



Putting the
pieces together

Regional plans, data and outcomes

Evaluation of the information needs of Regional
Councils constituted under the Aboriginal and
Torres Strait Islander Commission Act 1989



OFFICE OF EVALUATION AND AUDIT
ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER COMMISSION

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2003

Office of Evaluation and Audit
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission

Foreword

This report presents the results of a special evaluation, undertaken by the Office of Evaluation and Audit (OEA), which focused on key issues relating to ATSIC Regional Council planning, outcome measurement and advocacy with special reference to data availability and requirements. This evaluation follows-on from the earlier evaluation of data issues surrounding Indigenous planning and outcome measurements at the national level.

The evaluation was assisted by an Evaluation Advisory Committee (EAC), the membership of which was:

Mr Adrian Brahim (Kalgoorlie Regional Council)

Mr Robert Carroll (Chairperson Binnal Billa Regional Council)

Mr. Barry Johnson (State Policy Centre, NSW) from July 2003

Ms. Toni Malamoo (State Policy Centre (Qld) until June 2003

Ms Kerrie Nelson (National Policy Office ATSIIS)

Mr. Owen Daniel (Department of Transport and Regional Services) until June 2003; and,

Dr Wayne Beswick (Department of Transport and Regional Services) from July 2003

I wish to place on record my appreciation of the valuable input and insights provided by the members of the EAC.

A large number of agencies and individuals, whose contributions cannot be acknowledged individually, provided input to this evaluation in different ways. I wish to thank in particular the Regional Council Chairpersons of the two case study areas, Cairns and Districts and Kullarri, for their support for the evaluation; and also those elected representatives of ATSIC Regional Councils who met with the evaluation team providing valuable information on their experiences in planning and advocacy. I also thank all those Regional Managers who responded to the OEA survey.

I am particularly pleased with the level of assistance provided to the evaluation team by several Commonwealth agencies, including the Australian Bureau of Statistics, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services, and Indigenous Communities Coordination Task Force, as well as State Government agencies in Queensland, Western Australia and the Northern Territory.

George Menham was engaged as a short term consultant to assist the evaluation project. He prepared the workshop summary report and contributed immensely to the development of the planning framework presented in the report. He also read and commented on the earlier draft of the report and suggested several editorial changes.

This evaluation was conducted by Gaminiratne Wijesekere and Terry Freeman under the direction of Patrick Batho, Manager (Special Projects). Subsequently, from mid-May to July 2003, Terry Freeman as the Acting Manager (Special Projects) coordinated and supervised the preparation of the report, with Gaminiratne Wijesekere compiling the major part of this report.

Since July 2003 a new agency known as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Services (ATSIS) was established to design and deliver programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, with ATSIC maintaining its policy and priority setting role. In effect the Commission and Regional Councils will respectively set national and regional priorities and prioritise programs to be delivered by ATSIS. The findings of the evaluation will be invaluable to Regional Councils in developing and setting regional priorities.

During the course of this evaluation, the Minister for Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs appointed a Review Panel to assess the roles and functions of ATSIC; this Review may have ramifications for the way in which Regional Councils may function or plan in the future.

I commend this report to ATSIC, all Regional Councillors, Regional Managers, Program Managers within ATSIS, and Commonwealth and State and Territory agencies who are directly or indirectly involved in regional planning, outcome measurements, advocacy and service delivery programs.

Rod Alfredson
Director of Evaluation and Audit
28 October 2003

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Abbreviations

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
AHMAC	Australian Health Ministers Advisory Council
AIC	Australian Institute of Criminology
AIGC	Australian Indigenous Geographical Classification
AIHW	Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
ANIH	Agreement on National Indigenous Housing Information
ARIA	Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia
ARHP	Aboriginal Rental Housing Program
ATSIC	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission
ATSILS	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Service
ATSIS	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Services
CAEPR	Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research (Australian National University)
CAP	Crisis Accommodation Program
CD	Collection District
CGC	Commonwealth Grants Commission
CHINS	Community Housing and Infrastructure Survey
CHP	Community Housing Program
CMIH	Community Managed Indigenous Housing
COAG	Council of Australian Governments
CRA	Commonwealth Rent Assistance
CSHA	Commonwealth-State Housing Agreement
DAA	Data Analysis Australia
DHA	Department of Health and Ageing
DEST	Department of Education, Science and Training
EAG	Evaluation Advisory Group
ERP	Estimated Resident Population
FaCS	Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services
GIS	Geographical Information System
HOP	Home Ownership Program
HPA	Home Purchase Assistance
HRSCAA	House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs
IESIP	Indigenous Education Strategic Initiatives Programme
ISS	Indigenous Social Survey
JJNMDS	Juvenile Justice Minimum Data Set
KRODCS	Kullarri Region Outstation Data Collection System
LAC	Legal Aid Commission

LFS	Labourforce Survey
MBS	Medical Benefit Scheme
MCATSIA	Ministerial Council for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs
MCEETYA	Ministerial Council of Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs
MDS	Minimum Data Set
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
NATSIS	National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Survey
NCATSIS	National Centre for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Statistics
NCPASS	National Child Protection and Support Services
NCSU	National Crime Statistics Unit (ABS)
NDCA	National Data Collection Agency
NGOs	Non-Government Organisations
NHS	National Health Survey
NHDA	National Housing Data Agreement
NHS	National Housing Strategy
NIHIIC	National Indigenous Housing Information Implementation Committee
NPO	National Policy Office
NPSU	National Perinatal Statistics Unit
NSSC	National School Statistical Collection
OATSIH	Office of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health
OEA	Office of Evaluation and Audit
PRA	Private Rent Assistance
RC	Regional Council (ATSIC)
RO	Regional Office (ATSIS)
RRMA	Rural, Remote and Metropolitan Area classification
RRSNC	Rural and Regional Statistics National Centre
SAAP	Supported Accommodation Assistance Program
SCRCSSP	Standing Committee for the Review of Commonwealth/State Service Provision
SLA	Statistical Local Area
SRA	Supplementary Recurrent Assistance
SSS	Supplementary Sample Surveys
TAFE	Technical and Further Education
VET	Vocational Education and Training
WHO	World Health Organization

Executive Summary

The aim of the evaluation

The evaluation on which this report is based extends an earlier evaluation completed by the Office of Evaluation and Audit in July 2002. That evaluation considered issues surrounding the need for data to assess program performance at the national level to measure outcomes for the Indigenous population as a whole.

The focus of the present evaluation has shifted from the national sphere to an assessment of the information required by Regional Councils constituted under the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission Act 1989* to discharge their statutory function of regional planning.

The absence of reliable and comprehensive data on Indigenous programs has been a major impediment to evaluating program performance. While that issue is now being advanced nationally under the auspices of the Council of Australian Governments, there remains unfinished business to satisfy regional requirements.

In broad terms the evaluation has focused on:

- determining what information Regional Councils need to plan effectively;
- assessing the information available to Councils to assist in planning;
- identifying information gaps that inhibit Council planning; and
- developing a conceptual framework to assist Regional Councils in the process of preparing regional plans.

The context within which this evaluation has taken place has served to reinforce the significance of regional planning to improve the economic, social and cultural status of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Increasing significance of regional plans

While the product may vary in quality, regional plans have become fundamental to further reform of the ATSIC system, the way government agencies deliver services to Indigenous communities, and their responsiveness to achieving outcomes.

What has emerged from the evaluation is the demonstrable reciprocal responsibility of Government at all levels and Regional Councils to commit to regional plans so that collectively they might better serve Indigenous communities.

Because service delivery to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities is a shared responsibility between all spheres of government, regional plans must cover a wide range of issues, span a number of sectors, and reach across program boundaries.

New machinery of government arrangements being implemented under the umbrella of ‘separation of powers’ and the creation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Services (ATSIS) as an independent agency responsible for all program management and funding decisions, have added a new dimension to regional planning.

The extent to which regional plans contribute to the outcomes of government agencies, including ATSIS, by being able to identify community needs and relative disadvantage and provide a framework for the delivery of services will proportionately add to their value.

The connection is already provided under the ATSIC Act. What seems to be required is a renewed commitment by government and Regional Councils to regional planning.

If regional plans are to be effective, Regional Councils must be able to ensure the responsiveness of mainstream agencies to them. On the other hand, if Regional Councils expect agencies to align their decision-making with their regional plans, and if agencies require more definition in regional plans to ensure their accountability, the quality of those plans in many instances will need to be improved. These requirements will put new pressures on regional planning, the capacity of Regional Councils and the information necessary to ensure that regional plans are evidence-based.

Ensuring adequate resources are available to assist Regional Councils will require an on-going commitment and additional resources. The integration of agency responsibility within a regional planning framework is a way to ensure that appropriate resources are available for the regional planning process.

Information as a pre-requisite

The creation of Regional Councils envisaged that elected Indigenous representatives would identify development priorities in the region. This would include the services communities needed, and how they would be delivered according to those priorities. Accordingly, it was expected that community aspirations and needs would be reflected in Regional Council plans.

To establish a profile of the region and determine needs requires information about the communities and people within the region. The collection, analysis and use of information are vital for rational policy formulation, planning, delivery and monitoring of programs at national, state and regional levels.

The range of information required to inform regional planning includes population, growth, composition, living conditions, spatial distribution, migration patterns, infrastructure and the living environment.

Access to evidence-based information on the socio-economic and cultural aspects of the Indigenous residents of a region is essential for a Regional Council to effectively perform its statutory planning function and advocate the interests of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. A Regional Council's ability to negotiate with agencies on service delivery is enhanced where policy proposals and policy reviews are backed by statistical evidence.

The considerable emphasis given by agencies and government to performance and outcomes has highlighted the deficiencies in available data against which to measure performance. The access of Regional Councils to reliable, accurate and timely evidence-based information to demonstrate need and measure performance will be a critical issue in the Regional Council planning process.

This is not an issue for Regional Councils alone. Regional Councils will need mechanisms to access and utilise the intelligence and resources of governments and agencies operating in the sphere of Indigenous Affairs, while recognising that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people themselves remain the best judges of their needs and need to be involved in the solutions.

The regional planning process requires and, to some extent, is dependent on productive interaction between Regional Councils and government agencies responsible for service delivery, both at the starting point of planning and during the process of developing regional plans. This also involves assistance in the collection and analysis of data and the integration of other planning processes.

Regional Council planning may also need a structure that will assist Regional Councils in designing their planning and advocacy agendas. An attempt is made in this report to provide such a structure based on the experience of Regional Councils to date.

A changing environment

Regional planning must now be responsive to the changing environment in Indigenous Affairs. This environment is influenced by:

- new policy directions by individual Commonwealth and State governments and collectively through the Council of Australian Governments;
- recognition of the need for all spheres of government to work together with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people;
- pressures to achieve better coordination between and within governments and agencies; and
- efforts by governments to improve delivery arrangements at the community level through greater community participation in decision-making.

An evaluation report of this kind can only point to possible future directions. There is a compelling need for a stronger focus to be given to regional planning at the national, state and regional levels and by government agencies, and for it to be adequately resourced.

The evaluation has identified the Regional Council plan as the key document that will determine the extent to which Regional Councils become effective policy advocates and representatives for the Indigenous peoples in the region. It has confirmed that regional planning is multi-dimensional, complex and needs to be able to respond to many different demands and expectations in a dynamic environment.

The evaluation has also confirmed the diversity of Regional Councils and that many issues remain to be resolved with Regional Council planning. These include:

- the need for appropriate resourcing of regional planning activities by Regional Councils;
- the desirability of a consistent national governance and service delivery framework building on the *National Commitment to Improved Outcomes in the Delivery of Services for Aboriginal Peoples and Torres Strait Islanders (1992)* in the new environment of Indigenous Affairs;
- government agencies (including ATSIS) and Regional Councils being required to work together in the development and implementation of regional plans so that roles and responsibilities may be clearly defined and accepted and resource assistance provided by the agencies concerned;
- the desirability of a central coordination, implementation, monitoring and reporting point for regional planning and its outcomes in terms of services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and the measurement of outcomes;
- whether existing arrangements can be strengthened by more clearly defining, through legislation, if necessary, the responsibility of agencies to work within the regional planning framework and to provide appropriate services whether directly or on a purchaser-provider basis;
- the linking of national data requirements and reporting to regional and community information needs; and
- the value of a structure or template for regional plans drawn from the experience of Regional Councils themselves to assist in developing future regional plans that integrate national, regional and community objectives and establish the foundations of coordination with agencies.

In identifying the issues, based on an assessment of the current planning processes, the evaluation has sought to offer a framework for consideration by all interests as a guide for Regional Councils in developing future regional plans and revising existing plans.

Recommendations

- There would be benefit to ATSI in setting up a statistical coordination unit (preferably with participation from ABS and AIHW). Its purpose would be to establish, develop and monitor an ATSI database at national, state and Regional Council levels. This will involve the creation of a position of a statistical officer in state offices;
- The proposed Indigenous Statistical Coordination Committee could review existing capabilities to undertake high level policy research and implement a suitable program to enhance research within ATSI;
- Revise the *ATSI Act* to allow Regional Councils to enter into agreements and Memoranda of Understanding with mainstream agencies to strengthen the position of Regional Councils in planning and advocacy;
- ATSI to support a regular program of training and capacity building covering all ATSI staff assigned to Regional Councils in planning, monitoring, and interpretation of data. A crash program covering planning, advocacy and negotiations may also be provided to Regional Councilors; and
- Ensure structural linkages between all levels of planning and statistical data bases. There is a role for state offices of ATSI in this process.

ATSIS response:

Comments from the Policy Coordination and Review Group Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Services

Recommendation 1

There would be benefit to ATSIS in setting up a statistical coordination unit (preferably with participation from ABS and AIHW). Its purpose would be to establish, develop and monitor an ATSIS database at national, state and Regional Council levels. This will involve the creation of a position of a statistical officer in state offices.

During 2001, ATSIC formed the Information, Analysis and Research Unit (IARU) within the then National Policy Office. The primary purpose of the Unit was to improve our information coordination and dissemination role (but not database management or development) to undertake analysis to support policy and program development and to begin to coordinate our research investments. At the same time, the ATSIC Reporting Unit was being constructed to support the management of information across the Commission.

Currently in the Policy Coordination and Review Branch, the Research and Statistical Services Unit (RSSU) has responsibility for statistical advice and coordination. ATSIS has an ongoing relationship with the ABS, including the placement of an out-posted officer in the RSSU. It is clear that there is a need for improved quantitative research and analysis capacity within ATSIS and the building of capacity to effectively use the work across the agency. As such, improving capacity at different levels of the agency will be important.

The development of ways to store and disseminate information across the agency is increasingly important as the focus on both needs-based analysis and Regional Council planning is increasing. This will require enhanced ways to manage data (including funding information, census material and other administrative information) and strategies to increase capacity to use this information.

Recommendation 2

The proposed Indigenous Statistical Coordination Committee could review existing capabilities to undertake high level policy research and implement a suitable program to enhance research within ATSIS.

Initial work has been undertaken to examine ways to improve our approach to managing research. A central coordination point for managing our research investments and disseminating this and other research material was considered, but

it was decided to task policy and program areas responsible for funding specific research work to continue to undertake this role. The National Policy Committee has a central task in the oversight of this research investment. Whether there is a need for a specific statistical coordination committee is debateable. Currently all new research work is usually approved by the NPC as are papers and projects of any significance undertaken by the RSSU.

Staff located in the RSSU also participate on a number of external committees that undertake coordination functions as well as providing a statistical advisory service across the agency. The strategic focus of ATSIIS funded or influenced research should take account of existing activities, both internal and external. Our responsibility is to focus on research activities that are owned and directed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Recommendation 3

Revise the ATSIIC Act to allow Regional Councils to enter into agreements and Memorandums of Understanding with mainstream agencies to strengthen the position of Regional Councils in planning and advocacy.

ATSIIC is in a unique position to engage with government agencies. It has the elected mandate to participate in government systems and work with relevant government agencies while taking an active advocacy role on behalf of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. This mandate provides a platform for effecting change by promoting agreement making and integrated planning at the regional level as the decisive mechanism for coordinating the provision of services by governments that target the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

The submissions made by the Commission to the ATSIIC Review included support for changes to improving the environment for Regional Councils to enter into agreements and memorandums of understanding with government agencies at various levels, thereby strengthening their position in terms of planning and advocacy. In order to contribute to agreement making with government agencies, including ATSIIS, Regional Council plans must identify community needs and provide a framework for the delivery of services. This connection is already provided under the ATSIIC Act.

Recommendation 4

ATSIIS to support a regular program of training and capacity building covering all ATSIIS staff assigned to Regional Councils in planning, monitoring, and interpretation of data. A crash program covering planning, advocacy and negotiations may also be provided to Regional Councillors.

There have been a number of events initiated in 2003 in relation to Regional Council planning and the use of data. These include:

- Workshop on Regional Planning and Data Issues, organised by the Office of Evaluation and Audit, Canberra, May;
- Meeting of the Board of Commissioners and Regional Council Chairs to discuss a more strategic approach and greater co-ordination of Regional Council Planning, Canberra, June;
- Coordinating workshop of National Office areas connected with Regional Planning processes, Canberra, July; and
- Meetings of Regional Council Chairs, Regional Managers, State Managers and National office staff to discuss Regional Council planning.

The Policy Coordination and Review Branch has responsibility for facilitating in-house capacity building on policy analysis, data interpretation and advocacy. By strengthening these skills across the agency, Regional Councils will be better placed to engage with governments in a shared approach to agreement making and allow for a more strategic approach to the storage of national data.

Recommendation 5

Ensure structural linkages between all levels of planning and statistical data bases. There is a role for state offices of ATSiS in this process.

The combination of activities around Regional Council planning has provided momentum for governments to invest in regions through Regional Council Plans. There is a commitment to increase funding for regional and community planning initiatives for 2003-04 from the PAPD funding program. The revision of the Regional Council Planning Framework in National Office and the proposed appointment of specialist planning staff in all States Offices will enhance the co-ordination of state-wide data and the development of planning expertise in Regional Offices.

By embracing the new integrated community and regional planning regime, the corporate goals of maximising equity in funding and developing needs based Regional Council Plans can be achieved. The new approach will empower Regional Councils to negotiate agreements with all levels of government on the allocation of program funds designated for their region.

The COAG trials in different communities across Australia have also provided a fresh initiative on how to encourage greater community participation in planning and how to engage with government and non-government agencies in 'joined-up' collaborative projects.

Background to the evaluation

Introduction

The *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission Act 1989* (the ATSIC Act) empowers the Office of Evaluation and Audit (OEA) to evaluate and audit the operations of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) and other portfolio agencies.

Section 94 (1) of the *ATSIC Act* requires each Regional Council established under the Act:

to formulate, and revise from time to time, a regional plan for improving the economic, social and cultural status of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander residents of the Region.

In 2002, OEA undertook an evaluation to assess the availability and quality of data for regional planning and measuring outcomes for Indigenous service delivery programs.

While that evaluation was in progress, some senior officers of ATSIC's National Office suggested that the evaluation should also examine data issues impacting on ATSIC Regional Council planning.

Because of time and resource constraints the earlier evaluation was confined to the availability of data at the national level for four key sectors—law and justice, health, education, and housing and infrastructure. As the evaluation had a national focus, it was not possible at the time to take up the suggestion. The current evaluation builds on that evaluation and covers data issues at the regional level for all key program sectors.

The focus of the current evaluation is not to review decisions taken by Regional Councils on planning, monitoring, evaluation or advocacy. Rather its focus is on regional planning processes, including monitoring, evaluation and advocacy, and the availability and use of evidence-based information.

Administration of Regional Councils

Australia, excluding the area coming under the Torres Strait Regional Authority, is divided into 35 ATSIC regions and 16 zones. The Indigenous residents of a region who are registered on the Commonwealth electoral roll elect members to that region's council in elections conducted by the Australian Electoral Commission every three years. Each Regional Council is divided into wards. Councillors elect a Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson. The position of the Chairperson of a Regional Council is salaried and full-time.

