpa Health Committee Balgo
The consultants plan to meet with representatives from the organisations either face-to-face or via teleconference.

The consultants will be conducting on-site visits to the following locations on the following dates:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Dates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ringers Soak (Kundat Diaru)</td>
<td>1 December 05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Billiluna (Mindibungu)</td>
<td>1 December 05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balgo (Wirrimanu)</td>
<td>2 December 05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mulan</td>
<td>2 December 05</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.4 **Stakeholder Questions**

To facilitate the Evaluation, questions are provided overleaf which seek your response.

It is important to note that specific comments provided by individuals will be de-identified in the report. This is to ensure that all stakeholders have the opportunity to freely contribute their view on the current status of the East Kimberley COAG Trial.
4. **Key Questions**

Following is a list of questions which seeks to obtain your views on the East Kimberley COAG Trial Site’s progress.

### 4.1 Setting the scene

4.1.1 What do you think were the key challenges at the start of the Trial, in terms of how Government agencies worked together and with the Indigenous communities?

4.1.2 Can you provide us details of key dates, agreements, specific initiatives, governance and partnership agreements and/or other significant events, associated with the way Government and Indigenous communities work together, that your organisation is involved in?

### 4.2 Working together

**Extent of coordination between and within Governments;**

4.2.1 Do you think anything’s changed in the way Government agencies liaise with each other with regards to providing services to Indigenous Australians? How have things changed?

4.2.2 Are you aware of any specific mechanisms which aim to improve coordination between and within Governments?

If so, we’d be interested in more details about the mechanism(s), such as the following:

- Who are the organisations involved?
- What roles and responsibilities are assigned to each organisation? Are these well understood?
- What is the logic/rationale behind the mechanism/initiative?
- What are the goals and objectives, and how were they decided?
- Are there any joint decision mechanisms?
- Are there any strategies (as part of the mechanism) that aim to understand the needs of the communities?
- Are there any agreed resource allocation arrangements?

**Extent of partnership between the Government and community partners**

4.2.3 Do you think anything’s changed in the way Government agencies and Indigenous communities do business or work together since the Trial started? How have things changed?
4.2.4 How well do you think Shared Responsibility Agreement(s) was implemented?

Why do you think that the Agreement has/has not worked well?

- What responsibilities are assigned to each organisation? Are these responsibilities well understood?
- Have the Government agencies delivered on their commitments/undertakings?
- Has the Community delivered on its commitments/undertakings?

4.2.5 Are you aware of any other specific mechanisms which aim to build partnerships between the Government and community partners?

- Who are the organisations involved?
- What roles and responsibilities are assigned to each organisation? Are these well understood?
- How is the community involved under this mechanism?

4.2.6 Do you think the Trial is well-understood and supported by the broader Indigenous community? Please tell us why/why not.

4.2.7 Do you think the new Indigenous affairs arrangements (post-ATSIC) are well-understood and accepted by the broader Indigenous community? Please tell us why/why not.

4.3 Interim Indigenous Outcomes

4.3.1 What improvements or other changes have you observed since the trial began?

4.3.2 Are you aware of any interim outcomes being achieved from the Shared Responsibility Agreement(s)? Please provide further comments as to what was achieved from which of the Shared Responsibility Agreements.

4.3.3 Do you think the proposed commitments and undertakings in the Shared Responsibility Agreement(s) are likely to achieve the agreed objectives and priorities? Please tell us why/why not.

4.3.4 How are outcomes of the Trial measured (or if no measurement has taken place, how are outcomes intended to be measured in the future)?

4.3.5 Has baseline data been established as the starting point for measuring progress (over time)?

4.4 Lessons Learnt

4.4.1 Do you think the Trial’s working well? Why/why not?

4.4.2 Are you aware of any ‘best practice models’ which have been working well, and can potentially be applied in the way business is done in other areas? Please provide more details about the example(s).
4.4.3 Are you aware of any instances where things did not turn out the way they were intended to?
Please provide more details about the example(s).
   o What were the intended outcomes?
   o What were the actual outcomes?
   o Can you identify why things turned out the way they did?

4.4.4 If you have a chance to go back to the beginning of the Trial, is there anything you would do differently to improve the outcomes? Please tell us what you would change and why.

4.5 Next Steps

4.5.1 Do you think the agreed objectives, priorities or commitments for the Trial need revision?
Please provide details about what should be revised and why.

