

# 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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