Administrative and other support services for Regional Councils are provided by a network of ATSIC Regional Offices. Currently there are 29 Regional Offices throughout Australia supporting the 35 Regional Councils. All program funding and most of ATSIC's staff have been transferred to a new agency, ATSIIS. Regional Offices of ATSIIS now provide support to Regional Councils.

Planning and advocacy functions of Regional Councils

Under the *ATSIC Act*, the first function of a Regional Council is to formulate a regional plan reflecting community aspirations and needs, and taking into account the region's diverse circumstances. The functions and powers of a Regional Council as defined by the *ATSIC Act* are:

1. formulate and revise from time to time a regional plan for improving the economic, social and cultural status of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander residents of the region (s. 94 (1)(a));
2. assist, advise and co-operate with the Commission, others Commonwealth bodies and State, Territory and local government bodies in relation to the implementation of the regional plan (s. 94 (1)(b));
3. make proposals, in accordance with section 97, for Commission expenditure to the region (s. 94 (1)(c));
4. receive, and pass on to the Commission, and the TSRA, the views of Aboriginal persons and Torres Strait Islanders about the activities, in the region, of the Commission, other Commonwealth bodies and State, Territory and local government bodies (s. 94 (1)(d));
5. represent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander residents of the region and act as an advocate of their interests (s. 94 (1)(e));
6. such other functions as are conferred on the Regional Council by or under this Act (s. 94 (1)(f)); and
7. to do anything else that is incidental or conducive to the performance of any of the preceding functions (s. 94 (1)(g)).

Section 95 (1) of the Act empowers Regional Councils 'to do all things that are necessary or convenient to be done for or in connection with the performance of its functions.'

Regional support services provided by ATSIC's National Office

From its inception, ATSIC established two Regional Council support units in its National Office. One assisted regional administration and the other assisted policy development and regional planning. The latter conducted the first regional planning review in 1992 and prepared guidelines for both regional planning and community-based planning.

ATSIC funding for community-based planning ceased around 1993, despite the 1992 planning review having found a need for continued support for community-based plans and their linkage to regional planning. The Planning Support Services Unit appears to have ceased to operate in the late 1990s, without transferring its role to another unit.

At the time of the evaluation no unit in ATSIC's National Office had specific responsibility to support the regional planning process.

The evaluation

This report:

- evaluates the information needs of Regional Councils to develop regional plans that identify the needs and aspirations of Indigenous residents of the region;
- reviews the capacity of regional planning to respond to changing and emerging needs;
- identifies opportunities flowing from the regional planning process;
- suggests possible mechanisms to increase the availability and accessibility of data for Regional Councils to perform their legislative functions; and
- considers the desirability of a consistent framework for developing regional plans as a guide for Regional Councils.

An Evaluation Advisory Group (EAG), comprising a Regional Council Chairperson, a Regional Manager, ATSIC State and National Offices and OEA representatives, was established to guide the evaluation.

In addition to the EAG, an Evaluation Reference Group and an Evaluation Resource Group provided advice on specific issues relating to regional planning, advocacy and data (see Appendix 1 for a list of members of the Evaluation Advisory Group, Evaluation Reference Group and an Evaluation Resource Group).

Terms of reference and the evaluation methodology were endorsed by EAG and approved by the Director of Evaluation and Audit. These are at Appendix 5.

Evaluation strategy

The evaluation used the following strategies to achieve its objectives.

Case studies

The evaluation conducted two case studies to collect in-depth information on, among other things, regional planning processes, community consultation, coordination with service delivery agencies, the availability of evidence-based data and its use, monitoring and evaluation, and the integration of Regional Council plans with those of other agencies.

The Regional Councils selected as case studies were Kullarri (Broome) in Western Australia and Cairns and District in Queensland. The Kullarri Regional Council represented the planning process in a remote region and where the ATSIC Regional Office has developed a system of community data collection. The Cairns and District Regional Council represented planning in urban and rural environments.

During mid-January to March 2003, the evaluation team carried out field work to collect detailed information from ATSIC Regional Managers and Regional Office staff, Regional Council Chairpersons and councillors, a range of State government agencies (located both within and outside Regional Council areas), schools and higher educational institutions, health service providers, local governments, community organisations, and individuals with planning expertise. The team also met with an ATSIC Commissioner from Western Australia and an ATSIC Commissioner from Queensland. In addition the evaluation team met with the Indigenous Policy Unit of the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) and Treasury officials in the Northern Territory.

Regional planning survey

OEA conducted a survey of ATSIC Regional Managers (see Appendix 2) to obtain information on Regional Council planning processes, coordination with other agencies, staff training requirements, data availability and use, and views on how the planning, monitoring and advocacy functions of Regional Councils could be improved. The survey was carried out during April 2003. All Regional Managers responded to the survey.

Regional planning workshop

A workshop was held in Canberra from 15-16 May 2003 to discuss a sample of Regional Council plans, to understand the planning processes and consider emerging best practices relevant to the development of a regional planning framework. Other issues included:

- the status of community planning, and any links to regional planning;
- possible links between Regional Council plans and the plans of mainstream and other agencies; and
- the current status of information reporting at the regional level.

The workshop was attended by a State government representative, a Regional Council Chairperson and Managers and others from ATSI's national, state and regional offices. All attendees at the workshop are directly or indirectly involved in planning, monitoring and evaluating Indigenous service delivery programs, and/or the development, planning and monitoring of projects at community, regional, state or national levels.

In addition to the two regional plans selected as case studies, the planning processes of the Murdi Paaki Regional Council, the Many Rivers Regional Council and the Perth regional planning framework were discussed. These regional plans represented different socio-economic and geographical settings and planning approaches.

The Murdi Paaki Regional Council used the whole-of-government approach in developing its plan. The Many Rivers Regional Council developed a structural approach identifying the involvement of other agencies in determining regional priorities. The regional planning framework for the Perth area blended the regional planning experience in the Noongar/Perth areas and the principles of the Western Australian government's partnership approach.

Key dates in the evaluation

Draft Terms of reference including evaluation strategy	November 2002
Appointment of Evaluation Advisory Group (EAG)	December 2002
Draft TOR and evaluation methodology endorsed by ESC	December 2002
Field work	
(a) NT and WA	9-22 February 2003
(b) SA and Qld	2-15 March 2003
OEA Survey of Planning and data issues	April 2003
Canberra workshop (planning and data issues)	15-16 May
Workshop report by consultant	May 2003
Circulate workshop papers and workshop report	June 2003
First draft of evaluation report	July 2003
EAG discusses draft evaluation report	25 July 2003
Final draft	15 August 2003

Regional Council planning process

2

Introduction

This chapter focuses on two aspects of the legislative functions of Regional Councils: regional planning and advocacy. Material for the chapter is derived from responses from Regional Managers to the OEA supplemented by in-depth information collected the case studies. The chapter also incorporates information gathered by the evaluation team from meetings with State agencies including the Northern Territory, Regional Councillors and Regional Office staff in Western Australia, Queensland, and South Australia.

Status of regional plans

All Regional Councils have a regional plan. Some Regional Councils (26 out of 35) have revised their regional plans. Six of these were considering revising their plans further. Nine Regional Councils were in different stages of revision. Almost all Regional Councils who developed regional plans recently or were in the process of doing so opted to formulate a new plan rather than modify the existing plan.

Regional Office support to Regional Councils

Formulating a regional plan, revising it from time-to-time and advocacy are key legislative functions of a Regional Council. Regional Office staff support Regional Councils to carry out these functions and activities. The role of Regional Office staff and the level of support provided vary between Regional Councils, and these are facilitated either explicitly under a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), or implicitly as part of the normal support services to the Regional Council.

Regional Office staff play a major role¹ in preparing regional plans, supporting the advocacy function, conducting community consultations and coordinating with other agencies. The proportion of regional plans prepared solely by Regional Councils was only 9% (Table 1). Although the corresponding proportion for the Regional Office was only 3%, some 89% of regional plans were prepared jointly by Regional Councils and Regional Offices. Regional Office staff also play a major role in monitoring ATSIC funded programs in the region as well as coordinating with mainstream agencies (Table 1).

¹ In Tasmania, these support services to Regional Council are currently provided by the State Office.

Table 1: Role of the Regional Offices (RO) in supporting Regional Councils (RC) in performing key functions/activities

Function/activity	Solely by RC	Solely by RO	Both RC and RO
	Percentage		
Preparing regional plans	8.6	2.8	88.6
Consulting communities and Community organisations	5.7	8.6	77.1
Monitoring outcomes	2.9	48.6	42.9
Advocacy support	-	14.2	80.0
Coordinating with mainstream agencies	5.7	22.9	62.8

Source: OEA Survey, 2003.

Note: Functional responsibility 'not stated' category has been omitted from the table. Consequently, percentages given in some rows may not add up to 100.

Regional plans: Process

Most Regional Councils have a planning cycle of about three years. Initial decisions such as goals, vision and the period of the plan, are usually taken by the Chairperson and Regional Councillors. Most Regional Councils obtain the views and advice of the Regional Manager. Community consultations are carried out around those goals determined by the Council. Where a consultant is contracted or the Regional Office is directly involved in developing the plan, the consultant or the Regional Office staff acts as facilitator(s) rather than directly conducting community consultations.

Generally, the Regional Council Chairperson, Portfolio Councillors, Regional Office staff and external consultants (if engaged) determine planning strategies and identify priorities in the region. When the regional plan is completed it is distributed among relevant Commonwealth and State/Territory Government agencies for information and comments. Where cooperation between Regional Councils and service delivery agencies is good, input is actively sought and, in many instances, provided.

Community consultations

During the early years of operation, ATSIC provided financial support to community organisations to prepare community plans. ATSIC's support for community planning ceased in mid-1990s, thus effectively ending financial assistance for the community planning program.

In the absence of current community plans, Regional Councils generally consult communities and community organisations directly to obtain their input to regional plans. The level of such consultations and the methods used vary according to the region.

Persons and agency contribution to the development of regional plans

Almost all regional planning process involved Regional Councils seeking community views in the development stage but only a few Regional Councils provided feedback on the final regional plan. Only a few Regional Councils (e.g. the Cairns and District Regional Council) held meetings to inform mainstream agencies about planning strategies and to seek input for implementation.

About 35% of current regional plans had a significant input from Portfolio Councillors or advisory committees appointed under Section 96 of the *ATSIC Act* (see Table 2). Approximately 53% of regional plans currently in place utilised the services of a consultant. Apart from ATSIC Regional Office staff and Portfolio Councillors, Regional Councils receive input from external agencies providing services to Indigenous communities and Indigenous community organisations. The vast majority of regional plans have been developed with the involvement of community organisations (69%) and State government agencies (57%).

Table 2: Persons/agencies contributed to the developments of regional plans

Persons/agencies	Number*	%
Portfolio/s 96 advisory committees	12	34.2
Community organisations	24	68.6
Consultants	19	52.8
Government agencies	20	57.1

Source: OEA Survey, 2003.

* Some Regional Council plans had more than one contributor.

Most Regional Councils are satisfied with the development of their regional plan. Some (e.g. Cairns and District), however, have developed separate plans to monitor performance and outcomes.

Support services provided by ATSIC Regional Office staff

ATSIC Regional Offices, while attending to the administrative matters of Regional Councils, also assist with planning, monitoring, supplying statistical information and representing Indigenous interests at the local level as well as coordinating with other agencies. The OEA Survey sought information from Regional Managers on staff assigned to assist Regional Councils carry out the specific tasks of planning and policy development, outcome measurement, advocacy and supply of statistics.

Based on the responses, the majority (94%) of Regional Councils receive support from a staff member of the Regional Office specifically for planning and policy development. Other support provided ranged from 57% for the supply of statistical information to 86% for advocacy support.

Table 3: Number of Regional Councils with a specific staff support provided by Regional Office

Specific task	Number	%
Planning and policy development	33	94.3
Outcome measurement of ATSIC funded programs	21	60.0
Advocacy support	30	85.7
Supply of statistical information	20	57.1

Source: OEA Survey, 2003.

Training requirement of Regional Office staff assigned to Regional Councils

Regional Office staff tasked with providing the support services to Regional Councils discussed above varied in number and the level of training they received. The OEA Survey sought information from Regional Managers on staff training needs, and comments on whether these officers would benefit from training in the following areas: planning and policy development, monitoring outcomes, data analysis and interpretation, and negotiation. Regional Managers were invited to identify other training requirements to enhance the skills of staff.

The overwhelming response was that staff supporting Regional Councils need training—on-the-job, short-term or long-term—to enable them to perform their assigned tasks more effectively. The training needs ranged from 84% for ‘negotiation’ to 97% for ‘planning and policy development’ (Table 4).

Table 4: Training requirement by the Regional Office staff tasked to support Regional Councils in planning, monitoring, data analysis and negotiations

Subject area	RMs responded to the question	Specific training required	
		Number	%
Planning and policy development	33	32	97.0
Monitoring outcomes	31	28	90.3
Data analysis and interpretation	31	28	90.3
Negotiation	31	26	83.9

Source: OEA Survey, 2003

Some Regional Managers indicated that training of Regional Council support staff is ‘essential’ or considered ‘high priority’, while others commented that training would be beneficial. For training in data analysis and interpretation, several Regional Managers suggested that a training course conducted by ABS would meet their requirements. Other training considered useful included ‘critical analysis’, ‘interpretation of law’, ‘development of memoranda of understanding’, and ‘contract management’.

Regional Priorities

The OEA Survey also sought details from Regional Managers on the top five priorities contained in current Regional Council plans. Some Regional Managers commented that Regional Council had not determined priorities, either because Council was unsure of the availability of funds, or they considered all areas of the regional plan equally important for the region. For example, the Queanbeyan Regional Council's current plan contains a number of projects developed after extensive community consultation. These projects have not been prioritised by the Council due to the uncertainty of funds.

Of the priorities that were identified in regional plans, health ranks highest (58%, see Table 5). Other top five priorities included: social, cultural and heritage (52%), economic development (49%), land and native title (49%), and family and youth issues (39%). Some regional plans identified region-specific priorities such as alcohol and drug abuse, or the development of partnerships with mainstream agencies.

These priorities are broadly compatible with the national objectives set out in the National Commitment agreed to by COAG.² The COAG national objectives were based on four components: land, culture and heritage, economic development and social wellbeing. While the regional priorities identified by Regional Council plans fit well with the national objectives, priorities that rank high in Regional Council plans are in fact components COAG considered under social well-being i.e. health, education, housing and infrastructure, law and justice.

Table 5: Key priorities identified in the regional plan

Priority	Number	%*
Health	19	57.6
Social, cultural and heritage	17	51.5
Economic development	16	48.5
Land, native title and homelands	16	48.5
Family and youth	13	39.3
Education	12	36.4
Employment and training (including CDEP)	12	36.4
Housing, infrastructure and environment	11	33.3
Law and justice	11	33.3
Leadership, capacity-building	7	21.2

Source: OEA Survey, 2003.

* Percentages are based on 33 responses.

² Council of Australian Governments (COAG) (1992) *National commitment to improved outcomes in the delivery of programs and services for Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islanders* (Section 3 National Objectives), Perth.

Regional planning: integration with other planning frameworks

Numerous agencies from different levels of government provide services to Indigenous communities. ATSIC acts both as a supplementary funder of mainstream services and manages Indigenous-specific programs such as the Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP), Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services and Housing and Infrastructure. Because Regional Council plans mostly identify as priority areas service delivery programs administered by other agencies, there is a need to integrate within the regional plan the planning frameworks or planning strategies of other service providers.

The OEA survey asked Regional Managers whether they thought there should be a link between Regional Council planning and planning by agencies of other levels of governments and, if so, how such linking or integration could be achieved. Regional Managers who responded were unanimous in the need to integrate Regional Council Planning with those of the other service delivery agencies. However, they were divided as to how such integration could be achieved. From responses received for the survey the following options emerged:

- amend the *ATSIC Act* to make it mandatory for government agencies to consider the Regional Council plan when delivering services or committing funds in the region;
- increase the level of commitment and use of Regional Council plans by other agencies through partnership, service agreements or memoranda of understanding; and
- issue directions under COAG, requiring agencies to consult Regional Councils and consider Regional Council plans when delivering services to Indigenous communities in the region.

The 1992 National Commitment of the Council of Australian Governments made specific reference to the option 3 above (see Box 2.1). However, except for a few States where regional agreements for some sectors (or by some agencies) have been developed, the situation remains largely unchanged since the 1992 National Commitment.

Coordination with other agencies

In addition to mainstream agencies, there is a host of agencies at the community level (i.e. Community and Local Government Councils, and community-based organisations) that deliver services and liaise with mainstream agencies and ATSIC about perceived community needs. Similarly, at the regional level (not necessarily the ATSIC regional level) there are also such agencies, some of which are controlled by Indigenous Community Councils.

Many other Indigenous organisations provide specialised services, such as legal, health, and accounting, to Indigenous communities. Some of these organisations existed long before ATSIC was established. These organisations continue to represent Indigenous needs and liaise with mainstream agencies. The evaluation team observed that, in some instances, there was little coordination between these organisations and ATSIC Regional Councils, although ATSIC funded some of them.

Where there was some form of coordination and cooperation with mainstream agencies, the arrangements were highly dependent on the level of personal acquaintance that the Chairperson or the Regional Manager had with officials of mainstream agencies. The evaluation team also observed that, although not widespread, there was reluctance by some Regional Councils to consult mainstream agencies.

The lack of coordination among service delivery agencies and the lack of consultation with Regional Councils by mainstream agencies in some regions were more problematic than in others. In some regions State agencies directly consult with communities through organisations with whom they have funding links. This practice fails to recognise ATSIC Regional Councils as legitimate representatives and advocates of Indigenous interests in the region.

Box 2.1

6.2 The Governments of Australia:

6.3 agree that the planning and delivery of services will take into account the planning role of Regional Councils established under the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission Act 1989* and that in turn ATSIC will take into account the planning processes and advisory bodies established by State, Territory, and Local Governments; and that Regional Councils are encouraged to consult with all spheres of government in the formulation of their regional plans;

6.4 accept that regional plans prepared by Regional Councils under the *ATSIC Act* provide one basis for negotiated agreements for the delivery of programs and services to Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islanders; and

6.5 will endeavour to assist and support Regional Council planning processes by maintaining and enhancing linkages and coordination between ATSIC Regional Councils and State and Territory statutory advisory bodies where they exist and other existing government planning and advisory processes and agreed program delivery mechanisms of governments.

Source: Council of Australian Governments 1992, *National Commitment to improved outcomes in the delivery of programs and services for Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islanders*, Perth.

Discussions that the evaluation team had with some State Government departments, schools and non-Government agencies confirmed the lack of coordination and cooperation between these bodies and Regional Councils. However, it was encouraging to observe that these agencies were willing to cooperate with Regional Councils in developing, implementing and monitoring Indigenous specific programs in the region.

Effective coordination with agencies is at times a particular problem in some Regional Councils when the Regional Council is required to deal with agencies belonging to different administrations. For example, Queanbeyan Regional Council covers an area coming under three different jurisdictions: New South Wales, the Australian Capital Territory and the Jervis Bay Territory. Dealing with representatives from three jurisdictions with potentially diverse interests is a difficult task.

Planning systems within ATSIC

ATSIC's Corporate Plan is prepared in accordance with the overall directions approved by the Commission and its budget estimates are prepared in consultation with the Minister. There is no apparent link between ATSIC's national plans and State and regional plans. Since there are now no community based planning initiatives, there is no link between community plans and regional plans. Thus, it is hard to identify how regional priorities are reflected in the strategic decision-making process or how funding processes are linked to regional priorities. At best, these links occur as a top-down process.