4.5.2 What would you change now in order to make the Trial work better?
Evaluation of the Western Australian COAG Trial Site – East Kimberley

Community Discussion Paper

24 November 2005

1. Introduction

Quantum Consulting Australia is conducting an evaluation of the WA Council of Australian Governments (“COAG”) Indigenous trial site in the East Kimberley. The focus of this evaluation is to find out what’s working well, and what could be improved. We are also interested in what’s changed in the way of doing business with the Government since the COAG Trial.

The evaluation report will include:

- **Setting the scene**: The history of the Trial
- **Working together**: The process of how Community and Government departments work together
- **Interim Indigenous outcomes**: What’s changed since the Trial and how do we monitor how things have changed over time
- **Lessons learnt**: What works well? What doesn’t?
- **Next Steps**: What is the best way forward and what should we look at in the next evaluation

2. Key Questions

A key objective is to improve the way things are done and your input can help. Listed below are questions that we will be discussing when we visit your community.

**Setting the scene**

- What do you think were the key challenges at the start of the Trial, in terms of how Government agencies worked together and with the Indigenous communities?

**Working Together**

- Do you think anything’s changed in the way Government agencies and Indigenous communities do business or work together since the Trial started? How have things changed?
- Do you think the Trial’s working well? Why/why not?
- Do you think people in your community understand what the Trial is about? Do you think they support it?
• Do you think people in your community understand the new Indigenous affairs arrangements (post-ATSIC)? Do you think they support the arrangements?
• Do you think the Shared Responsibility Agreement(s) is working well? Why/why not? Did the Government and the community both deliver what they promised to do in the Agreement(s)?

Interim Indigenous Outcomes
• What improvements or other changes have you seen in your community since the trial began?

Lessons Learnt
• What do you think has been working well from the Trial?
• If you have a chance to go back to the beginning of the Trial, is there anything you would do differently to improve the outcomes?
• What would you change now in order to make the Trial work better?

If you have any questions about this evaluation, you are welcome to contact:

