Social Indicators for Aboriginal Governance: Insights from the Thamarrurr Region, Northern Territory

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Foreword

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.

Suddenly, in the 1930s, white people, traders, prospectors and others came on to people’s country. We started to fight back because they were coming on to our land. The government said that we needed help and asked the Church to come in. They brought Western law and a modern way of living.

Thamarrurr then went underground. After that the system never really worked for our people. All of our previous systems of law and governance were replaced. At the time the old people thought it was a good thing. But many were also confused. It was a quiet time a time when we depended on the missionaries. For many years we were directionless. We were told to follow rules and that’s it.

But the spirit of the people was still there. Some of our people began to get restless and gradually we starting moving, with the help of many people, to get our governance back. We became more positive and we began to see that this is what we are. Control was reclaimed.

We saw that Thamarrurr gave back people the right to speak for themselves and talk about themselves. We realised that all is equal between people. Even the smallest clans now have a say. We now can stand up and say ‘I’ve got the right to have a say.’

A really big change is happening. We are moving forward. And it will continue.

In many areas, such as the school and other places, we are taking leading roles.

This document is an important tool for our people. At the end of the day we just want to be treated like ordinary Australians. We want our people to have the same living conditions and opportunities as normal Australians. We want our kids to have a chance.

Thanks to everyone, and there are many that participated on this project.

Thamarrurr Region Councillors,
Wadeye
June 2004
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Abbreviations and acronyms

ABS Australian Bureau of Statistics
AGPS Australian Government Publishing Service
AHW Aboriginal Health Worker
AIGC Australian Indigenous Geographic Classification
AIAS Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies (now AIATSIS)
AIATSIS Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies
AIHW Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
ANU The Australian National University
ANZSIC Australian and New Zealand Standard Industry Classification
AR-DRG Australian Refined Diagnosis Related Group
ASCO Australian Standard Classification of Occupations
ASFR Age Specific Fertility Rate
ASGC Australian Standard Geographic Classification
ATSIC Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission
CAEPR Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research
CD Collection District
CDEP Community Development Employment Projects (scheme)
CHINS Community Housing and Infrastructure Needs Survey
CHIP Community Housing Infrastructure Program
COAG Council of Australian Governments
DEST Department of Education, Science and Training
DEWR Department of Employment and Workplace Relations
ERP Estimated Resident Population
GAA Growth Assessment and Action (program)
HIPP Health Infrastructure Priority Projects
IA Indigenous Area
IHANT Indigenous Housing Authority of the Northern Territory
ICCP Indigenous Communities Coordination Pilot
ICD9 International Classification of Diseases, Ninth Revision
IL Indigenous Location
MAP Multiple Assessment Program
MDC Major Diagnostic Category
NAHS National Aboriginal Health Strategy
NATSIS National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Survey
NCEPH National Centre for Epidemiology and Population Health
NHS National Health Survey
NILF Not In the Labour Force
NTDCD Northern Territory Department of Community Development
NTDE Northern Territory Department of Education
NTDEET Northern Territory Department of Employment, Education and Training
NTDHCS Northern Territory Department of Health and Community Services
NTGC Northern Territory Grants Commission
PHCAP Primary Health Care Access Program
QOL Quality Of Life
SLA Statistical Local Area
TAFE Technical and Further Education
TFR Total Fertility Rate
TRBP Thamarrurr Region Business Plan for Community Housing 2002–2006
TRS Thamarrurr Regional School
VET Vocational Education and Training
WHO World Health Organisation
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