Most regional plans do not contain adequate details in relation to programs administered by mainstream agencies. Their focus is mainly on programs administered by ATSIC. Regional plans do not identify any specific projects that are considered for funding during the planning period, nor do they provide details such as targets, planned outputs, or outcomes and costs. Thus, there is a tendency for planning documents to be more general in nature.

New functional arrangements

With new functional arrangements now in operation under the umbrella of 'separation of powers' and the creation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Services as an independent agency responsible for all program management and funding decisions, Regional Councillors' time and involvement in community consultations, coordination with mainstream program administrators and advocacy functions in general will be likely to increase.

These functions will include among others:

- community based planning;
- consulting with communities and community organisations;
- on-going development of regional plans;
- coordination with mainstream agencies (Commonwealth, State and Local governments) and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO's);
- monitoring and evaluating programs (funded by both ATSIC and mainstream agencies); and
- representing Indigenous people in the region at the local level (attending meetings and other forums).

These functions re-emphasise the need to adequately resource Regional Councils.

ATSIC's regional planning is an important function for Indigenous development. It recognises the diversity and heterogeneity across regions and seeks to determine community priorities, sources of funding and service delivery responsibilities.

The evaluation team supports the need to implement a regular program of training to develop the skills of Regional Office staff assisting Regional Councils in planning, outcome monitoring, supply and interpretation of statistics.

Linking bottom up and top down planning

Introduction

Regional planning has many dimensions to it. Its benefits and public value go beyond the legislative requirement of Regional Councils under the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission Act 1989*. As a primary tool of development, regional plans seek to restore responsibility, authority and control to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people over those things that matter in their lives.³ This chapter examines the essential linkages between national and regional planning.

The regional planning mandate

While the product may vary in quality, regional plans have become fundamental to further reform of the ATSIC system and the way services are delivered to Indigenous communities. There is now a reciprocal responsibility for government at all levels and Regional Councils to commit to regional plans so that collectively they might better serve Indigenous communities and enable Regional Councils to engage with government agencies.⁴

The regional planning mandate of Regional Councils derives from the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission Act 1989*. Several legislative requirements underpin the regional planning process, establishing linkages between the development of regional plans, the involvement of agencies responsible for services and reporting on the implementation of regional plans in the annual report of Regional Councils (s. 91 of the *ATSIC Act*). Within the current legislative framework, Regional Councils also contribute to the fulfilment of an object of the *ATSIC Act*:

to ensure coordination in the formulation and implementation of policies affecting Aboriginal persons and Torres Strait Islanders by Commonwealth, State, Territory and local governments, without detracting from the responsibilities of State, Territory and local governments to provide services to their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander residents.

³ A national workshop *Regional planning and Data Issues* held in Canberra on 15-16 May 2003 as part of the evaluation has informed the following sections of the report. Many of the observations are drawn directly from workshop papers and discussions (see Appendix 3 for the Report of the National Workshop). To give completeness, some additional examination was made of specific issues raised.

⁴ Previous performance evaluations of regional administration under the *ATSIC Act* have drawn a distinction between project management and community development. This summary of the outcome of the national workshop sees strategic planning and community development as part of the same overall process—to improve the quality of life of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people through control of their own development.

In facilitating this coordination, regional plans provide a platform for identifying and building on community needs and assets, and providing a basis for sustainable projects and outcomes. Inherent in the regional planning function is the need for cooperation between Regional Councils and agencies responsible for providing services and to report on outcomes.

As a focal point for empowerment and the way services are delivered to each community, regional plans increasingly are becoming more comprehensive. Because funding responsibilities rest with each sphere of government, regional plans are required to cover a wide range of issues, span a number of sectors, and penetrate cross-sectoral boundaries among the agencies responsible for programs and providing services.

A major reason for the enlargement of the regional planning process into a more comprehensive development framework is that agencies responsible for the management of public monies within strict accountability and performance regimes are looking at ways to target and deliver services in a more efficient and effective way within the constraints of available resources. Coordination of funding and service delivery has therefore become a major challenge. Regional plans help stitch together the various program elements and funding sources. To the extent that regional plans contribute to the outcomes of Government agencies, as well as identifying community needs, their value increases proportionately.

The Commonwealth Grants Commission identified a range of funding sources which need to be taken into account in the regional planning process.⁵ These sources were:

- Commonwealth mainstream programs;
- Commonwealth Indigenous-specific programs;
- State and local government mainstream programs;
- State and local government Indigenous-specific programs.

The CGC observed that the functions covered by its inquiry—health, housing, infrastructure, education, training and employment—were split between the Commonwealth, State and local governments. The split involved complex interrelationships which have implications for program design, funding and service delivery.

⁵ Commonwealth Grants Commission (2001) *Report on Indigenous funding 2001*, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra.

In seeking better ways to deliver services, governments have promoted the concept of “joined up” delivery. Simply put, this means all agencies are required to work together with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to develop “seamless” program and service delivery within what Regional Councils might see as a single regional budget, the collective outcome of which is improvement in the quality of life in Indigenous communities for families and individuals based on local initiative.

A developmental approach

ATSIC’s approach to regional planning has been focused on developing community and individual capacity. The approach derives from new international development thinking which shifts development practice from determining needs externally in relation to program objectives to a process based on participation, capacity building and capacity development. The approach seeks to optimise service delivery for capacity building purposes.

The challenge posed by a developmental approach is how government agencies become developmentally focused, and how their programs and methods of service delivery supplement and stimulate community capacity building.

In its submission⁶ to the House of Representatives Standing Committee Inquiry into Capacity Building, ATSIC states:

Implementing a development approach at community level means that individuals, families, and small groups identify their private aspirations, needs and priorities, through an appropriate and supportive planning process. They are supported in achieving these over time, with appropriate resources. This process nurtures emerging leaders, who may then become involved in community-based organisations working for the public interest.

The ATSIC paper argues that what distinguishes capacity development from service delivery is its “holistic” nature and the active part individuals, families and organisations play in the process, rather than as passive recipients of services.

Acceptance of the principles of capacity development requires a shift in the way agencies fund community projects and a commitment by government to longer-term sustainable outcomes. Within the process of capacity development, ATSIC has identified the key participants as youth, elders, family, community and/or settlements.

⁶ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) (2003) *Submission by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs. Inquiry into Capacity Building in Indigenous Communities* (Attachment B: p. 19).

However capacity development might be defined and integrated in regional plans, it is inescapable that the more effective delivery of services is an important aspect of the development process. Indeed, participants at the national workshop drew a strong link between governance and service delivery where governance involves the management of the development process, including the way services are delivered.

The Minister for Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs, the Hon. Philip Ruddock, in his address to the National Treaty Conference on 29 August 2002 stated:

The government has been fostering a new culture of agreement-making with Indigenous people that is giving them real influence and control in the affairs of state that matter to them.

Regional plans identify those things that matter to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, of which the maintenance of long-term capacity, the provision of appropriate services, and sustainable outcomes are fundamental.

Important as theories of development are, the issue for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people identified at the national workshop in the planning process is to ensure that services are delivered in accordance with the priorities they establish.

New government initiatives based on a holistic view of development and a whole of government approach to service delivery are supporting the process to bring about improvement among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Support for regional agreements

An emerging issue associated with the comprehensiveness of regional planning is the negotiation of agreements between government and their agencies and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

An initial impetus to the making of agreements was given by the National Commitment. Governments supported a framework for improving outcomes incorporating agreed arrangements for planning, funding, coordination, delivery of services and agreements against a background of shared responsibilities.

Governments agreed that the planning and delivery of services would take into account the planning role of Regional Councils under the *ATSIC Act* and the planning processes and advisory bodies established by State, Territory and local government. The framework provided for consultation with all spheres of government in formulating regional plans. Governments undertook to assist and support Regional Council planning processes by maintaining and enhancing linkages and coordination between ATSIC Regional Councils and State and Territory statutory advisory bodies, and other existing government planning and advisory processes.

A new climate of negotiation, cooperation, coordination and collaboration between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and Commonwealth and State agencies has emerged in recent years, leading to a range of frameworks, supported by formal agreements, to ensure the more effective delivery of services to Indigenous communities. These arrangements remain consistent with and build on the National Commitment.

In this regard the valuable contribution of State Advisory Committees (SACs) cannot be overemphasised. SACs (or equivalents) comprise the Chairpersons of all Regional Councils and ATSIC Commissioners in the State. The role and functions of SACs, although legislatively not defined, is to advise on planning and advocacy at the State level. Despite their informal role, SACs potentially function as the direct link between Regional Councils and State ATSIS Offices and play a major role in developing partnerships with State and relevant Commonwealth agencies in delivering services to Indigenous communities in the State.

While there are developments along these lines in each State, two such arrangements in Queensland and Western Australia elevate the concept of partnership. The Queensland initiative relates to a specific region—the Cape York Partnership—and the Western Australian initiative is more broadly based covering the whole of the State in formal arrangements. Each offers guideposts for the future.

A significant development in inter-governmental cooperation and coordination of funding and projects at the regional level has been the establishment of the Indigenous Communities Coordination Task Force under the aegis of the Council of Australian Governments (COAG). A budget initiative associated with the work of the Task Force is the creation of an Indigenous flexible funding pool. Together they support cross-portfolio initiatives in specific locations identified as COAG Indigenous Coordination Trial sites to implement a “whole of government” approach to service delivery.

The overall aim is to provide more flexible programs and services based on priorities agreed with communities through a partnership of shared responsibility. The lessons learned from these cooperative approaches in ten trial sites will have potential to be applied more broadly.

Communities participating in COAG trials will be able to use the funding pool to kick start a wide range of projects to build capacity and improve social and economic wellbeing. The trials are expected to be completed by the end of 2003, after which they will be evaluated.

A structure of regional planning

Regional Council planning must now be responsive to the changing environment in Indigenous Affairs. This environment has been influenced by a number of factors:

- new policy directions by individual Commonwealth and State Governments and collectively through COAG;
- recognition of the need for all spheres of government to work together with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people;
- pressures to achieve better coordination among and within governments;
- efforts by governments to improve delivery arrangements at the community level through greater participation in decision-making; and
- the possible restructuring of ATSIC following the ATSIC Review.

Coordination of the kind being undertaken by governments requires an effective planning mechanism that assists government as well as acts as a negotiating platform for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. This partnership, in turn, points to the need for a structure of regional planning which sets policies and goals at one level, and identifies specific programs and funding to give effect to these policies and goals at the regional and community levels.

A particular focus of regional planning is to ensure that government outcomes, determined in the budgetary process, are consistent with and aligned to how Indigenous people perceive their own development opportunities and service needs. Such an alignment would aim to ensure that Regional Councils have leverage with agencies responsible for service delivery.

Given the limited resources of Regional Councils, the planning requirement imposes a particular need for agencies to match their program outputs to community goals. This is the reverse of having Regional Councils determine their priorities within program envelopes, thus promoting the “silo” effect of service delivery where each agency is likely to protect its program interests.

If regional planning is to have meaning, Regional Councils must be able to ensure the responsiveness of mainstream agencies both to regional plans and their advocacy. This responsiveness currently takes many forms. Primarily it is being forged by a new climate of negotiation, cooperation, coordination and collaboration between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and Commonwealth and State agencies resulting in a range of frameworks, supported by formal agreements, to ensure the more effective delivery of services to Indigenous communities.

These arrangements have put new pressures on regional planning. If government and Regional Councils expect agencies to align their decision-making with regional plans, and if agencies require more definition in regional plans, the quality of those plans in many instances may need to be improved. While this imposes new requirements on Regional Councils, it also imposes particular responsibilities on government agencies to support them in the regional planning process.

The decision by the Commonwealth to separate policy from individual funding decisions by creating a new agency—ATSIS—independent of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission and Regional Councils has given a new dimension and impetus to regional plans.

Formal relationships between ATSIS as a service agency and ATSIC and Regional Councils responsible for policy development, advocacy and regional planning could have significant flow on effects for future arrangements linking regional planning and all Commonwealth agencies. In announcing the new arrangements, the Minister stated that government would support ATSIC and Regional Councils to extend their influence and engage with mainstream agencies with greater credibility and authority.

Strengthening the planning and delivery arrangements

It is legitimate to ask whether existing arrangements could be strengthened in the interests of both government and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Inevitably there will be more memoranda of understanding and more agreements. This process in itself will further stretch the resources and capacity for Regional Councils seeking to optimise their regional plans in specific service delivery arrangements.

Partnership arrangements might more formally require government agencies to embed Regional Council priorities in their activities. This involves more than words in an agreement. The arrangements should seek to establish specific obligations of agencies to assist and support Regional Councils in the development of regional plans.

One option might be to make the relationship a legislative one, building on and extending the concept of “joined up government” so that the regional planning process is itself a shared responsibility. Without formal backing of some kind, the arrangements might be dependent more on the good will of the participants than on specific performance contracts between governments and their agencies.

It was clear from workshop discussions in the new environment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs that the regional planning process required and, to some extent, was dependent on productive interaction between Regional Councils and government agencies responsible for service delivery, at the starting point of planning, during the process of developing regional plans, and in their implementation.

There is a reciprocal responsibility in deciding not only what needs to be done (the regional plan) but ‘how’ and ‘where’ it is to be done, involving the architecture of programs and the funding of projects. This responsibility establishes a pathway from Regional Councils’ analysis of their regions and conception of their vision and goals to agency outputs and service delivery at the community level.

Monitoring, measuring and evaluating performance

While considerable emphasis is simultaneously being given by agencies and government to the need for performance information, thus highlighting deficiencies in available data, the overriding consideration is the outcome of regional plans—the improvement of the quality of life of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, improving access to services, and overcoming relative disadvantage.

Consequently, monitoring and evaluation assume importance in any Indigenous planning and policy framework, providing program managers with valuable information to measure program effectiveness and to judge the efficacy of chosen strategies. A properly established monitoring and evaluation regime could be useful for the program managers to:

- make informed decisions on program management and service delivery;
- ensure the most effective and efficient use of resources;
- determine whether the program is on track and to implement any changes to the program as and when needed; and
- evaluate the extent to which the program has had the desired impact.

Recognising the value of monitoring and evaluation in regional planning, ATSIC in 1994 approved changes to its regional planning guidelines emphasising, among other things, the important role that monitoring and evaluation should play in the regional planning process.

As efforts continue to provide the necessary data, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people themselves remain the best judges of their needs, the extent of their disadvantage, and the impact of programs and services on their communities. The National Commitment endorsed by COAG affirmed a planning framework which, “identifies, and establishes clear and measurable objectives, agreed outcomes and performance indicators.”

Two sets of performance indicators—headline indicators and strategic change indicators—have been proposed to be used in measuring program outcomes of Indigenous people. While these two sets of indicators may be applicable to performance measurement at the national level and to some States with a large Indigenous population, it may be necessary for ATSIC to examine to what extent these indicators are feasible and appropriate to be used for outcome measurements at the Regional Council level.

Performance measurement and evaluation represent a significant aspect of keeping a regional plan alive and using the results to advocate policy change. Consistency in reporting may flow from the decision of governments to issue a regular national report on Indigenous disadvantage, as a result of a decision of COAG.

The national report will be made against key indicators of Indigenous disadvantage. It will help measure the impact of changes to policy settings and service delivery and provide a concrete way to measure the effect of COAG's commitment to reconciliation through a jointly agreed set of indicators.

The COAG Reconciliation Framework, agreed in November 2000, included a commitment to the development of a performance monitoring strategies and benchmarks. A Steering Committee for the Review of Commonwealth State Service Provision has developed a reporting framework incorporating:

- priority outcomes;
- headline indicators;
- strategic areas for action; and
- strategic change indicators

The value of such a framework will depend, in part, on its acceptance by and alignment with the needs and expectations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, the way regional plans follow a similar and complementary process, and the way, in turn, the report reflects the perceptions of Indigenous communities.

The COAG framework has the potential to extend and be incorporated in the structure of regional plans. This is not to suggest that the COAG framework should be imposed on the regional planning process. It would be a guide for the way regional plans might be constructed and assessed.

The value of considering the COAG framework as a basis for a broadly consistent approach to regional plans is that it has government recognition, is receiving government funding support, and will result in a report on the condition of Indigenous society as suggested by national indicators.

Issues for consideration

A number of issues flow from this analysis. They include:

- the need for appropriate resourcing of regional planning activities;
- the desirability of a consistent national governance and service delivery framework building on the National Commitment in the new environment of Indigenous Affairs;
- government agencies, including ATSIIS, and Regional Councils being required to work together in the development and implementation of regional plans so that roles and responsibilities may be clearly defined and accepted and resource assistance provided by the agencies concerned;
- the desirability of a central coordinating, implementing, monitoring and reporting point in ATSIIS for regional planning and its outcomes in terms of services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and the measurement of outcomes;
- whether existing arrangements can be strengthened by more clearly defining the responsibility of agencies to work within the regional planning framework and to provide appropriate services whether directly or on a purchaser-provider basis;
- the linking of national data requirements and regional and community information needs;
- the need for a structure or template for regional plans drawn from the experience of Regional Councils themselves to assist in developing future regional plans that integrate national, regional and community objectives and establish the foundations of coordination with agencies;
- recognition that the structure and process of planning within the region, including community level planning as a feeder for regional plans, is critical for the integration of different levels of planning which perform specific roles;
- the regional planning mandate of Regional Councils under the *ATSIC Act* establishes the fundamental link between the planning process and cooperative arrangements with government bodies in the implementation of the regional plan;
- acknowledgment of the relationship between Regional Council plans and other levels of planning recognises a reciprocal responsibility in the interests of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and all spheres of government;
- partnership arrangements might more formally require government agencies to embed Regional Council priorities in their activities, thus establishing specific obligations of agencies to assist and support Regional Councils in the development of regional plans; and
- consideration of whether the relationship should be embedded in legislation.

Data requirements of Regional Councils

Introduction

The creation of Regional Councils envisaged that elected Indigenous representatives would determine priorities in the region. Planning profiles would include the services communities needed, and how they would be delivered according to priorities. Accordingly, it was expected that community aspirations and needs would be reflected in Regional Council plans.

To establish a profile of the region and determine needs requires the collection, analysis and use of information about the communities and people within the region. Such information is vital for rational policy formulation, planning, implementation and monitoring of programs at national, state and regional levels.

The range of information required to inform regional planning includes population, growth, composition, living conditions, spatial distribution, migration patterns, infrastructure and the living environment.

Access to evidence-based information on the socio-economic and cultural aspects of the Indigenous residents of a region is essential for a Regional Council to effectively perform its statutory planning function and advocate the interests of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. A Regional Council's ability to negotiate with agencies on service delivery is enhanced where policy proposals and policy reviews are backed by statistical evidence. This chapter outlines the key data requirements of Regional Councils.

General considerations

Planning by Regional Councils does not demand sophisticated economic planning models. Current Regional Council plans are mostly short-term (3-5 years' duration) and are necessarily broad in scope. Consequently their data requirements for planning purposes are not as extensive as those required for long term national plans.

While Regional Managers and some Regional Councillors understand the need for a holistic approach to planning, few have adopted it. Most Regional Council planning is program-based and focuses on individual programs. Two important factors for regional planning are data disaggregated by gender and the recognition of regional and cultural diversity.

Gender statistics

Where applicable, gender-disaggregated data on the socio-economic and cultural characteristics of the population should be collected, analysed and disseminated. Women in Australia, as in most countries, rate low against key socio-economic indicators.⁷ Indigenous women in general are doubly affected^{3/4}being women as well as being persons of Indigenous origin. As planning aims to channel resources to those in greater need, gender-disaggregated data assume paramount importance in planning and outcome measurement in the Indigenous context.

Regional and cultural diversity

Indigenous communities take many forms: some communities are located in major urban centres, while others are in small towns, town camps, on cattle stations or on traditional homelands. The way these communities came into being also differs according to historical experiences. This diversity is further differentiated by variations in social and economic status, cultural beliefs and life-styles existing within communities.⁸ In these circumstances, the actual data needs of Regional Councils will vary.