Simon Hood
Quantum Consulting Australia Pty Ltd
PO Box Y3499
PERTH WA 6832

Phone: (08) 9325 3233
Email: shood@quantumconsulting.net.au
Fax: (08) 9325 2311
### Appendix C – East Kimberley COAG trial detailed timeline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DATE</th>
<th>EVENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3 November 2000</td>
<td>COAG endorses an Indigenous affairs approach based on partnerships and shared responsibilities with indigenous communities, program flexibility and coordination between Government agencies, with a focus on local communities and outcomes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 April 2002</td>
<td>COAG announced up to 10 trial sites for the Whole of Governments approach to Indigenous affairs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23 September 2002</td>
<td>Ken Matthews (Secretary of DoTaRS) visited Perth to meet with Regional Commonwealth and State Government Agency Heads.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-22 October 2002</td>
<td>Sturt Creek bush meeting with Ken Matthews and Richard Curry –ICCT.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 2002</td>
<td>WA Government released <em>Action plan for addressing family violence and child abuse in Aboriginal Communities</em> in response to Gordon Inquiry. Implementation of this plan forms part of the WA Government’s contribution to the East Kimberley COAG trial site.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 March 2003</td>
<td>Australian and State Government meetings in Perth.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-26 March 2003</td>
<td>Workshop for regional agencies in Halls Creek.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 April 2003</td>
<td>Ken Matthews (Secretary, Department of Transport and Regional Services) &amp; Richard Curry (Director General, Department of Indigenous Affairs) attended Tjurabalan prescribed body corporate meeting in Billiluna. 90 traditional owners meet with the KLC &amp; ICCT/ATSIS – agreed for the communities in the region to participate in the COAG trial (subject to 5 conditions).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 2003</td>
<td>Commencement of Munjurla Scoping Study.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 June 2003</td>
<td>Lingiari Foundation began community consultations for Munjurla Scoping Study.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-20 June 2003</td>
<td>DoTaRS, ICCT, ATSIS, DIA visited the communities discussing the COAG trial, looking at community priorities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 June 2003</td>
<td>Peter Jebb started work as CIC in Halls Creek.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 July 2003</td>
<td><strong>Announcement of COAG WA site in Billiluna.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 August 2003</td>
<td>First management group (ATSIS, DoTaRS and DIA joint Secretariat) meeting held in Halls Creek.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-5 September 2003</td>
<td>First Interim Munjurla Reference Group meeting held in Halls Creek. (Note: this Group later on evolved into the Regional Reference Group after the completion of the Munjurla Study)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 2003</td>
<td>Balgo Local Response Group formed by WA Government to support community initiatives that address the needs of at-risk youth.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22 November 2003</td>
<td>Administrator appointed by the Registrar of Aboriginal Corporations to the Wirrimanu Aboriginal Corporation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-3 December 2003</td>
<td>Second Interim Munjurla Reference Group meeting held in Halls Creek.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 February 2004</td>
<td>Ken Matthews met with Richard Curry and other Commonwealth and State Government Agency Heads re the progress of the COAG WA trial to date.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23-27 February 2004</td>
<td>DoTaRS and DIA community visits, COAG WA trial site.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February/March 2004</td>
<td>First SRAs discussed/negotiated with Mulan, Billiluna, Balgo and Ringer Soak – youth projects, Mulan SRA signed soon after in May 2004 (first single issue SRAs in Australia).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 and 18 March 2004</td>
<td>Draft versions of Munjurla Scoping Study released to Government Agencies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 April 2004</td>
<td>Australian Government announced the abolition of ATSIS/ATSIC. Indigenous Coordination Centres to replace ATSIS Regional Offices (one</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Event</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-21 April 2004</td>
<td>Third Interim Munjurla Reference Group meeting held in Billiluna.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22 April 2004</td>
<td>CEOs of Community Councils advised of ATSIS’ Community in Crisis package, to be provided to the Tjurabalan region to allow for initiatives in housing and relating to the community stores.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 2004</td>
<td>East Kimberley COAG trial women attend Alice Springs COAG Women’s Gathering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 May 2004</td>
<td>First Shared Responsibility Agreement signed by Ken Matthews – providing $3000 towards the purchase of equipment to enable the Mulan Community to organise after-school activities for Mulan youth.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 April 2004</td>
<td>Final Munjurla Scoping Study completed and provided to ATSIS/DoTaRS/DIA.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 June 2004</td>
<td>COAG Meeting, item on agenda included progress of COAG trials and issues relating to abolition of ATSIC/ATSIS.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 July-7 July 2004</td>
<td>DoTaRS community visits, COAG WA trial site.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-21 July 2004</td>
<td>Fourth Interim Munjurla Reference Group meeting held in Ringers Soak.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 2004</td>
<td>Peter Jebb takes up position with DoTaRS out of Perth Office.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 September 2004</td>
<td>Grog and Justice Summit held in Mulan.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>early January 2005</td>
<td>Broker funding for enhanced environmental health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 2005</td>
<td>Two new DoTaRS staff recruited in Halls Creek (Mark Sewell and Carrie Hannington).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 2005</td>
<td>DoLGRD initiated municipal services meeting to improve coordination between the Shire and the communities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 2005</td>
<td>Site visit – Secretary.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March/April 2005</td>
<td>Batch of SRAs signed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 2005</td>
<td>Joint Action Plan circulated to agencies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 June 2005</td>
<td>Regional Reference Group Meeting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 2005</td>
<td>Multi-functional police facility constructed and staffed in Balgo as part of WA Government’s response to the Gordon Inquiry.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 2005</td>
<td>Development of 100 Day Plan began.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 2005</td>
<td>Schools visit to Canberra.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 2005</td>
<td>Chairs/CEOs meeting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 2005</td>
<td>COAG trial information session held in Halls Creek.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 October 2005</td>
<td>Interim Regional Reference Group Meeting (involving community representatives only, on request).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31 October 2005</td>
<td>Project commencement: Stage One Evaluation of the East Kimberley COAG trial site.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 2005</td>
<td>Production of Ringers Soak Community Plan</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix D – Lessons learnt to be applied throughout ORAC’s remote corporate governance training program

Lessons Learnt to be Applied Throughout ORAC’s Remote Corporate Governance Training Program

Office of Registrar of Aboriginal Corporations
Training & Publications Section
Kerrie Nelson, Updated November 2005

1. Before training, a situational analysis is required to capitalise on local knowledge and expertise and identify capacity development points.

2. Statistical information, evidence based information, and/or systemic issues with potential to affect delivery of training or training outcomes should be referred to ORAC for higher level strategic action.

3. Non accredited information sessions and introductory workshops are fundamental precursors to accredited training programs.

4. The importance of quality relationships between training team/participants to motivation and learning.

5. Effective trainers have corporate governance content depth, understand participative/experiential processes and activities, understand and apply VET sector best practice to planning, preparation, delivery, assessment and reporting. They have the capacity to bring cultural knowledge and sensitivity to their relationships with participants and the ability to establish a collaborative learning environment that integrates corporate governance with community governance. A willingness to learn from participants as well as teach is also considered an essential attitude.