Data requirements for planning

Data requirements by Regional Councils can be classified under the following broad categories, although these are not mutually exclusive:

- demographic;
- economic;
- social and cultural; and
- environment.

Demographic data requirements

Core data required by Regional Councils to accurately gauge the needs of communities are the size, growth and composition of the Indigenous population at both the community and regional level. Information on population change is vital for assessing population size, composition and geographic location. Two aspects of population essential for Regional Council planning purposes are:

⁷ Commonwealth Office of the Status of Women (2002) *Women in Australia 2001*, Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, Canberra.

⁸ House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs (1989) *A chance for the future, training in skills for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island community management and development*, Report of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, AGPS, Canberra.

- the natural increase (births>deaths); and
- migratory movements (the movement of people into and out of a specific geographic area).

Fertility (births) and mortality (deaths), which may vary across regions and communities, affect the size and composition of the population in a region/community. Where fertility and mortality trends remain relatively stable, migration movement could play a major role in altering the size and composition of the population.

Migration can affect population groups differently: it may be that young people, mainly men of working-age or people with relatively better education are more likely to move out of a particular community or region. The dependency burden⁹ of communities or regions could increase or decrease respectively as a result of the large movement of working-age persons from and into an area.

Regional Managers who responded to the data issues questions in the OEA Survey reported that the population size and broad age-gender distribution and information on labourforce characteristics are frequently used when preparing regional plans. The evaluation, however, observed that data were mainly used to complete the regional profile section of the regional plan as specified in ATSIC's regional planning Framework.¹⁰

Economic data requirements

Economic sector data

Economic sectors relate to primary industry (agriculture and fisheries), secondary industry (mining, quarrying, and construction) and tertiary service industries (business and commerce). Information on the availability, distribution, turnover, production and employment in these industries is important for Regional Councils to profile and assess resource requirements to develop policies for Indigenous employment. Specifically, the arts and crafts industry, fishing, tourism, trade and banking-related activities are highly relevant.

⁹ Ratio of the young (<15 years of age) and old (65 years and over) population combined, to the persons of working-age (15-64 years).

¹⁰ ATSIC (1984) *The regional planning framework, A guide to Regional Council planning in the context of other planning activities within regions*, 3rd edition, November 1994, Part D: Regional Council Strategic Planning and the Regional Plan, p. D13.

Labourforce data

One area frequently identified by Regional Managers who responded to the OEA Survey was data on the labourforce—employment and unemployment statistics. Labourforce data include occupation, industry characteristics, and education and training of the employed.

To assess the size and characteristics of the working-age population, available resources in the region and communities must first be determined and then regional and community policies formulated and monitored.

Income data

For Regional Council planning, data on both the level and distribution of personal, family or household income of Indigenous peoples in the region are required. Data on income could be used to assess income differentials across and within Regional Council areas. Income distribution is also important to measure changes over time, as a proxy measure for general standards of living.

Investments/expenditure data flows

A number of Commonwealth, State and local government agencies provide funding for various services in communities in Regional Council areas. Regional Councils are aware of the funding levels from ATSIC for specific programs and expenditure patterns. Funding arrangements of other agencies to provide services to Indigenous communities are complex, particularly in remote regions. Some community organisations receive funding from both Commonwealth and State and Territory governments. They may also receive funding for Indigenous-specific service delivery programs from numerous Commonwealth agencies.

As pointed out in the context of the Northern Territory,¹¹ such complexities are reflected in the ‘sheer number of agencies; the overlapping Commonwealth, State and Territory fiscal arrangements; the division of roles and responsibilities between ATSIC and the Northern Territory Government; and the role and structures of local governance’. Because of this complexity, it is essential that Regional Councils know the amount of money invested in their regions by all levels of government, not just ATSIC. Such information will improve coordination of service delivery and help Regional Councils to effectively monitor regional outcomes and impacts of economic and social policies in their region.

¹¹ Westbury, N and Sander, W (2000) Governance and service delivery for remote Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory: challenges and opportunities, *CAEPR Working Paper No. 6/2000*, Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, Australian National University, Canberra, p. 9.

Welfare payments

Welfare payments refer to all types of assistance provided by the government through its social security networks. Most welfare programs are now channelled through Centrelink. They are intended to assist people maintain minimum standards of living. Data required will include personal and geographic characteristics of welfare recipients and details of their families.

Social data requirements

Social data requirements include information on a number of areas that influence the level of wellbeing and quality of life of regional Indigenous people. For a number of years, government agencies, including ATSIC, have invested in a range of initiatives to improve the social conditions of Indigenous people especially in rural and remote areas.

As the provision of social services is vested with State and Territory governments, Regional Councils should be able to monitor outcomes. It is imperative, therefore, that Regional Councils have access to information on all social programs undertaken by all levels of government. Social programs are diverse, but the following are important:

- health;
- education and training;
- housing;
- law and justice; and
- culture.

Health

As was shown in chapter 2, health ranked as the first priority for the majority of Regional Councils. Although the WHO definition of health as it is applied to Indigenous health is much wider than merely the absence of diseases or injury (for definition of health see ATSIC 2002),¹² the data required for measuring health program outcomes at the Regional Council level include:

- incidence and prevalence of diseases (the general population and its major age-components), mental health and disability, causes of morbidity and hospitalisation;
- mortality (general mortality, infant and child mortality, maternal mortality and foetal loss);

¹² ATSIC (2002) *Outcome data measurement. Unfinished business. Evaluation of data for outcome measurement for selected Indigenous service delivery programs*, Office of Evaluation and Audit, ATSIC, Elect Printing, Canberra, p. 55.

- workforce development;
- life-expectancy/median age at death;
- causes of death, disabilities;
- nutritional status;
- obesity;
- risk-factors (smoking, drug and alcohol abuse, unhealthy food habits, unprotected sex, violence and self-harm, obesity and lack of exercise);
- access and quality of services provided;
- community participation; and
- health expenditure.

Education and training

Education and training for Indigenous peoples are areas of significant disadvantage compared to non-Indigenous Australians.¹³ Education covers a number of fields and levels from Preschool, through to primary and secondary, to tertiary and higher education and is provided by both government and non-government agencies/institutions.

For regional policy development and monitoring outcomes the following information on supply and demand for education and training is needed:

- supply – number and distribution of educational institutions, quality of buildings, equipment, teachers and students; and
- demand – number of children/persons requiring a specific type of education, their geographical distribution and skills required.

Performance indicators and underlying statistics were developed by the Ministerial Council for Employment, Education and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) Task Force. To measure educational outcomes in Preschool, school and Vocational Education and Training (VET) sectors. Although the list is not comprehensive, it is unrealistic to expect Regional Councils to have statistics on all MCEETYA performance indicators for all educational sectors in the region.

Regional Councils could focus on a few indicators to measure educational outcomes of Indigenous children (Preschool and school) at the local level such as:

- enrolment, grade progression, completion rates in schools, Preschools, primary and secondary schools;

¹³ Miller, M (Chairman) (1985) *Report of the committee of review of Aboriginal employment and training programs*, AGPS, Canberra.

- numeracy and literacy standards (Preschools, primary and secondary schools, and VET sector);
- Indigenous workforce in educational institutions (Preschools, primary and secondary schools);
- introduction of culturally inclusive curriculum;
- participation/involvement of parents/community members in educational decision making;
- tertiary educational institutions VET, (pass rate, withdrawal or dropout rates, completion rates and qualifications gained or certificates completed); and
- current educational and training facilities at the community and regional levels (availability of, and accessibility to, educational facilities and resources).

Regional Councils planning may be enhanced by the availability of information on the current level of skills of Indigenous people in the region, including working-age persons and expenditure on educational and training sector programs.

Housing conditions and characteristics

Housing information required includes:

- the stock of public, community and private dwellings where Indigenous people live;
- people usually living/sleeping in the dwelling and number of bedrooms;
- the characteristics of Indigenous housing, such as ownership, materials of walls, roof and floor, amenities (such as water, power for lighting and cooking, and sewage) available and in working order;
- houses that need repair and replacement, including estimated costs;
- housing affordability; and
- Indigenous people provided with different types of accommodation.

Law and justice

The information needs in this category include data on victims of crime and offenders, police apprehensions, persons charged who required legal services, persons in gaols (including those in juvenile detention centres), and persons/families affected by domestic violence.

Culture

Indigenous culture is a complex web of heritage, attachment to land, maintenance of language, and artistic endeavour. It is central to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identity.

Cultural activities and programs in support of Indigenous culture include participation in the creative and performing arts, music, literature, heritage, recreational activity, museums, libraries, radio, television, and sports. Indigenous culture also includes intellectual property, connection to land and native title.

Only limited information is available on activities and aspects covered under the broad heading of cultural statistics, even for mainstream Australia or at the national level. Some information on persons engaged in cultural industries (i.e. arts and craft industry, performing arts, and music) is available from the Census. In most instances people's involvement in cultural activities is part-time and, as Census collections are based only on the principal occupation of a person, the Census may not give accurate data.

For Regional Council planning purposes access to the following statistics appears important:

- type, number and geographic distribution of language groups;
- distribution of schools where traditional language is taught;
- persons engaged in arts, crafts and performing arts including their geographic distribution;
- Indigenous sites of cultural significance;
- traditional festivals and ceremonies; and
- Indigenous coverage by radio and television, and users' views on programs.

Environmental data needs

The nature of environmental issues varies across regions. As such, the data requirements of Regional Councils will also vary. Of the Regional Council plans considered by the evaluation, most recognised or embraced the concept of sustainable development. Data on land use, existing natural resources, parks and places of cultural significance and heritage, water quality, and mining and exploration of natural resources could be considered for planning purposes.

Data availability at the Regional Council level: censuses and surveys



Introduction

There are two main sources of data for regional planning purposes: censuses and surveys, and administrative collections by agencies. This chapter considers censuses and surveys. Administrative collections are considered in the following chapter.

Census of population and housing

Since 1966, censuses have been conducted in Australia every five years. The Census of Population and Housing (the Census) covers basic population and housing characteristics to provide detailed information for economic and social policy development.

The Census has unique features not present in many other data collections. Apart from individual enumeration where data are collected separately for each person and for each dwelling, the Census covers every person and dwelling in a specified territory and according to a well defined enumeration process. It also covers every person in the area at the time the Census is taken as opposed to persons usually residing in the dwelling/household. Because the Census is conducted every five years it provides a comprehensive picture of change over the period.

For each person counted, the Census provides information on geographic, household/family, demographic, social and economic characteristics. The housing component provides key data on dwelling characteristics. From the Census information collected, ABS compiles and publishes a range of statistical tables covering both population and housing characteristics for different geographic areas—national, state, section-of-state, local government areas, and Statistical Local Areas (SLA). Population data are published according to both place of enumeration and place of usual residence. Topics covered in censuses from 1971 to 2001 are shown at Appendix 4.

The lowest geographic level covered by the Census is the Collection District (CD) defined by the ABS for the purposes of the census. The Collection District is subsequently used for other statistical collections (i.e. surveys). The Census assumes particular importance in the Indigenous policy environment as it is the only source of comprehensive socio-economic and housing data on the Indigenous population for small geographic areas such as individual communities and ATSIC regions.

The 60 Regional Councils originally established under the *ATSIC Act* used the 1986 CDs to determine Regional Council boundaries. As all future changes to CD boundaries are recorded by the ABS, it will be possible to aggregate population and housing characteristics of the Indigenous population at the Regional Council level, if the Regional Council boundaries do not cross CDs.

For the first time from the 2001 Census, ABS released key population and housing data for ATSIC Regional Council areas. This release contained some 20 population tables and nine housing tables (see Table 4.1).

Table 5.1: Indigenous profile

Table Number	Description
101	Selected characteristics by Indigenous status by sex
102	Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander status by sex
103	Age by Indigenous status by sex
104	Type of educational Institution attending by Indigenous status by sex
105	Highest level of schooling by Indigenous status by sex – persons aged 15 years and over
106	Language spoken at home and proficiency in spoken English by sex – Indigenous Persons
107	Religious affiliation by sex – Indigenous persons
108	Weekly individual income by age by sex – Indigenous persons aged 15 years and over
109	Age by social marital status by sex – Indigenous persons aged 15 years and over
110	Computer use by Indigenous status by age by sex
111	Internet use by Indigenous status by sex
112	Family Type by Indigenous status of family – families and persons in families in occupied private dwellings
113	Selected characteristics by Indigenous status by sex (second release processing) – persons aged 15 years and over
114	Non-school qualification: level of education by Indigenous status by sex – persons aged 15 years and over
115	Non-school qualification: field of study by Indigenous status by sex – persons aged 15 years and over
116	Age by labourforce status and Industry sector by Indigenous status by sex – persons aged 15 years and over
117	Industry by Indigenous status by sex – employed persons
118	Occupation by Indigenous status by sex – employed persons
119	Industry sector by hours worked by Indigenous status by sex – employed Indigenous persons

Source: ABS (2002) *2001 Census: Regional profiles*.

Table 4.1 continued over page

Table 5.1: Indigenous profile *(continued)*

Table Number	Description
120	Weekly family income by Indigenous status of family – families in occupied private dwellings
121	Household type by Indigenous status of household – occupied private dwellings containing family or lone person households
122	Weekly household income by Indigenous status of household – households in occupied private dwellings
123	Structure of dwelling by tenure type by Indigenous status of household – occupied private dwellings
124	Number of persons usually resident by structure of dwelling by Indigenous status of household – occupied private dwellings containing family or lone person households
125	Number of persons usually resident by number of bedrooms by Indigenous status of household
126	Weekly household income by monthly housing loan repayment by Indigenous status of household – occupied private dwellings being purchased
127	Weekly rent by landlord type by Indigenous status of household – occupied private dwellings being rented
128	Weekly household income by weekly rent by Indigenous status of household – occupied private dwellings being rented
129	Selected averages by Indigenous status

Source: ABS (2002) *2001 Census: Regional profiles*.

Despite the many uses of Census data for policy planning and measuring socio-economic changes over time, there are a number of problems in using data to ascertain the size and composition of the Indigenous population in small geographic areas, States and Territories and the national level.

To date ABS has conducted seven censuses since the 1967 Referendum which provided for the ABS to include statistics on Indigenous people as part of Australian population. However, no two censuses, consecutive or otherwise, have produced consistent intercensal Indigenous population counts. Reasons for the inconsistencies vary¹⁴ and include improvements in coverage, and an increase in the Indigenous population in successive censuses due to increased self-identification.

¹⁴ For a brief discussion see ATSIC (2002) *Outcome data measurement. Unfinished business. Evaluation of data for outcome measurement for selected Indigenous service delivery programs*, Office of Evaluation and Audit, ATSIC, Elect Printing, Canberra.

Other problems with Indigenous census data relate to undercounting. ABS estimates that the net population undercount of the Indigenous people for the 2001 Census was 4.1%.¹⁵ Although the net-undercount was higher than the comparable percentage (1.8%) for the non-Indigenous people, the actual undercount of Indigenous people is expected to be much higher than the estimated 6.1%. This is because the Post Enumeration Survey sample on which net undercount figures were derived did not include remote areas. Apart from the undercount, a substantial proportion of persons was counted by the Census but did not respond to the question on Indigenous status.

In 2001, over 767,757 persons (4.1% of the total) did not respond to the census question on Indigenous status. After examining responses to other census questions and those of others in the family, ABS was able to determine the Indigenous status of some 300,000 people. However, there was nearly 2.0% of the total population for whom Indigenous status was classified as 'not stated'. Some of these people could have been persons of Indigenous origin.

Even among the persons whose Indigenous status is known, there is a high level of non-response to other census questions¹⁶ (see ATSIC, 2002). In each successive census, ABS introduces numerous measures to improve the coverage and quality of data. As part of the quality control measures, the proportion of non-response to key census questions could be reduced. This could affect measuring the trends in socio-economic status of Indigenous Australians across censuses.

Because of the high level of mobility, ABS encounters numerous problems in accurately conducting the Census in areas affected by a high level of movement of Indigenous people. This is particularly a problem in rural and remote areas. To overcome this problem, ABS uses the *de jure* enumeration approach in enumerating Indigenous people in remote areas. Although the *de jure* method may be more relevant to the enumeration of Indigenous people in remote regions, the application of this without a clear and sound definition of 'usual residents' concept, the census enumeration in remote areas is will fail, as has been shown to date.

The above limitations should be kept in mind by Regional Councils when using census data for planning, monitoring and advocacy. In regions or communities where census enumeration is extremely poor, a fresh data collection may be an option for ATSIS to consider.

¹⁵ Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) (2001) *Information paper: Census of Population and Housing, Data quality -- Undercount*, ABS Cat No. 2940.0, Canberra.

¹⁶ See for example ATSIC (2002) *Outcome data measurement. Unfinished Business. Evaluation of data for outcome measurement for selected Indigenous service delivery programs*, Office of Evaluation and Audit, ATSIC, Elect Printing, Canberra.

Experimental population projections

Owing to the non-availability of reliable information on the size and age-sex composition of the Indigenous population and its components of change—births, deaths and net-migration—ABS compute population projections based on assumed coverage levels of population counts, and the levels of fertility, and mortality. In the projections, the net migration of Indigenous persons across States and Territories is assumed as insignificant. Because of the highly volatile nature of these projections, ABS termed these as experimental projections. While national projections are prepared separately for age and sex, State and Territory Indigenous population estimates are for the total population only (i.e. both sexes combined).

Projection results, both National and State and Territory, are presented as two series, high and low. In the absence of reliable information on the population base, uncertain data on Indigenous births and deaths and virtually non-existing data on inter-State/Territory migration, it is difficult to judge the validity of such projections. It is equally difficult to determine which of the two projections is better suited for regional planning. The difference in the estimated total Indigenous population between the two scenarios is large (about 58,000 or 13% for the year 2000), given the size of the Indigenous population.

Sample surveys

In the 1970s ABS launched a regular series of household surveys to obtain detailed data to fill the gaps in data required to measure socio-economic and demographic conditions of the Australian population, and to monitor areas of policy concern (i.e. employment and unemployment). ABS has a Labourforce Survey (LFS) program. This was introduced in 1964 as a quarterly survey and became a monthly survey in 1978.

ABS also conducts a series of monthly Supplementary Sample Surveys (SSS) as a supplement to the LFS. However, the SSS sample does not cover remote and sparsely populated areas, mainly due to high costs. ABS considers that this exclusion has no adverse impact on aggregate estimates at the National or State level except for the Northern Territory where the Indigenous population areas form a fifth of the total population. For Regional Council planning purposes the exclusion of remote areas from routine ABS sample surveys has an adverse impact on Indigenous data.

Indigenous Social Survey

An Indigenous Social Survey (ISS) was conducted by ABS in 2002 to obtain detailed data on the socio-economic characteristics of the Indigenous population. Sample selection was based on the population distribution as projected by ABS for 2002. ISS used a multi-stage random sample, with stratification by State and *Accessibility/Remoteness Index for Australia* (ARIA) classification. Collection

Districts to be sampled and households to be surveyed were selected randomly. Up to three adults aged 15 years and over were selected from identified households for detailed interviewing. ISS targeted up to 12,000 Indigenous people.

ISS collected information on a range of topics include: age, gender, marital status, children ever born and their survival status, family/household structure, language spoken at home, English language proficiency, activities and festivities of cultural significance, Indigenous arts and crafts, music and dance and related work, education, housing, employment, law and justice, crime and violence, and alcohol and drug use and abuse and self-assessed health status and disabilities.

ISS contains some key survey questions from the General Social Survey (GSS). It also maintains a close comparability with key data items collected from the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Survey (NATSIS). One of the criticisms of NATSIS was that it attempted to collect information on many topics of Indigenous policy relevance, but without giving due consideration to data quality. ISS also followed a similar approach.

The results of ISS are not expected until the end of 2003 or early 2004. The smallest geographic area for which detailed data will be available will be modified ARIA groupings (i.e. major urban, other urban and remote). It will be therefore be possible to produce ISS data for large ATSIC Regional Councils. ABS is considering conducting an ISS every 6 years.

National Health Survey Program

As part of its regular household survey program, ABS conducts a National Health Survey (NHS) to collect detailed data on a range of health-related topics to measure the health of the Australian population. These include information on recent and long-term illnesses and health conditions, self-assessed health status, doctor consultations, visits to health facilities, and medications used. As Indigenous people are not represented adequately in normal ABS household surveys, the NHS, in both 1995 and 2002, included a supplementary sample of CDs from remote areas to increase Indigenous coverage. ABS later assessed the data from the 1995 supplementary sample to be of poor quality. Results of the 2002 NHS are yet to be released.

Community Housing and Infrastructure Needs Survey (CHINS)

CHINS is funded by ATSIC and was first conducted in 1992 to ascertain housing and infrastructure needs in Indigenous communities and the costs associated with providing and/or upgrading accommodation and utility services. CHINS does not collect information on housing and other infrastructure information from households in each dwelling. Instead, the survey collects information from key informants who are likely to possess knowledge on housing conditions and infrastructure in the community.

CHINS has been conducted in 1992, 1999 and 2001. The number of communities and persons covered by CHINS could vary from survey to survey, as CHINS only includes communities that were occupied at the time, or expected to be occupied in the next 12 months.

Owing to differences in methodologies, scope, concepts used and data items collected, the CHINS 1999 results were not exactly comparable with the 1992 results. CHINS 2001 used methodologies and concepts that were similar to 1999.

CHINS 2001 was conducted by ABS field officers who were engaged for the 2001 Census and used three-types of forms: (1) Housing form: to collect information about housing stock, and details of repairs and maintenance of housing managed by Indigenous Housing Organisations; (2) Community form: to collect information on community infrastructure in discrete communities with a population of 50 or more persons; and (3) Short Community form: for communities with a population fewer than 50 persons.

Overall, CHINS 2001 covered about 45% of the communities, and those dwellings managed by Indigenous Housing Organisations (IHOs). Consequently, the results of CHINS cannot be extrapolated for the total Indigenous population.

The accuracy of CHINS depends on the extent of knowledge of the informants on housing, amenities and infrastructure. A number of Regional Managers reported in the OEA Survey that they use data from CHINS when developing housing and infrastructure plans for the region, while acknowledging the poor quality of data. Because of the data quality issues, the Kullarri Regional Council has developed a system to collect and regularly update information on community characteristics (i.e. population, housing assets and existing infrastructure).

The Western Australian Government compared the data from CHINS 1999 for the State with data available from their own Environmental Health Needs Survey of 1999 and found that the latter provided better quality information on key housing and infrastructure.¹⁷

¹⁷ Hopkins, K (2001) *Environmental health needs in Western Australian discrete Indigenous communities, based on the 1999 Community Housing and Infrastructure Needs Survey*, Environmental Health Needs Coordinating Committee, Perth.

Potential data at the regional level from key administrative collections



Introduction

Data available from administrative collections are derived from records maintained by numerous government and non-government agencies on various aspects of a program. Although the data from these collections is a valuable source of statistical information, the primary purpose of these collections is not to provide statistics, but to aid program administrators to assess program effectiveness, efficiency and impact. In some cases statistics are maintained to meet legislative requirements (i.e. births, deaths) but are nonetheless important sources of data.

This chapter focuses on the key data collections by Commonwealth and State and Territory agencies that have the potential to produce data at the sub-State level. These collections, however, may not align with defined Regional Council boundaries.

All data sets included in this chapter identify Indigenous people (or clients) in their collections. The extent of the coverage of Indigenous people (or clients) and the quality of the information contained in these collections could vary across and within jurisdictions.

Vital statistics

Vital statistics in this chapter focus on data on births, deaths, still births, and adoptions. Vital statistics records are maintained by the Registrars of Marriages, Births and Deaths of each State and Territory according to the legislation of the respective jurisdictions. Statistics on adoptions are discussed under a separate heading 'Statistics on children'.

Births and deaths

Births and deaths notification forms used in all States and Territories have the provision to record the Indigenous status of parents (for births) and Indigenous status of the deceased. For statistical purposes ABS considers any child for whom either parent is identified on the birth notification form to be a birth of an Indigenous person (Table 6.1), whereas the Indigenous status of the deceased is recorded on the death notification form as either Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander is considered as an Indigenous death. Deaths that occurred in a given year (usually a calendar year) classified by age and gender provide the basis for the computation of various statistical indices for mortality.

Table 6.1 Statistics on registered births and deaths

Data description	Births and deaths collected by State and Territory registration systems.
Agency responsible for data collection and dissemination	State and Territory Registrars of Marriages, Births and Deaths. Data disseminated by the National Processing Centre, Australian Bureau of Statistics, Brisbane Qld. 4000 http://www.abs.gov.au/
Key data	Births: Number of births, births classified by age of mother, sex-ratios at birth, and fertility rates. Deaths: Number of deaths, age, gender; causes of death. Note: Detailed data on cause of death is not available as small Indigenous populations in most Regional Council areas restrict release due to confidentiality regulation.
Collection and publication	Collection: ongoing; publication: annual
Geographic level	State and Territory
Able to be provided at a Regional level?	Yes—subject to confidentiality provisions.
Comment	Indigenous persons are under-identified in the collections. ABS considers that Indigenous identification to be better in NT, SA, WA, ACT and Qld. Identification could vary between Councils. Rates are calculated on mid-year estimates which are of doubtful quality (see chapter 3).

Perinatal mortality

Perinatal deaths include (a) neonatal deaths occurring within the first 28 days of life; and (b) foetal deaths (for pregnancy losses up to 20 weeks of gestation or foetuses weighing at least 400g) (Table 6.2). Reporting is mandatory by State and Territory law.

Table 6.2 Perinatal deaths

Data description	Perinatal deaths
Agency responsible for data collection and dissemination	State and Territory Registrars of Marriages, Births and Deaths. ABS for compilation and dissemination. National Processing Centre, Australian Bureau of Statistics, Brisbane Qld. 4000 http://www.abs.gov.au/
Key data	Mothers: Age, maternal conditions, pregnancy outcome, type of birth and gestation period. Stillbirth or neonate: Gender, birth type, (single or multiple) weight at delivery, and condition of the foetus (or neonate).
Collection and publication	Collection: ongoing; publication: annual
Geographic level	State and Territory; and SLA level.
Able to be provided at a regional level?	Yes—subject to confidentiality provisions.
Comments	Indigenous status of stillbirths and neonatal deaths are determined according to the Indigenous status of the mother or the father. Data on perinatal deaths is also available from the Perinatal collection of State and Territory health departments (see Perinatal morbidity). For Regional Councils unable to access data due confidentiality regulations, data may be accessible at a Zone level.

Morbidity statistics

Morbidity statistics are collected by a number of sources: hospital morbidity (States and Territories); perinatal morbidity (State and Territory health departments); and Notifiable Disease Surveillance Program (Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing).

Perinatal morbidity

Data on perinatal morbidity are collected by State and Territory Health Departments (commonly known as the midwives collection). This collection has detailed information on the pregnancy, mother and neonatal death (Table 6.3). This collection identifies Indigenous babies according to the Indigenous status of their mothers.

Table 6.3 National Perinatal Statistics

Data description	Perinatal morbidity and mortality including mortality information from State and Territory Registrars of Marriages, Births and Deaths.
Agency responsible for data collection and dissemination	Collection by State and Territory Health Departments. Collation and dissemination by AIHW (National Perinatal Statistics Unit), Sydney Children's Hospital, 2 nd Floor, McNevin Dickson Building, Avoca St., Randwick, NSW 2031 http://www.aihw.npsu.gov.au/
Key data	Mothers: age, maternal conditions, pregnancy outcome, type of birth and gestation period. Stillbirth or neonate: sex, birth type, (single or multiple) weight at delivery, and condition of the foetus (or neonate).
Collection and publication	Collection: ongoing; publication: annual
Geographic level	State and Territory; and SLA level
Able to be provided at a regional level?	Yes—subject to confidentiality regulation.
Comments	The perinatal collection does not collect information on the Indigenous status of fathers. NPSU data includes some information not available in the ABS mortality collection.

Hospital morbidity

Data on admitted patients to hospitals are collected from records maintained by hospital authorities. Data collected upon separation include diagnosis, treatment provided, and length of stay. Since morbidity conditions are sourced from hospital patients, this collection normally provides serious morbidity conditions that require hospitalisation (Table 6.4).

National Notifiable Diseases Surveillance System (NNDSS)

NNDSS is located in the Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing and monitors the incidence of communicable diseases reported by each State and Territory. NNDSS records individual data on each communicable disease reported. Notifiable diseases commonly reported by all jurisdictions include: (a) preventable diseases, (b) quarantinable diseases, (c) vector-borne diseases and (d) bacterial infections (Table 6.5).

Table 6.4 Hospital morbidity statistics

Data description	Public and private hospital admitted patients.
Agency responsible for data collection and dissemination	Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, PO Box 570, Canberra ACT 2601 http://www.aihw.gov.au/
Key data	Age, sex and place of residence, diagnosis and other clinical information, length of stay, health insurance details and administrative information.
Collection and publication	Collection and publication: annual
Geographic level	State and Territory
Able to be provided at a regional level?	Yes
Comments	Diagnosis information is currently recorded according to the 10 th revision of International Classification of Diseases (ICD). There is no uniform system of recording Indigenous status of an 'admitted patient'. The number of hospitals reporting to AIHW has increased over the years. This factor should be taken into account when assessing trends.

Table 6.5 Notifiable diseases: National Notifiable Diseases Surveillance System

Data description	Communicable disease notifiable under State and Territory legislation.
Agency responsible for data collection and dissemination	Collection and reporting: State and Territory Health Departments. Dissemination: Communicable Diseases and Environmental Branch, Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing, Woden 2606 (maintains NDSS). http://www.health.gov.au/
Key data	Type of disease with phenotype and genotype descriptors; date of onset and notification, age, sex and location (post-code) where disease reported/treated.
Collection and publication	On-going. Quarterly reports are released.
Geographic level	State and Territory
Able to be provided at a regional level?	Yes—confidentiality criteria apply
Comments	Data relate only to the location where a disease was reported and not the individual's usual place of residence.

Law and justice

Law and justice cover a range of areas and a number of collections. However, only police statistics on offenders, and custodial statistics (i.e. number of people incarcerated) can be disaggregated to the sub-State level.

Statistics on offenders

Statistics on offenders refer only to cases investigated and where charges are laid by police. Police departments in States and Territories classify offenders according to the main type of crime.

Data are normally collected at the police station level, and it is possible to aggregate statistics at the Regional Council level if the particular police stations falling into a Regional Council area are determined. However, as a police district could cover more than one Regional Council area, it may be difficult to accurately separate statistics for each Regional Council. For Tasmania and Queensland reliable statistics for Indigenous offenders are not yet available.

The method used to record the Indigenous status of an offender can vary across jurisdictions, police are now moving to a uniform approach under persuasion by the Crime Statistics Unit of ABS. However, these statistics cannot be used as an index of crime because they exclude crimes not reported to police, under investigation or which did not result in charges being laid.

Custodial Statistics

Information relating to persons in gazetted prisons in Australia is available from the Annual Survey of Prisoners conducted by ABS. Information is derived from records maintained by State and Territory corrective services institutions (Tables 6.6 and 6.7). There are two types of data collected: *stock* data (as at 30 June each year) and *flow* data (collected quarterly).

Table 6.6 Annual Prison Census (Stock data)

Data description	Number and characteristic of prisoners in each State and Territory covering all adult prisoners (aged 18 years and over except in Victoria and Queensland where the age is 17 years).
Agency responsible for data collection and dissemination	Australian Institute of Criminology from 1976 to 1994 ABS from 1994 Australian Bureau of Statistics, Crime and Justice Statistics Unit, Melbourne Vic 3000 http://www.abs.gov.au/
Key data	Age, sex, legal status, court of sentence, date of reception, sentencing status, type of sentence, the most serious offence/charge, duration of sentence and previous imprisonment and geographic location.
Collection and publication	Collection and publication: annual
Geographic level	State and Territory
Able to be provided at a regional level?	Yes—where the location of the prison/detention centre is located within a Regional Council area.
Comments	From 2001 offences are classified according to the Australian Standard Offence Classification. The 2001 edition of Prisoners in Australia contains an appendix with the concordance to the previous classification the Australian Classification of offences (ANCO). Data relate only to the location where a prisoner is held.

Table 6.7 Quarterly prison statistics (flow data)

Data description	Number and characteristic of prisoners in each State and Territory covering all adult prisoners (aged 18 years and over except in Victoria and Queensland where the age is 17 years). Provides <i>flow</i> data on prison population and is designed to supplement the <i>stock</i> data collected on prisoners from the <i>Annual prison census</i> .
Agency responsible for data collection and dissemination	Australian Institute of Criminology from 1976 to 1994 ABS from 1994 Australian Bureau of Statistics, Crime and Justice Statistics Unit, Melbourne Vic 3000 http://www.abs.gov.au/
Key data	Age, gender, legal status, periodic detention orders and community-based correction orders.
Collection and publication	Collection and publication: quarterly
Geographic level	State and Territory
Able to be provided at a regional level?	Yes—where the location of the prison/detention centre is located within a Regional Council area.
Comments	Detailed information for Indigenous prisoners is limited.

Statistics on children

The status of children is a significant policy consideration to all levels of government. However, the compilation of data on child populations is limited to a few collections, such as births, birth weight (perinatal collection), deaths, hospitalisation, and immunisation.

Other information on Preschool and school population is available from educational sectors. A cross-portfolio taskforce, comprising agencies such as Commonwealth Departments of Family and Community Services (FaCS), Department of Health and Ageing (DHA), Education, Science and Training (DEST), Prime Minister and Cabinet (PM&C) and ATSIC, has been established to examine children's issues.

This initiative has been taken under the auspicious of FaCS' National Agenda for Early Childhood. This collaborative effort will ultimately assist with the establishment of a regular information collection and reporting systems to facilitate program outcomes in areas such as: child health, literacy and numeracy, children with social and emotional problems, substance misuse leading to contact with the criminal justice system. Among the child-specific data collections statistics on adoptions and children under protection are important for the development of policies concerning children and child welfare. However, data on the adoption of Indigenous children will not be able to be produced at the Regional Council level due to insufficient numbers.¹⁸

Child protection statistics

Statistics relating to the protection of children—those who have been or are being abused, neglected or otherwise harmed or whose parents cannot provide adequate care and protection—are available from records maintained by each State and Territory collected by agencies responsible for family services.

The statistics are collated, analysed and published annually by AIHW according to concepts and counting rules agreed with State and Territory governments.¹⁹ There are sufficient numbers of Indigenous children covered in these collections to enable the production of statistics at a Regional Council level (Table 6.8).

Data for Indigenous children in out-of-home care are separately reported according to Aboriginal Child Placement Principles.²⁰ The number of Indigenous children for whom child protection action has been sought, initiated or taken, is large enough for computation of statistics for most Regional Council areas.²¹

¹⁸ See for example for the 11-year period from 1997–98 to 2001–02, there were 73 adoptions involving Indigenous children. See Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) (2002) *Adoptions Australia 2001–02*, AIHW Cat. No. CWS 18, Canberra.

¹⁹ The National Child Protection and Support Services Data Group (NCPASS), consisting of representatives of each State and Territory agencies responsible for family services oversee the collection and liaise with AIHW on data issues.

²⁰ See Lock, JA (1997) *The Aboriginal child placement principle*, Research project no. 7, Law Reform Commission of New South Wales, Sydney.

²¹ See AIHW (2002) *Child protection Australia 2001–02*, Child Welfare Series no. 32, AIHW Cat. No. CWS 20, Canberra.

Table 6.8 Child protection statistics

Data description	Children in contact with the State and Territory family services agencies for protective reasons.
Agency responsible for data collection and dissemination	Collection: State and Territory family services agencies. Publication: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, PO Box 570, Canberra ACT 2601 http://www.aihw.gov.au/
Key data	Child protection notifications, investigations, and substantiations; children on care and protection orders; children on out-of-home care; type of abuse or neglect substantiated; source of notification, age and gender and geographic location of child, child placement details, relationship of the child to the persons responsible for abuse or neglect.
Collection and publication	Collection: ongoing; publication: annual
Geographic level	State and Territory
Able to be provided at a regional level?	Yes—subject to confidentiality regulation.
Comments	There are jurisdictional variations in the methods, processes and definitions used in recording child protection matters. AIHW reports ²² that in some jurisdictions the Indigenous status of children is not always reported. Efforts are under way in all jurisdictions to collect data on a uniform basis, and improve the quality. These developments are guided by the National Child Protection and Support Services (NCPASS) data group, consisting of State and Territory and AIHW representatives.

²² AIHW (2002) *Child protection Australia 2001–02*, Child Welfare Series no. 32, AIHW Cat. No. CWS 20, Canberra.

Childcare service statistics

The Commonwealth through FaCS provides financial assistance to meet the cost of centre-based childcare for low-income families. Each year FaCS conducts a census of all childcare service providers funded by the department (Table 6.9). Information collected refers to a reference period of one week (i.e. 14-20 August). Personal information concerning a child, including Indigenous status, is extracted from enrolment forms.

Table 6.9 Census of child care services

Data description	Commonwealth funded childcare services
Agency responsible for data collection and dissemination	Department of Family and Community Services Woden ACT 2606 http://www.facs.gov.au/
Key data	Children's age, address, labourforce status of parents, hours worked and fees paid, English speaking background. Staff characteristics: age, location, employment pattern, type of work, qualification and experience, hours worked and in-service training received in the previous year. Type of services provided by service outlets.
Collection and publication	Annual
Geographic level	State and Territory
Able to be provided at a regional level?	Yes
Comments	Over 98% of service providers report by the due date.

Education and training statistics

Regular statistical collections by government agencies on Indigenous education covering preschools and schools can be produced at a sub-State level.

Preschool statistics

The National Indigenous Preschool Census is the main database currently available on preschool children, their enrolment details and service providers (Table 6.10). This database is maintained by the Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST), and includes data collected from:

- private preschools by Data Analysis Australia (DAA); and
- government preschools by State and Territory educational departments.

Table 6.10 Preschool statistics

Data description	National statistics on children attending government or non-government preschools and preschool service providers.
Agency responsible for data collection and dissemination	Collection: Private preschools: Data Analysis Australia (DAA) for DEST Government Preschools: State and Territory educational departments Dissemination: Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST), PO Box 9880, Canberra ACT 2601 http://www.dest@gov.au/
Key data	Child's age, sex, total hours per week attending and the sessional participation. Preschool programs, childcare facilities, number of children, priority access for Indigenous children and number of Indigenous children on waiting list.
Collection and publication	Annual
Geographic level	States and Territories
Able to be provided at a regional level?	Yes
Comments	Despite State and Territory variations in the data items collected there is a broad consistency in key data produced by the collection.

School statistics

The major source of data on enrolments, students and staff is the National School Statistics Collection (NSSC) by ABS for

- government schools collected annually by ABS direct from the State and Territory education departments; and
- non-government schools collected by from DEST (Table 6.11)

Table 6.11 National School Statistics collection

Data description	Statistics on students and staff in all government and non-government schools
Agency responsible for data collection and dissemination	Australian Bureau of Statistics PO Box 10 Belconnen, ACT 2610 http://www.abs.gov.au/
Key data	Schools: category, affiliation, type (primary, secondary, combined or other), enrolments Students: number, age, sex, school year, and level of schooling. Staff: number including full-time equivalent (FTE), sex, classification of staff (teaching, specialist support, administrative, clerical etc).
Collection and publication	Annual
Geographic level	States and Territories
Able to be provided at a regional level?	Yes—regional data from private school collection could be obtained from DEST. Data for Government Schools could be obtained from respective States and Territory Education Departments.
Comments	Comparability of the information is affected by variations in schooling policies and practices and in staff categories. Although the Indigenous status of students is available from NSSC, it does not identify the Indigenous status of school staff.