6. Curriculum development and learning support materials need to be localised and focused on local corporate governance issues.

7. The community agent role is separate to training, but fundamental to its success.

8. Partnering with regional and/or state Registered Training Organisations and trainers assists to develop local capacity to undertake this work.

9. Translation of words into first language and the use of interpreters for “dialogue learning” enhances understanding and application.

10. Opportunities to compare and contrast traditional governance arrangements and law and Western corporate governance principles enables discussion about cultural match, mismatch, similarities and differences, and enhances motivation and learning.

11. The identification and use of local issues in established corporations enables application of learning, and enhances motivation and learning.

12. Training Key staff (CEOs, CFOs and senior administrators) is as necessary as for Boards and members.

13. New learning has the potential to create conflict as participants put knowledge into action. Conflict awareness and management should be built into the training.
program and a good communication strategy developed and implemented.

14. Encouraging participation by senior law people in the program, even though they may not formally enroll in the program, has significant benefits for program support, motivation, and learning.

15. The involvement of youth in the training is dependent on the support of senior law people and the use of traditional and/or local learning processes. Youth for corporate governance training purposes are those young people from 15 years of age and above, unless specified and supported by senior family members.

16. In remote sites, participants may variously suffer from ill health, the effects of trauma, or other life stresses. Training programs need to build in self care components, particularly nutrition, exercise and relaxation techniques.

17. Mentoring and ongoing tutoring as required needs to be incorporated into ORAC’s suite of training and the delivery of the program.
Appendix E – Key factors in developing Indigenous internal capacity

The matter of internal capacity is a research topic which has achieved prominence in Indigenous affairs world-wide in recent times. In considering the matter of models and approaches which achieve an effective level of internal capacity, it has previously been suggested that three factors which assist Indigenous communities in overcoming poverty and effectively representing themselves requires:

**Indigenous self-government** – Indigenous people have real decision-making power over the design of governing institutions, over land and resource use, over development strategies, over program management, over internal affairs, and so forth.

**Capable governing institutions** – Those communities have backed up decision-making power with capable institutions that can exercise power fairly and effectively. They can get things done.

**Cultural match** – The governing institutions (representative structures) themselves are indigenously generated, reflect Indigenous conceptions of how authority should be organised and exercised, and therefore have legitimacy with the people they govern.

Cultural match has been described as structures that:

- Embody values that Indigenous Australians feel are important;
- Reflect their contemporary conceptions of how authority should be organised and exercised;
- Are generated through Indigenous efforts; and
- Through this have the support of those they govern.

It has further been suggested that “Strong Indigenous governance (representation) starts not in federal or state policy but in Indigenous communities. It begins with the Indigenous communities themselves. But both Indigenous communities and non-Indigenous governments have critical roles to play in the process”.  