*Indigenous Education Strategic Initiatives Programme (IESIP):
performance indicators*

Under IESEP, preschools and schools receive financial and other resources to improve accessibility to education for Indigenous children. Funds are provided under the *Indigenous Education (Supplementary Assistance) Amendment Act 1996*, which provided for the Commonwealth to make Supplementary Recurrent Assistance (SRA) grants to educational institutions.

A set of performance indicators has been developed for preschool and school sectors. Each State and Territory education department is required to report to DEST performance in their respective educational institutions against agreed indicators. A complete list of performance indicators agreed under the RSA for preschools and schools is given in the earlier OEA Evaluation report.²³

Although DEST collects the permeance indicators for individual educational facility in the State or Territory, underlying base statistics are not generally available. Regional Council area data could be obtained direct from State and Territory education departments.

Housing statistics

National statistics on housing and infrastructure for Regional Council planning purposes are available from two main sources:

- collections maintained by States and Territories under the provision of the Commonwealth State Housing Agreements (CSHA); and
- housing related assistance provided through Commonwealth agencies such as FaCS.

Commonwealth State Housing Agreements (CSHA)

Under the *Housing Assistance Act 1996*, the Commonwealth provides grants and enters into agreements with State and Territory governments on housing matters. The 1996 Commonwealth State Housing Agreement (CSHA), provided for greater flexibility in funding, accountability and an outcome focus. The current CSHA (1993-2003) requires an outcome measurement framework for reporting against a core set of indicators. Under the CSHA, all parties agreed to a Minimum Data Set (CSHA-MDS) for reporting (Table 6.12) AIHW has primary responsibility to process, analyse and publish data from the CSHA collection as follows:

- Aboriginal Rental Housing Program (ARHP);
- Crisis Accommodation Program (CAP);
- Community Housing Program (CHP);
- Private Rent Assistance (PRA); and
- Home Purchase Assistance (HPA).

²³ ATSIC (2002) *Outcome data measurement. Unfinished business. Evaluation of data for outcome measurement for selected Indigenous service delivery programs*, Office of Evaluation and Audit, ATSIC, Elect Printing, Canberra.

Table 6.12 Minimum Data Set collection (CSHA-MDS)

Data description	Information on services funded under CSHA.
Agency responsible for data collection and dissemination	Collection: State and Territory housing agencies Dissemination: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, PO Box 570, Canberra ACT 2601 http://www.aihw.gov.au/
Key data	Consumers – postcode, selected letters of first and last name (for linkage), date of birth, gender and country of birth. Indigenous origin.
Collection and publication	Annual
Geographic level	State and Territory
Able to be provided at a regional level?	Yes
Comments	Dwellings are, in most jurisdictions, determined as Indigenous when the head of the household, or the applicant, identifies as an Indigenous person. This is determined at the time of application or when the dwelling is allocated. Indigenous status of a household could change either by an Indigenous person moving into or out of a household.

Supported Accommodation Assistance Program

The Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) targets homeless people through a network of some 1,200 agencies contracted by State and Territory governments. Funding arrangements require each agency to provide to State and Territory governments information on clients' circumstances and on the type of services provided. This information forms the basis of a national data collection maintained by AIHW. Although SAAP collection does not represent all persons who are homeless, it nevertheless is a useful source for policy development (see Table 6.13).

Table 6.13 Supported Accommodation Assistance Program

Data description	Persons assisted by Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP)
Agency responsible for data collection and dissemination	Collection: State and Territory family service agencies Dissemination: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, PO Box 570, Canberra ACT 2601 http://www.aihw.gov.au/ Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services, Woden ACT 2606 http://www.facs.gov.au/
Key data	Age, gender, family composition, and labourforce status of applicant; housing before SAAP; living arrangements.
Collection and publication	Annual
Geographic level	State and Territory
Able to be provided at a regional level?	Yes
Comments	FaCS released in 2001 a report covering Indigenous SAAP clients. There are some concerns however, as to whether the concept of 'homelessness' used in SAAP collection is accurately capturing homelessness in Indigenous communities by taking into account transient homelessness, psychological homelessness and occupancy of improvised dwellings.

Income support program collections (Centrelink/FaCS)

Centrelink and the Department of Family and Community Services deliver a range of Commonwealth programs to the Australian community. The Commonwealth Government aims to reduce social welfare dependency through stronger families, stronger communities and economic and social participation under the Australians

Working Together (AWT) policy. The focus of the policy package is the provision of a combined service with emphasis on community and family partnerships. Centrelink and FaCS provide a number of services to eligible persons or families including:

- family assistance;
- youth and student support (Austudy/Abstudy);
- child and child care support;
- housing and community support;
- labour market assistance;
- carer support; and
- support for the aged

These services identify the Indigenous status of recipients based on self-identification. However, this information is not currently available at the sub-State level. FaCS has established a longitudinal database containing details of client characteristics and benefits, including family details. This database consists of information extracted fortnightly. Data are available from 1995.

From this database a 1% sample data file has been created for detailed policy analysis by FaCS. Given the small size of the Indigenous clients, the 1% sample may not yield satisfactory results for Indigenous policy development and analysis at a Regional Council level. The evaluation team has been informed that development of an Indigenous specific longitudinal database is under consideration by FaCS.

Overcoming gaps in available information

7

Introduction

This chapter highlights barriers to the development of a database at the Regional Council level. It suggests measures that ATSIIS could consider to develop a database that would have application at National, State and Regional Council levels and support the information needs of ATSIIC and Regional Councils. It also highlights key gaps in information which impact on Regional Council in performing their functions of planning, outcome measurement and advocacy.

Development of an Indigenous regional database

Barriers

A number of factors operate as barriers to the development of a regional statistics system based on Regional Councils areas. In principle, access to data from State and Territory agencies is difficult, owing partly to the sensitive nature of such information and partly to legislative provisions protecting the confidentiality of personal information. Confidentiality is a particular problem when statistics are requested for small geographic areas. The population identified by the 2001 Census as being of Indigenous origin comprised 2.4% of the total Australian population.²⁴ The distribution of the Indigenous population across 35 Regional Councils is largely uneven as depicted in Table 7.1.

Of the 35 Regional Councils, five had an Indigenous population of 20,000 or more and a further 11 had between 10,000 and 20,000. The vast majority of Regional Councils located in the Northern Territory, South Australia and Western Australia have Indigenous populations of fewer than 10,000, with some having fewer than 5,000. As Regional Councils with low Indigenous population numbers are mostly located in remote areas of Australia, it is likely that the number of clients served by different agencies in these areas will also be low. This could prevent these agencies releasing detailed information on their clients for Regional Council areas due to privacy considerations.

²⁴ ABS (2002) *Population distribution Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians*, ABS Cat. No. 4705.0, Australian Bureau of Statistics, Canberra.

Another problem caused by the small size of the Indigenous population in some Regional Councils is the inability to compute meaningful statistics to be used to measure program outcomes. For example, the performance indicator framework developed to measure Indigenous outcomes by the MCATSIA Task Force for the SCRCSSP²⁵ recommends that expectation of life at birth be used as a key headline indicator of overall health. Although the risk of death among the Indigenous population is higher than non-Indigenous Australians, the number of deaths in sparsely populated regions is not large enough to calculate life tables to derive life expectancies.

Table 7.1: Distribution of Regional Councils in State and Territory by size of the Indigenous Population, 2001

State/Territory	<5000	5,000-10,000	10,000-20,000	20,000 or more	All
NSW/ACT	-	1	2	3	6
Vic.Tas	-	-	3	-	3
Qld	-	2	4	1	7
WA	6	2	-	1	9
SA	1	1	1	-	3
NT	2	4	1	-	7
All	9	10	11	5	35

Source: ABS (2002).

This problem is further complicated by uncertain population counts by age produced by censuses for most Regional Council areas. Current boundaries of Regional Councils do not necessarily align with State and Territory administrative sub-divisions, or with Census Collection Districts on which key ABS collections and many State and Territory collections are made. When 60 Regional Councils were initially established by the ATSIC Act, there was a close alignment of Regional Council boundaries with those of the census Collection Districts demarcated for the 1986 Census.

The alignment changed when the number of Regional Councils was reduced to 35 (excluding the Torres Strait Regional Authority), making it difficult to provide statistics for Regional Councils affected by the boundary changes. This is an issue for consideration by ATSIS if Regional Council boundaries are changed again.

²⁵ SCRCSSP (Steering Committee for the Review of Commonwealth/State Service Provision) (2003) *Report on Government Services 2003. Indigenous Compendium*, Productivity Commission, Canberra.

The lack of coordination between multiple service providers within a region, involving different levels of government, as well as within government agencies themselves, adversely affects the development of a reliable database at the regional level. The absence of institutional links between service providers and those who need their statistics (i.e. Regional Councils) is also a key factor. As there are a number of agencies involved in service delivery the capacity to develop a consistent database is limited. Some agencies collect data using their own concepts and definitions and using methodologies different from other agencies. These could produce results which are not only inconsistent but contradictory.

A further issue for Regional Councils arising from multi-agency involvement in Indigenous service delivery is obtaining details of individual agency program expenditure. A study conducted for the Department of Health and Human Services (now Health and Ageing) highlighted this issue. The study commented that, due to the complex arrangements and diversity of funding methods employed in Indigenous health care delivery systems at the regional level and the under-identification of Indigenous people in most collections including the Census, it was difficult to estimate the actual cost of health service provision. Any estimates currently available on health expenditure are based on a fair amount of guesswork.²⁶

The Gordon Inquiry Report commented that most agencies work in 'silos' and consequently focus only on the areas of activity relevant to a particular program. The many problems experienced by Indigenous people in accessing services are not separate or isolated. Rather, they are multifaceted and interactive. Therefore, inter-agency cooperation and information sharing is necessary for effective service delivery to Indigenous communities and for monitoring outcomes.

Strengthening the statistical reporting system

With the implementation of the 'separation of powers' concept in the Indigenous policy and program environment at the Commonwealth level, policy development, monitoring and advocacy become central functions of ATSIC and especially Regional Councils. This will undoubtedly create new demands for data. In this regard, statistical information is a vital component to maintain accountability of projects that are delivered by public monies. Monitoring and evaluation backed by evidence-based information will, therefore, be vitally important. A lack of this type of information has adverse consequences for the service delivery agency as well as for program managers who are accountable for the expenditure of public funds. The success or failure of the process of Regional Council planning, outcome measurement and advocacy may depend on how ATSIIS meets this challenge, as

²⁶ See for example, Deeble, J, Mathers, C, Smith, L, Goss, J, Webb, R and Smith, V (1998) *Expenditures on health services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people*, AIHW Cat. No. HWE 6, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Canberra.

well as how it can coordinate and integrate with statistical agencies of the Commonwealth (i.e. ABS, AIHW, and AIC) and State and Territories. ATSIS should recognise the challenge that it faces in meeting ATSIC's information needs and develop the capacity to undertake policy research to provide advice to ATSIC and Regional Councils. Demand for information would arise also from ATSIS Program Managers, who see the benefit of using evidence-based information to develop and improve Indigenous programs and performance measuring. Such data requirements should also be a key consideration in any development of an ATSIS Indigenous database. Therefore, statistical and technical (system) capabilities of ATSIS should be developed and strengthened to meet the growing demand for data at the Regional Council level.

There is no doubt that the adequacy of data available is a major factor in determining the quality of regional plans. Very often, strategies developed without supporting evidence are bound to fail because of over-optimistic targets. However, the effectiveness of the planning, monitoring and advocacy functions of Regional Councils is not guaranteed by the mere availability of statistical information.

Regional Councillors and Regional Office staff need advice on what these statistics actually mean. Thus, the capacity to interpret statistics and undertake research is essential. The OEA Survey results revealed that most Regional Managers recognise the need to improve the skills of staff tasked with assisting Regional Councils in planning and monitoring functions.

In respect of policy research and analysis, the National Office of ATSIS has a major role to play. ATSIS has a number of national policy units, each of which is responsible for developing policies and advising ATSIC on various policy matters. Up until now, the level of policy analysis undertaken has, however, been limited mainly due to resource and data constraints. For policy analysis ATSIC and ATSIS, therefore, rely heavily on outputs of other agencies, mainly, the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research (CAEPR) and the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATIS) or external consultants.

A possible way forward

The previous evaluation²⁷ proposed that a statistical unit within ATSIC be established to:

- assist ATSIC (now ATSIIS) Program Managers to design information recording forms/survey forms;
- coordinate with other agencies on developments in statistical and performance indicators;
- assist Program Managers in the on-going development of performance indicators;
- undertake policy oriented research; and
- provide statistics to Program Managers and ATSIC as required for planning and monitoring program outcomes.

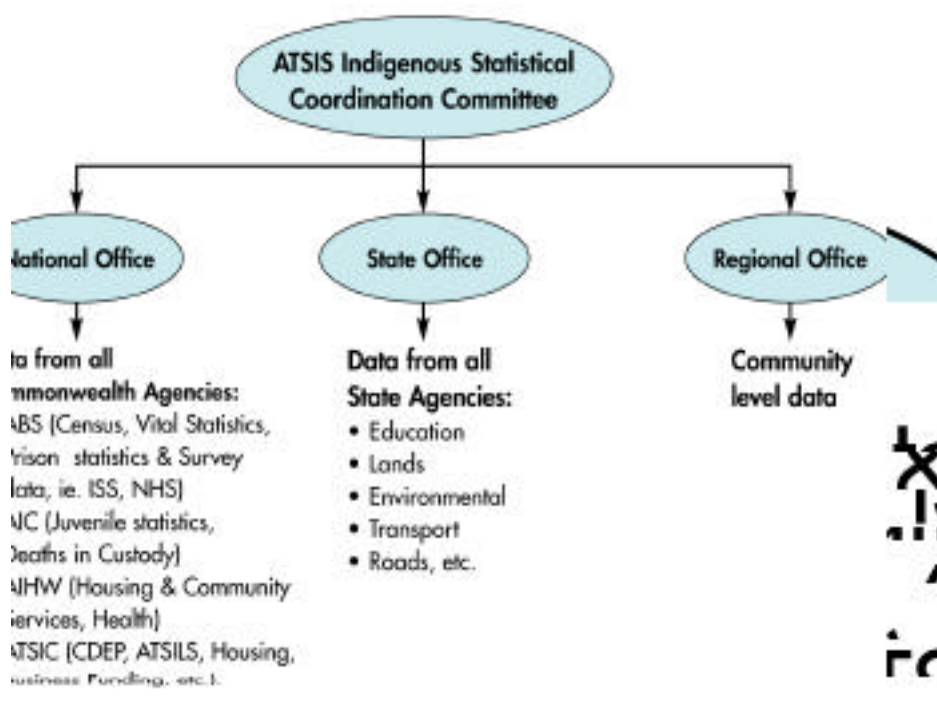
ATSIC established a Statistical Unit within the National Office. Under new administrative arrangements, it became a part of ATSIIS on 1 July 2003. The present evaluation is of the view that the enhancement of statistical and research capabilities within ATSIIS should be a high priority if the planning, monitoring and advocacy functions of ATSIC and in particular Regional Councils are to be effective.

ATSIIS has responsibility to assist both ATSIC and Regional Councils to provide policy advice to government and information to support policy development and advocacy. Regional Managers should be able to access data on matters relating to regional planning and monitoring of program outcomes in their respective regions, both from ATSIIS and mainstream agencies.

To improve data available to ATSIIS and, in turn, to ATSIC the National Office of ATSIIS should consider establishing databases at the National, State and community levels, supported by Information Technology (IT) systems designs.

The present evaluation proposes that an Indigenous Statistical Coordinating Council (ISCC) be created to coordinate and oversee the development of statistical databases within ATSIIS to cover National, State and regional data needs.

²⁷ ATSIC (2002) *Outcome data measurement. Unfinished business. Evaluation of data for outcome measurement for selected Indigenous service delivery programs*, Office of Evaluation and Audit, ATSIC, Elect Printing, Canberra.



ABS has already set up a new centre known as the Rural and Regional Statistics National Centre (RRSNC) to compile and disseminate socio-economic data that will enable the study of causes of change across rural, regional and remote areas of Australia and the provision of statistical information for policy planning and monitoring trends. AIHW is also currently developing a similar database covering regional statistics relating to health and welfare. These two agencies are also responsible for the development of classification systems, data dictionaries and statistical standards for numerous areas of population, health and welfare statistics. It is therefore very important for ATSI to maintain a close liaison with these agencies to reap the benefit of the developments in the databases as well as the conceptual and statistical standards. This could be a function of the proposed coordinating committee of ATSI.

Development of the database at these three levels requires specialist system support from the IT section of ATSI. This support should include system design and development of user-friendly software to manipulate data in different geographic areas. The ISCC could make arrangements to purchase or acquire data from Commonwealth agencies, (mainly ABS, AIHW, Centrelink/FaCS and AIC) and update it on an on-going basis. ISCC could also coordinate and liaise with ATSI State Offices regarding databases used by State and Regional Offices of ATSI.

Box 7.1

Kullarri Region Outstation Data Collection System (KRODCS)

Kullarri Regional Council has established a community level database known as Kullarri Region Outstation Data Collection System (KRODCS) to collect up-to-date information on housing and infrastructure to be used by the Regional Council to assess Housing and Infrastructure needs of people living on outstations. With the development of a bilateral housing agreement in WA, there is now an increased need for up-to-date, accurate and detailed information at the community level—remote, major communities and town reserves—for assessing needs and for targeting housing and infrastructure resources.

KRODCS is an electronic MS Access database which is open for on-going development, with flexibility to include regional or community-specific information. The database was developed over the period from July 2001 to February 2002, and it became fully operational in March 2002. Data collection and updating is carried out by the field staff of ATSIIS, Resource Agencies and other service providers including the CDEP.

KRODCS was established to fill the significant data gaps existing on housing and infrastructure at the community level. KRODCS collects information in a disaggregated form, which has the advantage over other collections such as CHINS where the information is collected for the community as a whole by the Indigenous Housing Organisations or an informant chosen from respective communities.

Existing housing and infrastructure data collection systems (censuses and CHINS) fail to provide accurate information on homeless people who are not permanently residing in communities. Nor do they provide sufficiently reliable information to assess housing and infrastructure needs against the Australian Housing standards or the Common Reporting Framework. KRODCS is designed to collect detailed information on individuals and households, including:

- age and gender and relationships of persons living in dwelling;
- dependant children;
- primary and secondary carers;
- homeless people;
- condition of dwelling (improvised dwelling);
- sharing arrangement of dwellings with various extended family groups;
- multiple (2 or 3) residences a person might occupy during a given year to gain an understanding of the nature of occupancy of dwellings;
- outstation assets, infrastructure services (insurance details; electrical and water reticulation); and,
- distance to services.

To assist State Offices in the development of databases containing state specific data sets, it is suggested that a position of Statistical Officer be created in each State Office whose primary function, under the direction of the ISCC, would be to acquire all relevant data sets (i.e. education, health, land use, and transport) from State-agency collections. The Statistical officer needs to identify all data sets that are available from State agencies which could be disaggregated at the sub-state or sub-regional level that may be useful for ATSIC Regional Council planning and monitoring outcomes. This assessment should include a review of data quality as well.

At the community level, it may be necessary for ATSIS to fund the collection of socio-economic data and, where necessary, update Population census and CHINS data for communities. Such data collection activity will involve providing additional resources to Regional Offices. These additional resources could be sourced from existing ATSIS programs, such as CDEP, or through community capacity building initiatives. Alternatively, the additional resources required by Regional Offices could be sought from agencies involved in the delivery of services to Indigenous communities.

Given the nature and the type of planning priorities identified in most Regional Council plans, as reported by Regional Managers' responses to the OEA Survey, and the day-to-day data requirements for Regional Councils for representing Indigenous interests, this evaluation proposes that the ISCC should accord highest priority to the following areas identified as key data gaps when developing an Indigenous regional database.

Key data gaps

The previous evaluation examined the data available at the national level which could provide ATSIC Program Managers with statistical information to inform decision making and to monitor program outcomes. Over 80 data sets covering four sectors—law and justice, health, education and training, and housing and infrastructure—were examined for quality and usability for planning and outcome measurements using the following four-category classification:

- reasonably good;
- should be used with caution;
- not useful due to small sample size (or fewer number of clients in the collection); and
- not useful as they do not identify Indigenous people.

Population size

The Census is the key source for detailed data on geographic, demographic, and socio-economic characteristics of the Indigenous population. Problems of coverage of the Census and non-response to census questions are acute for Regional Council areas particularly in remote regions. As such concerns have been raised by community leaders, government agencies and service providers to communities about the accuracy of census population counts for communities, regions and State.

For example, a consultancy report prepared for the Queensland Government²⁸ attempted to compare the Census counts for 2001 for Indigenous communities in the State with the estimated population derived from a number of indirect data sources. This report revealed, among other things, that the Estimated Resident Population (ERP) of ABS for most remote communities was substantially lower than reconstructed populations for the same communities. Although the present evaluation cannot verify the accuracy of the population figures derived for those communities, it nevertheless shows potential problems in using census figures for the Indigenous population in remote areas for allocation of resources.

Population growth

While the Census provides the base population for a given community or Regional Council area, the change in population is determined by the natural increase (balance between births and deaths) and the volume of migration across geographic areas. Data on natural increase is derived from the births and death registration system. In most jurisdictions, the extent of Indigenous identification in birth and death registration is poor in all jurisdictions. The exceptions are the Northern Territory, South Australia and Western Australia. Even in these jurisdictions, however, it is difficult to assume that coverage of identification is uniformly high in all Regional Council areas.

Data required to estimate the effect of migration on the Indigenous population in Regional Council areas are presently not available. Although the Censuses ask each person of relevant age to indicate the place they were one year ago and five years ago, the information provided is incomplete. Discussion that the evaluation team had with Queensland Government officials revealed that Indigenous people normally provide details of their community of origin rather than the actual community (or geographic area) they were living at particular points in time.

²⁸ Taylor, J and Bell, M (2002) *Benchmarking ABS population estimates for Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities*, Discussion Paper 2/2002, Queensland Centre for Population Research, University of Queensland, Brisbane.

Housing

The Census is the primary data source to assess housing stock and key characteristics of a dwelling. Recent censuses do not collect data on materials used for walls, roof and floor. Such information is vital for housing policy in Indigenous communities. Furthermore, only a limited set of detailed statistical tables cross-classifying population characteristics with those of the dwelling are released by ABS.

CHINS has been funded by ATSIC to collect information on housing, infrastructure and access to essential services in discrete Indigenous communities and Indigenous Housing Organisations. Data collected through CHINS are considered useful at National and State levels and for some large Regional Council areas. Data reported for communities are of questionable quality. Without regular updating the information collected through CHINS may not be reliable, particularly for communities with mobile populations.

Labourforce

The only data source that could provide details at the Regional Council level is the five-yearly population Census. Census data becomes available 1-2 years after collection and soon becomes dated. ABS regular labourforce surveys, despite collecting detailed information to assess labourforce characteristics, cannot provide information at Regional Council level.

Income distribution

Currently data are not available to assess the income distribution of Indigenous families/households. Using individual tax-payer data derived from the annual income tax returns received by the Australian Taxation Office (ATO), ABS attempts to assess the income of different regional areas (i.e. Statistical Local Areas). However, neither the tax file number application form nor the annual tax return submitted to ATO by individuals has provision to record the Indigenous status of the individual. Therefore, ATO data cannot be used to assess the income details of Indigenous tax-payers.

Child abuse and neglect

These are issues of significance to Indigenous communities particularly in remote parts of Australia. As discussed in chapter 5, data on child abuse and neglect maintained by the State and Territory family services departments are processed and published by AIHW. These statistics, however, do not represent the actual incidence of child abuse in Indigenous communities as only cases brought to the attention of the authorities are included in the collection. The Gordon Inquiry

Report²⁹ commented on the poor status of statistics on child abuse and neglect and recommended that all agencies establish sound reporting mechanisms to enable policy development and monitoring of outcomes.

Domestic violence

Similar to child abuse and neglect, incidence of domestic violence in Indigenous communities cannot be assessed only from the reported cases to authorities. The ABS sample surveys discussed in chapter 3 do not have adequate coverage of Indigenous peoples to yield reliable information on domestic violence in the Indigenous population. Survey data is not provided at the sub-State level.

Alcohol and drug abuse

Data to measure the prevalence of alcohol and drug abuse among Indigenous people are not available at the regional level, even though these are recognised by governments as significant problems affecting many Indigenous communities. The impact of alcohol and drug abuse on the health status of Indigenous people could be gained by examining cause of death statistics and cause(s) of hospital morbidity linked to alcohol and drug use. Survey data that attempt to probe and collect alcohol and drug abuse is often unreliable because it is unlikely that a respondent will admit to the use of illicit drugs or alcohol consumption which may have links with domestic violence, crime and health risks.

²⁹ Gordon, S, Hallahan K, and Henry, D (2002) *Putting the picture together, inquiry into response by Government agencies to complaints of family violence and child abuse in Aboriginal communities*, Department of Premier and Cabinet, Western Australia.

Towards a consistent framework and structure of regional planning



Introduction

The emergence of a new operating environment has pointed to the desirability of a consistent framework and structure of regional planning to guide Regional Councils in developing their regional plans. While frameworks will reflect the concerns of each Regional Council based on the needs identified by communities, some consistency may assist in both the reporting and evaluation process at the national and regional levels.

Establishing linkages

Each regional plan considered at the workshop set out to do different things, based on the particular circumstances of each region. Even so there is a strong underlay of similarity between the approaches to achieve common ends resulting from the same broad areas of disadvantage. It is possible therefore to put together from this experience the pieces that might make a basic framework and structure for planning without prescribing the content of a regional plan. The framework incorporated in this section attempts to do this. Regional Councils may use it as a template against which to assess their own plans and apply it where appropriate to their own circumstances.

It is recognised that the circumstances of communities in each region will determine the structure and content of the plan. Indeed it would be wrong to suggest that there is one specific scheme or approach for developing a regional plan. To do so would be inconsistent with community decision-making in what are crucial resolutions of very significant social, economic and cultural issues.

A consistent planning structure would seek to demonstrate the linkage between the setting of policies and goals at one level (s. 94(1)(a) of the *ATSIC Act*) and assisting agencies to identify specific programs, projects and funding to give effect to these policies and goals at the regional and community levels (s. 94(1)(b) of the *ATSIC Act*).

Agencies themselves have a responsibility in delivering their services to work with Regional Councils throughout the planning process to ensure some alignment between agency outputs and community development aspirations.

A draft framework template

The observations in this section are intended to provide a summary background to the regional planning process.

Regional planning with a clear and strong development focus recognises the need to integrate economic, social, human, economic and cultural activities involving a variety of institutions and agencies which interact with each other. For each region there are similar interconnections between crucial instruments in service delivery to enhance opportunity and responsibility for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the regions. Multiple disadvantages require multiple responses and multiple interventions. A significant purpose of regional planning and activities of Regional Councils is to ensure that the impacts and interventions are influenced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people themselves.

The primary consideration and starting point in developing a regional planning framework is the evaluative research to provide a picture of the region, the communities in the region, and the families, elders, clans and individuals within those communities.

The experience of Regional Council planners is that from this information it is possible to construct an impression, in the first instance, of what the needs are, and to begin the process of Regional Councils exercising their own judgments and choices. Further community consultation as part of an interactive top down and bottom up process will lead to the identification of priority areas and, within those areas, key action plans.

This is not to suggest that the regional plan must be specific in action for all programs, but in identifying issues in relation to services and the key target areas, the plan provides guidance for those who have the resources and responsibility to deliver the services which will impact on the target areas. The plan should not be an endless wish list, but should focus on the priorities determined as a result of broad consultations with the communities.

The plan might indicate:

- those priorities requiring regional policy development and subsequent advocacy;
- directions for the funding of Regional Council initiatives; and
- projects requiring Commonwealth, State and local government resourcing or policy change.

The plan should also be able to identify those agencies responsible for service delivery within the planning framework. This requires interactive dialogue between the Regional Council and the agencies responsible in both the planning process and in the formulation of the plan itself. Where agencies have difficulty in relating their outputs to a regional plan there needs to be a resolution by the various parties of how this alignment might occur.

Delegates at the workshop identified two core issues in regional planning and meeting the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to provide as a starting point for the way regional plans are put together. These are:

- quality of life; and
- access to services.

Because regional planning is multi-dimensional, it may be divided into several parts involving:

A. Taking control:

- Determine what the plan is to achieve and how it relates to the legislative planning requirements.

B. Drawing the picture of the region:

- Examine the environment within which the Regional Council operates, validated by statistical information.

C. Setting priorities and strategies

- Identify key issues and formulate broad regional priorities and strategies for translation into programs and projects at the community level.

D. Evaluation, policy change and advocacy

- Monitor and assess the impact of programs and services at the community level.

How these parts might be incorporated in a regional planning process is outlined in Appendix 6.

Appendixes

Appendix 1

Evaluation reference groups:

Evaluation Advisory Group

Alfredson, Rod (Director, Office of Evaluation and Audit)

Brahim, Adrian (Kalgoorlie Regional Office)

Carroll, Robert Chairperson Binaal Billa (Wagga Wagga)

Johnson, Barry (State Policy Centre NSW) (from July 2003)

Malamoo, Toni (State Policy Centre Queensland) (till June 2003)

Nelson, Kerrie (National Policy Office)

Owen, Daniel (Department of Transport and Regional Services)
(from July Beswick, Wayne)

Evaluation Resource Group

Barrett, Graham (State Government WA)

Batho, Patrick (Office of Evaluation and Audit)

Johnson, Barry (NSW State Policy Centre)

Riley, Andrew (Many Rivers, Regional Office)

Gook, Geoff (National Policy Office)

Evaluation Reference Group

Cotter, Chris (Kullarri Regional Office)

Leverington, Marilyn (Port Augusta, Regional Office)

Hogan, Steve (Regional Office, Burke)

Martin-Jard, Joe (Tennant Creek, Regional Office)

Sheldon, Bill (National Policy Office)

Walker, Mark (Cairns and Districts Regional Office)

Appendix 2

OEA survey of regional planning and data issues

Questionnaire for Regional Managers

Regional Council:

Q.1a. Do you have a current Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in place with your Regional Council?

Q.1b. If yes, when was the MoU signed? Year

Q.2. Who has responsibility for the functions/activities listed below (either under the terms of the MoU or according to current practice)? For each function/activity listed please mark X in the appropriate box to indicate whether the Regional Council is responsible, Regional Office is responsible or both Regional Council (RC) and Regional Office (RO) share the responsibility.

Function/activity	Regional council (RC)	Regional Office (RO)	Both RC and RO	Not specified
Preparing regional plans				
Consulting communities & organisations				
Monitoring outcomes of funded projects				
Advocacy/advocacy support				
Coordinating with mainstream agencies				

Q.3. What is the current status of the regional plan? (Mark (X) for all boxes that apply.)

Council has a current regional plan	
Regional plan is under revision	
Council does not have a regional plan	
Other (please specify).....	

Q.4. Who contributed to the development (or revision) of the regional plan? (Mark (X) for all boxes that apply.)

Regional Council	
Regional Office	
Portfolio/Advisory committee (established under s.96 of the ATSIC Act)	
Consultant(s)	
Community organisations	
Government agencies	
Other (please specify)	

Q.5a. What are the key regional priorities identified in the regional plan? (List up to five.)

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5

Q.5b. How was the prioritisation done?

.....

.....

.....

.....

Q.6. Who had (or will have) the primary responsibility for drafting the regional plan? (Mark X in the box provided.)

Regional Council	
Regional Office	
Consultant(s)	
Other (please specify)	

Q.7. Is there evidence that mainstream/other agencies are considering the priorities identified in your regional plan when allocating funds? Please identify the key agencies and provide your response by in the table below by marking X in the appropriate box.

Name of agency	Generally used	Not used	Can't comment

Q.8. How can mainstream agencies be encouraged to use (or fully use) the regional plan when developing their plans and delivering services to Indigenous communities in the region?

.....

.....

.....

Q.9. Do you have staff specifically assigned to assist Regional Council in planning, outcome monitoring, advocacy support, and the supply of statistical information? (For each activity mark X in the appropriate box.)

Field of activity	Whether assigned a staff member	
	Yes	No
Planning		
Outcome monitoring		
Advocacy support		
Supply of statistical information		

Q.10. What type of training would benefit officer(s) assisting Regional Council in carrying out planning, program monitoring and statistical data interpretation functions?

Course type	Comments
Planning and policy formulation	
Monitoring outcomes	
Data analysis and interpretation	
Negotiation	
Any other (please describe)	

Q.11. Five yearly population censuses 0 If so, for each data set please give the information on the source, and frequency of data availability (i.e. annual, five yearly). Please use additional space if necessary.

Type of data	Data source	Frequency

Q.12. What statistical information is required for effective regional planning, outcome monitoring and the advocacy of regional Indigenous interests, but is currently not available? Please give details in the table provided. Please use additional space if necessary.

Type of information required but not currently available	Possible source	Comments

Q.13. Should ATSIC's Regional Council planning processes be linked with those of mainstream/other agencies? If so, how can this be done?

.....

.....

.....

.....

Q.14a. Are any changes necessary to increase the effectiveness of the current processes and practices adopted by the Regional Council in (a) planning, (b) outcome monitoring and (c) the advocacy of Indigenous interests in the region?

(a) Planning

.....

.....

.....

.....

(b) Outcome monitoring

.....

.....

.....

.....

(c) Advocacy

.....

.....

.....

.....

Q.14b. To give effect to your views do you think any amendment to the *ATSIC Act* is necessary? Please give details.

.....

.....

.....

.....

Thankyou for completing the survey questionnaire

Appendix 3: Report of the National Workshop

The planning experience

A national workshop “Regional Planning and Data Issues” held in Canberra on 15-16 May 2003 as part of the evaluation has informed the following sections of the report. Many of the observations are drawn directly from workshop papers and discussions. To give completeness, some additional examination was made of specific issues raised.

The workshop was attended by a cross-section of delegates from ATSIC, Regional Councils and Commonwealth and State Government agencies. It provided an opportunity to assess the experience of Regional Council planning, emerging planning issues, performance measurement, coordination arrangements, whole of government approaches to service delivery, and the relationship between regional plans and service delivery.

The outcomes of the workshop were drawn together around five questions:

1. How do we set the agenda?
2. What can we do with what we’ve got?
3. How can we ensure that agencies respond to what we want?
4. How do we work together?
5. What information do we need to measure results?

Presentations and discussions at the workshop have contributed directly to the development of a proposed regional planning framework to assist Regional Councils.

Because of the nature of the presentations, this summary is at three levels: descriptive, impressionistic and evaluative.

A regional perspective

The dimensions of regional planning were underlined by the Chairman of the Cairns and District Regional Council, Mr. Terry O’Shane, in providing a framework for regional plans at the national workshop.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, dispossessed and removed from their traditions, may forget that it was basic planning, the need to work together, and the discipline of living in the harshest country in the world that characterised the survival of Aboriginal people. For Indigenous people planning is not a new phenomenon. The lives of Aboriginal people were planned around the environment and the sustainability of both.

Mr. O'Shane said: "We live in a world driven by economics, and notions of effectiveness and efficiency, financial management and accountability. Economics, however, should not be the driving force. Rather it is the disadvantage of Australia's Indigenous people which should provide the platform for regional planning."

Mr. O'Shane identified two fundamental dimensions to regional planning—the need for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

- to plan collectively; and
- to work with other agencies to ensure that service delivery provides the full range of opportunities and benefits.

Underpinning regional planning are:

- the ATSIC charter;
- accountability;
- existing programs; and
- Indigenous disadvantage.

The regional plan can be seen as:

- a document;
- a process;
- team building;
- a unifying and cohesive force; and
- a partnership between Regional Councils and agencies and organisations responsible for the delivery of services.

Internally the planning process enables the Regional Council to engage with the administration and strengthen the team relationship between the "elected" and "administrative" arms.

Within the current legislative framework, Regional Councils contribute to the fulfilment of an object of the ATSIC Act:

to ensure coordination in the formulation and implementation of policies affecting Aboriginal persons and Torres Strait Islanders by Commonwealth, State, Territory and local governments, without detracting from the responsibilities of State, Territory and local governments to provide services to their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander residents.

At the same time, the regional plan, as an instrument of this coordination, provides a platform for going forward, constructively building on community needs, ideas and values, negotiating the future, providing the foundations to build sustainable projects and outcomes, bringing about change and developing self-esteem and self worth.

Among the key components of a regional plan are:

- good governance;
- coordination of service delivery;
- monitoring; and
- evaluation.

Each regional plan should indicate how Regional Councils should do business both within the ATSIC structure and with other agencies. Effective planning, therefore, is important in the way it links national, state and regional levels.

A compelling need in the regional planning process is to plan collectively and consciously with administration staff, incorporating and co-opting other agencies so that service delivery benefits people on the ground, which ultimately is the fundamental purpose of planning. To do this, the plan must identify the issues—economic, social and cultural, assess existing programs and identify gaps in service delivery based on an understanding of the region and community needs. The community development process associated with regional planning is, therefore, multi-dimensional requiring multiple interventions.

As an integral part of good governance, Regional Council planning builds community participation and inclusiveness, clarifies roles, and involves all stakeholders in a coherent process. The regional plan itself promotes leadership at the local level, strengthens localised decision-making, connects regional, state and national efforts, and establishes Indigenous control and ownership of the development agenda.

Regional planning based on an appraisal of the environment, available resources and overcoming disadvantage should provide the basis for long-term commitments involving all groups, interests and participants who have a responsibility to bring about change. It should provide a sound basis for the involvement and responsiveness of all government agencies funded to provide services.

Regional planning in action

The regional planning mandate of Regional Councils derives from the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission Act 1989*. Under s. 94 (1)(a), each Regional Council is required to:

Formulate, and revise from time to time, a regional plan for improving the economic, social and cultural status of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander residents of the region.

Section 94 (1) (b) of the Act requires Regional Councils:

to assist, advise and cooperate with the Commission, the TSRA, other Commonwealth bodies and State, Territory and local government bodies in the implementation of the regional plan.

Inherent in these functions is the need for cooperation between Regional Councils and agencies responsible for providing services.

Increasingly, Regional Councils are coming to realise the full potential of a regional plan in establishing relationships between them and communities and with government and service providers. The delivery of services is best provided against an analysis of the circumstances of each region, the aspirational goals of communities, the identification of needs and priorities, and the strategies to ensure their effective delivery to overcome disadvantage.

Regional plans live in two worlds—community and government.

Because of their strategic position in the policy setting and delivery network, Regional Councils have to respond to a number of agendas:

- their own;
- those set by the government;
- those set by the reconciliation framework of the Council of Australian Governments; and
- those required by ATSIC in its representation and advocacy role and in the development of national policies.

Internally, regional planning is imperative both to the region as a whole and to ATSIC and Regional Councils. Within the internal environment change needs to be communicated clearly to all staff so that they themselves can participate in bringing about change. The process has been described as “rapid acceleration” to achieve significant shifts of culture in service delivery in a very short time.