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## Appendix F – Glossary of terms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>100 Day Plan</strong></td>
<td>The 100 Day Plan outlines the respective responsibilities by DoTaRS, other Australian Government agencies and Western Australian Government agencies in progressing a number of priority areas identified by the Regional Reference Group. As the name indicates, the Plan has a 100 Day Planning horizon.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ATSIC/ ATSIS</strong></td>
<td>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Council/ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Council. These have been abolished in 2004 and their former functions in policy development and service delivery have been transferred to mainstream government agencies under ‘new arrangements in Indigenous affairs’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CCA</strong></td>
<td>Community Consultation Agents. This is an initiative developed during the trial. Two representatives were selected from each community to form the conduit through which government consults with the respective community. This initiative did not achieve sustainability during the trial.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CDEP</strong></td>
<td>Community Development Employment Projects. Participants in the scheme subsidise two thirds of the scheme’s costs by voluntarily working for their Income Support Benefits. CDEP provides work and community development, assists with employment creation and the establishment of successful businesses and assists Indigenous Australians to gain training and skills which are necessary for employment in the mainstream labour market.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chairs and CEOs meeting</strong></td>
<td>A meeting involving chairpersons and CEOs of the relevant communities that sets the agenda for the Regional Reference Group Meeting.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>COAG</strong></td>
<td>Council of Australian Governments.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>'Commonwealth Heads Group' Meeting</strong></td>
<td>A fortnightly meeting of State Managers of Commonwealth Agencies, in which the East Kimberley COAG trial is a standing agenda item.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>DEWR</strong></td>
<td>Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (Australian Government).</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>DHW</strong></td>
<td>Department of Housing and Works (WA Government).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>DIA</strong></td>
<td>Department of Indigenous Affairs, the lead Western Australian Government department responsible for the East Kimberley COAG trial site.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>DoLGRD</strong></td>
<td>Department of Local Government and Regional Development (WA Government).</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>DoTaRS</strong></td>
<td>Department of Transport and Regional Services, the lead agency responsible for the East Kimberley COAG trial site from the Australian Government.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>FaCS/ FaCSIA</strong></td>
<td>Department of Family and Community Services (Australian Government). From February 2006 this agency was expanded to include the Indigenous affairs portfolio and became Department of Family and Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaCSIA).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Human Services Director General Group</strong></td>
<td>A meeting every six weeks of Director Generals from State Agencies with portfolios in human services.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Human Services Regional Managers Meeting</strong></td>
<td>Quarterly meeting of Regional Managers of State Agencies with portfolios in human services, in which the East Kimberley COAG trial is a regular agenda item.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ICC</strong></td>
<td>Indigenous Coordination Centre. These centres replace ATSIC Regional Offices. Each ICC coordinates Australian Government program funding and services in their region and is responsible for negotiating Shared Responsibility Agreements.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ICCT</strong></td>
<td>The cross portfolio Indigenous Communities Coordination Taskforce (ICCT) was established by the Secretaries' Group on Indigenous Issues to promote and support joint activity across Australian Government agencies and to work with the Indigenous communities participating in the initiative, and with State and Territory Governments. The ICCT established the broad operational framework for COAG trials and thereafter transferred responsibility for the trial sites over to relevant lead agencies. From 1 July 2004, the role of the ICCT has been subsumed into the Office of Indigenous Policy Coordination.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Joint Action Plan ‘Roadmap through the spinifex’</strong></td>
<td>The joint action plan identifies priority areas identified in the Munjurla Scoping Study and allocates responsibilities to the various government agencies/departments operating within the trial site. It also provides an overview of the demographics and key challenges of the region.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Kimberley Inter-agency Working Group</strong></td>
<td>A working group consisting of State Government agencies, NGOs (and formerly ATSIC), established to progress the Gordon Inquiry recommendations. It meets every 3 months and is chaired by DIA.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>KLC</strong></td>
<td>Kimberley Land Council. The Kimberley Land Council is the Native Title Representative Body for the Kimberley region.</td>
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<td><strong>Munjurla Scoping Study</strong></td>
<td>The key government agencies involved in the trial site commissioned a study to identify the Tjurabalan-Kutjungka region communities’ priority areas and which then drives the focus of the trial. The Study identified six priority Key Result Areas. These are: 1. relationships with governments and the non-government sector 2. social order and stability 3. participation and engagement in community and regional affairs 4. self-governance capacity 5. sustainable management practices 6. economic independence The Study proposes a framework comprising of a ‘main table’, a forum for partnership, engagement and negotiation, and ‘side tables’, working parties to discuss and plan actions addressing a number of key issues. The Study also advocates a new way of interacting with the region based on 10 principles: 1. partnership 2. shared responsibility 3. negotiated agreement 4. a regional approach 5. accountability to the region 6. consent to external intervention 7. a commitment to best practice 8. sustained involvement 9. capacity building 10. clear separation of powers</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>NGO</strong></td>
<td>Non-government organisation.</td>
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<td><strong>ORAC</strong></td>
<td>Office for the Register of Aboriginal Corporations.</td>
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<td><strong>Place Management Team</strong></td>
<td>The DoTaRS Community Initiatives Coordinators (also known as ‘Field Officers’) and DIA Place Manager form the ‘Place Management Team’ based in Halls Creek. Their role is to take a brokerage role with communities, all levels of governments, corporate sponsors and the private sector, and organise resources accordingly.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Regional Reference Group</strong></td>
<td>A forum of community representatives and senior government personnel which enables community views and priorities to be discussed and determined. The Group comprises two senior members of each community, a representative of the Tjurabalan Native Title Land Aboriginal Corporation, DoTaRS, DIA and the Halls Creek Shire Council. This Group has evolved from the Reference Group previously established for the...</td>
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<td>Munjurla Scoping Study.</td>
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<td><strong>Ringer Soak Community Plan</strong></td>
<td>This is a document first produced in November 2005 outlining the resources allocation planned for the Ringers Soak community by various State and Australian government agencies. It also provides a snapshot of the progress in each initiative.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>SRA</strong></td>
<td>Shared Responsibility Agreement. A document that spells out what communities, governments and others will contribute to achieve long-term changes in Indigenous communities. They are made at a local level.</td>
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