To function properly as a body a Regional Council needs to undertake planning to match resources with its own and ATSIC objectives, and to deliver outcomes on the ground to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Perth Noongar Regional Council

Goal

In establishing the framework for its regional planning process for 2003-2005 the Perth Noongar Regional Council agreed to focus on the following issues:

- youth and family
- governance and capacity building
- economic development
- sport and recreation
- education

Key Priority Area

- youth and family

At the community level, the extent to which local people are involved ensures local solutions to local problems, requiring a participative and inclusive planning process and a clear understanding of the dynamics of regional leadership and community development.

Regional and community decision-making may also result in reform from within.

Some Regional Councils, for instance, have felt constrained by existing organisational and community structures and in the planning process have questioned their suitability, particularly where it is felt that organisations need to

be more responsive to a regional approach, rather than operating as a number of discrete units, often performing similar functions which might more effectively be performed on a regional basis. One important area of reform in some regions has been the regionalisation of CDEP management and other service functions, such as health.

External influences can have a significant impact on communities. Responding to imposed requirements can be time consuming and resource intensive. At the same time Regional Councils see opportunities in linking with other planning processes and new program initiatives.

In analysing the external environment, Regional Councils examine how they interact with their clients—Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people—how they deliver services, and the perception and expectation that other agencies have of the region and how it operates. In responding to the external environment and from it creating a regional plan a Regional Council is better able to provide services to its clients and to engage with other agencies.

Balancing internal and external pressures invites the question: who controls the agenda.

A guidepost to development

While the regional plan as a product may vary in quality, Regional Councils now need to renew their commitment to regional plans as a foundation for their operations and serving their communities. Councils are coming to recognise that regional plans are central to the allocation of funds to community organisations, the provision of services by mainstream agencies, and to facilitate the role of Regional Councils as conduits between external demands and community needs.

The decision making rules of Regional Councils have required them to ensure that funding is consistent with priorities identified in regional plans. The same principle is inherently applicable to external agencies. For all funding decisions, the regional plan, therefore, is a reference point and a guidepost for community and regional development.

The connection between community needs and agency funding means that regional plans are important instruments in ensuring the effective coordination of service delivery by all agencies with responsibilities towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their responsiveness to community or area plans.

As governments seek new ways of delivering services, coordination has therefore become a major challenge. In doing so they have introduced a new concept in reform of government service delivery—“joined up” government. Simply put, this means all agencies work together in a common cause with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to develop and implement “seamless” program and service delivery within what Regional Councils might see as a single outcome or budget item.

A consequence for regional plans is that they need to become more comprehensive. They need to cover a wide range of issues, span a number of sectors, and penetrate cross-sectoral boundaries among the agencies responsible for providing services. To the extent that regional plans contribute to the outcomes of government agencies, through better targeting of resources their value increases proportionately. Regional plans also enhance the relevance of Regional Council as advocates and representatives of regional Indigenous interests.

Negotiation, cooperation, coordination, collaboration

An emerging issue associated with the comprehensiveness of regional planning is the process of negotiating agreements between government and their agencies and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

An initial impetus to the making of agreements was given by the *National Commitment to Improved Outcomes in the Delivery of Programs and Services for Aboriginal Peoples and Torres Strait Islanders* (the National Commitment) endorsed by the Council of Australian Governments on 7 December 1992 after prolonged negotiation between the Commonwealth, State and Local Governments.

The National Commitment endorsed a framework for improving outcomes incorporating agreed arrangements for planning, funding, coordination, delivery of services and agreements against a background of shared responsibilities.

The Governments agreed that the planning and delivery of services would take into account the planning role of Regional Councils under the *ATSIC Act* and the planning processes and advisory bodies established by State, Territory and Local Government. The framework provided for consultation with all spheres of government in the formulation of regional plans. Governments undertook to assist and support Regional Council planning processes by maintaining and enhancing linkages and coordination between ATSIC Regional Councils and State and Territory statutory advisory bodies, and other existing government planning and advisory processes.

A new climate of negotiation, cooperation, coordination and collaboration between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and Commonwealth and State agencies has emerged in recent years, leading to a range of frameworks, supported by formal agreements, to ensure the more effective delivery of services to Indigenous communities. These arrangements remain consistent with and build on the National Commitment.

Kullarri Regional Council

Vision Statement

- Sustainable Indigenous societies, communities, families and individuals enjoying our well-being.

Goal

- Regional autonomy (the authority to make and implement policies that affect us devolved from the centre to Indigenous people within the region.).

Sub-set goal:

- Efficient and effective Indigenous bodies making responsible and informed decisions for the better of our people in the region.

Many Rivers Regional Council

Core Values:

- respect for elders, the family unit and communities;
- cohesion within and between communities;
- recognition and respect for the inherent rights of the First People of the country;
- recognition and respect for traditional owners;
- recognition and respect for those with an historical or a contemporary connection with land;
- preservation of culture and heritage;
- identity intact and serving as a source of vigorous community revival.

Priorities

The council identified the following priorities:

- youth
- elders
- family
- capacity building (organisational and community governance)

Key Action Areas

- economic development
- culture and heritage
- health
- housing and infrastructure
- education
- law and justice
- sport
- capacity building
- transport

While there are developments along these lines in each State, two such arrangements in Queensland and Western Australia elevate the concept of partnership. The Queensland initiative relates to a specific region—the Cape York Partnership—and the Western Australian initiative is more broadly based covering the whole of the State in formal arrangements. Each offers guideposts for the future.

Regional Councils themselves are also recognising the critical nature of the “whole of government” process implicit in new coordination arrangements and the link between governance and service delivery.

The Murdi Paaki Regional Council has sought to enhance the process by creating Community Working Parties as forums for community planning, the identification of community needs, and negotiations with service providers. The Murdi Paaki framework seeks to link governance and service delivery structurally through elected community representation and engagement with service providers.

Agreement making has its own complexity. The number of agencies involved in service delivery and consequently the extent of the agreement making process can impact on the capacity of Regional Councils to participate effectively. At the same time, there would appear to be no process to evaluate how agreements are occurring and to monitor them within a coherent national framework. It is also argued that there are no requirements for agencies to take account of regional plans.

While a range of bilateral arrangements has been signed off at the national level, the agreements do not always identify the relationship to planning and processes at the regional level.

Some Regional Councils have seen value in utilising the potential of section 96 of the *ATSIC Act* empowering Regional Councils to establish advisory committees drawing outside agencies into the planning framework.

The Western Australian approach

In proposing a suggested framework for regional planning, the evaluation team has drawn on the initiative of the Western Australian government in its partnership framework *A Statement of commitment to a new and just relationship to negotiate a partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people*.

There are strong similarities between the approach of the Western Australian Government and the National Commitment, thus suggesting the continuing relevance of the National Commitment.

The statement of commitment involves structural arrangements that include a Social Policy Committee of Cabinet reporting directly to the Premier matched by an Indigenous State Advisory Committee.

The agreement provides for negotiated partnerships which:

- will be based on shared responsibility and accountability of outcomes;
- should be formalised through agreement;
- should be based on realistic and measurable outcomes supported by agreed benchmarks and targets;
- should set out the roles, responsibilities and liabilities of the parties; and
- should involve an agreed accountability process to monitor negotiations and outcomes from agreements.

The Partnership Framework establishes State-wide policies and administrative arrangements to support negotiations and agreements at the regional and local level. It will support Aboriginal people to negotiate regional and local agreements according to the priorities of Aboriginal people in partnership with other stakeholders. It will incorporate and be informed by separate agreements in the health, housing, essential services, native title, justice and other issues that impact on Aboriginal people in the State.

The Partnership Framework will address:

- a whole of Government/community approach based on negotiated policy benchmarks and targets;
- regional negotiated agreements incorporating integrated planning involving ATSIC, community organisations and State and local government;
- agreed processes for audit and evaluation of negotiations and outcomes;
- reform of government and Aboriginal organisational infrastructure where required to ensure the implementation of the partnership agreement.

Statement of Commitment to a New and Just Relationship between the Government of Western Australia and Aboriginal Western Australians

Partnership Framework

The Parties agree that the most effective means of translating the above principles into meaningful action and outcomes is by way of regional agreements, based on partnerships.

The parties agree that between Aboriginal people and the Western Australian Government there will be negotiated partnerships which:

- will be based on shared responsibility and accountability of outcomes;
- should be formalised through agreement;
- should be based on realistic and measurable outcomes supported by agreed benchmarks and targets;
- should set out the roles, responsibilities and liabilities of the parties; and
- should involve an agreed accountability process to monitor negotiations and outcomes from agreements.

The Partnership Framework will establish State-wide policies and administrative arrangements to support negotiations and agreements at the regional and local level.

The Partnership Framework will support Aboriginal people to negotiate regional and local agreements according to the priorities of Aboriginal people in partnership with other stakeholders.

The Partnership Framework should incorporate and be informed by separate agreements in the health, housing, essential services, native title, justice and other issues that impact on Aboriginal people in this State.

Funding arrangements

In the new environment of coordinated service delivery, regional plans help stitch together the funding available directly to Regional Councils from the Commonwealth Government and the services provided by mainstream agencies. In this way regional plans help overcome the constraints imposed by programs.

The Commonwealth Grants Commission observed in its *Report on Indigenous Funding* that the functions covered by its inquiry—health, housing, infrastructure, education, training and employment—were split between the Commonwealth, State and local governments. The split involved complex interrelationships which have implications for program design, funding and service delivery.

The decision by the Commonwealth Government to separate policy from individual funding decisions by creating a new agency—Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Services—independent of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission and Regional Councils has given a new dimension and impetus to regional plans.

Formal relationships between ATSIS as a service agency and ATSIC and Regional Councils responsible for policy, advocacy and regional planning could have significant flow on effects for future arrangements linking regional planning and all Commonwealth agencies. In announcing the new arrangements, the Minister stated that government would support ATSIC and Regional Councils to extend their influence and engage with mainstream agencies with greater credibility and authority.

The Indigenous Communities Coordination Task Force

A significant development in inter-governmental cooperation and coordination of funding and projects at the regional level has been the establishment of the Indigenous Communities Coordination Task Force under the aegis of the Council of Australian Governments. A budget initiative associated with the work of the Task Force is the creation of an Indigenous flexible funding pool. Together they support cross-portfolio initiatives in specific locations identified as COAG Indigenous Coordination Trial sites to implement a “whole of government” approach to service delivery.

The overall aim is to provide more flexible programs and services based on priorities agreed with communities through a partnership of shared responsibility. The lessons learned from these cooperative approaches in ten pilot areas will have potential to be applied more broadly.

Communities participating in COAG trials will be able to use the funding pool to kick start a wide range of projects to build capacity and improve social and economic wellbeing. The trials are expected to be completed by the end of 2003, after which they will be evaluated.

Performance data

The quality of a regional plan is a major contributor to and often determines the quality of the service delivery process and the way funds are allocated. Part of that quality depends on the range of data necessary and available to enable the regional plan to make informed judgements about the region, its community priorities and development strategies.

Whatever deficiencies there are in available data, the overriding consideration is the benefit of regional plans to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people—the improvement of the quality of life of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, access to services, and overcoming disadvantage.

One difficulty raised in the translation of government program outcomes into the broad quality of life aspirations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is that regional plans often are very inspirational. While this might be seen as an impediment to the alignment of government outcomes with community goals, the plans also allow flexibility. They are, after all, meant to be much broader than programs. They are not in a position to define specific inputs and funding allocations. A particular issue for regional planning then is to ensure that agencies and Regional Councils work together in the planning process to effect the alignment.

Murdi Paaki Regional Council

Vision Statement

The Murdi Paaki people are entitled to recognition and deserve respect, politically, culturally, socially and humanely.

Strategies:

- the good governance and administration of our Regional Council, its ancillary organisations, and of State and Commonwealth government agencies;
- strengthening and preserving our culture and our lifestyles,
- supporting and enhancing the living standards of our people,
- working together towards self-sufficiency in all of our activities; and
- improving the access of our people to mainstream service provision.

Key regional priorities

- improving the health and well being of children and young people;
- improving educational attainment and school retention;
- helping families to raise healthy children; and
- strengthening community and regional governance structures.

Cairns and District Regional Council

A Framework

- the vision
- process
- implementation

Process

- preliminary workshop;
- map the environment;
- define the guiding principles for the plan;
- prepare a mission statement to reflect the key responsibilities of the Council;
- establish a planning reference group;
- organise community forums;
- draft the plan; and
- conduct forum of interested parties to finalise the strategies.

Structure

- vision
- guiding principles
- main aims
- desired outcomes
- strategies
- actions required to take the plan forward and create impacts;
- priority areas for attention; and
- strategies to target these areas.

Because the imposed performance management concepts of inputs, outputs and outcomes are often interpreted differently not only by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities but by the agencies themselves, there is obviously a need in the performance measurement process, identified by the workshop, for a shared understanding of what the terminology means.

From a community perspective, the Chairman of the Cairns and District Regional Council, Mr. Terry O'Shane, questioned how it was possible to judge outcomes in relation to poverty. Comments at the national workshop suggested the need to build an understanding of the causes of poverty and relate these to local statistical analysis and strategy formulation.

Related to these issues is how Regional Councils can report on the impacts of complementary services and programs on whole communities, involving an assessment of the performance of other agencies. In other words, how is the situation of

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities being improved? ATSIC Regional Managers argue that there are challenges in the barriers resulting from service delivery being program centric. One solution may lie in a directional change from compliance to development.

The National Commitment affirmed a planning framework which "identifies, and establishes clear and measurable objectives, agreed outcomes and performance indicators."

Two sets of performance indicators—headline indicators and strategic change indicators—have been proposed to be used in measuring program outcomes of Indigenous people. While these two sets of indicators may be applicable to performance measurement at the national level and to some states with a large Indigenous population, it may be necessary for ATSIC to examine to what extent these indicators are feasible and appropriate to be used for outcome measurements at the Regional Council level.

Although efforts continue to provide the necessary performance and outcomes data, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people themselves remain the best judges of their needs and the impact of programs and services on their communities. In the absence of relevant statistical data, qualitative data involving judgments at the local level become important in assessing need and measuring outcomes.

A criticism of ATSIC's grants management processes has been that performance indicators often do not capture the positive impacts of grant funding and cannot be aggregated and reported at a national level. This suggests again the value, not to be dismissed, of qualitative assessments by the people whose lives are directly affected.

Conclusion

Regional planning must now be responsive to the changing environment in Indigenous Affairs. This environment has been influenced by a number of factors:

- new policy directions by individual Commonwealth and State Governments and collectively through the Council of Australian Governments;
- recognition of the need for all spheres of government to work together with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people;
- pressures to achieve better coordination among and within governments; and
- efforts by Governments to focus delivery arrangements at the community level through greater participation in decision-making requiring conceptualising and measuring need and the nature of service delivery.

Coordination of the kind being undertaken by governments requires an effective planning mechanism that assists government as well as acts as a negotiating platform for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

A particular focus of such planning is to ensure that government outcomes, determined in the budgetary process, are consistent with and aligned to how Indigenous people perceive their own development opportunities and service needs. Such an alignment would aim to ensure that Regional Councils have leverage with agencies responsible for service delivery.

The regional planning mandate of Regional Councils under the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission Act 1989* establishes the fundamental link between the planning process (s. 94 (1)(a)) and cooperative arrangements with government bodies in the implementation of the regional plan. This should be seen as a reciprocal responsibility in the interests of both.

A starting point along this path would be the new arrangements to be prescribed between ATSIIS and ATSIC now that specific funding responsibility has been removed from ATSIC.

If Regional Councils expect agencies to align their decision-making with regional plans, and if agencies require more definition in regional plans to ensure their funding accountability, the quality of those plans in many instances may need to be improved. Some important aspects of accountability may be more appropriate at subsidiary levels of planning and implementation which form part of the regional planning framework. Such accountability imposes the need for responsiveness by agencies at the local level.

While this imposes new requirements on Regional Councils, it also imposes particular responsibilities on government agencies to change the way they do business with Regional Councils and Indigenous communities. There are positive signs that this transformation is occurring under the impetus of effective Regional Council leadership and advocacy.

A number of issues flow from the deliberations of the workshop. They include:

- the need for appropriate resourcing of regional planning activities;
- the desirability of a consistent national governance and service delivery framework building on the *National Commitment to Improved Outcomes in the Delivery of Services for Aboriginal Peoples and Torres Strait Islanders* (the National Commitment) in the new environment of Indigenous Affairs;
- government agencies (including the new agency of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Services) and Regional Councils being required to work together in the development and implementation of regional plans so that roles and responsibilities may be clearly defined and accepted and resource assistance provided by the agencies concerned;
- the desirability of centralised support for a coordinating, implementation, monitoring and reporting point for regional and community planning and its outcomes in terms of services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and the measurement of outcomes;

- whether existing arrangements can be strengthened by more clearly defining the responsibility of agencies to work within the regional planning framework agencies and to provide appropriate services whether directly or on a purchaser-provider basis;
- the linking of national data requirements and regional and community information needs; and
- the need for a structural template for regional plans drawn from the experience of Regional Councils themselves to assist in developing future regional plans that integrate national, regional and community objectives and establish the foundations of coordination with agencies.

The advocacy role of Regional Councils

Directly related to the regional planning process and the outcomes to be achieved from regional plans is the role of Regional Councils to advocate the interests of the regions and their communities.

Section 94 (1) (e) of the *ATSIC Act* requires Regional Councils to:

“Represent the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander residents of the region and to act as an advocate of their interests.”

Enhancing the advocacy role of Regional Councils pursuant to the *ATSIC Act* could be one outcome of a coherent and consistent regional planning process to which external agencies can relate in planning their own service delivery arrangements and giving Regional Councils leverage with them.

The primacy given to regional planning is an important element in the authority of Regional Councils to engage with all agencies in the region delivering services. To the extent that regional plans draw on evidenced based information to identify needs against the disadvantages of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people the more likely are Regional Councils to achieve, either through advocacy or government commitment, an equitable allocation of funds.

At the national level the Commission has a function under 7(1) (b) of the Act to:

Monitor the effectiveness of programs for Aboriginal persons and Torres Strait Islanders, including programs conducted by bodies other than the Commission.

Section 7(1) (e) empowers the Commission to advise the Minister on the coordination of the activities of other Commonwealth bodies that affect Aboriginal persons or Torres Strait Islanders.

At the Canberra workshop, it was argued that while the *ATSIC Act* provided for the Commission to monitor the activities of other agencies, there were no procedures and no methodology to do it.

If regional planning is to have meaning, Regional Councils must be able to ensure the responsiveness of mainstream agencies both to regional plans and their advocacy as an integral part of the regional planning process.

Among the suggestions put forward at the national workshop to promote advocacy were:

- use available data strategically in public presentations;
- leverage funds and policy changes;
- get outputs and outcomes right;
- provide quality information through discussion papers and other policy documents reflecting the circumstances of each region;

- recognise and respond to Regional Council responsibilities under the ATSIC Act;
- be politically aware;
- encourage a more entrepreneurial approach by administrative staff;
- change the way agencies do business with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people;
- encourage Regional Councils to broaden their focus to a more strategic role, a process that might be facilitated by the recent machinery of government changes removing funding decisions from Regional Councils;
- participate in other regional planning processes;
- change the way we view the world;
- change organisational culture;
- build negotiating capacity;
- provide more resources to enable councils to plan more effectively and take on the advocacy role;
- seize the opportunity to form better alliances and to utilise others in the network;
- work more closely with representative bodies in relation to native title and priorities;
- develop clearer policy strategies and criteria;
- have the legislative capacity to monitor the performance of agencies contributing to the development of Indigenous communities;
- form better relationships with other agencies;
- play much more of a leadership role;
- fill the void for those willing partners wanting advice from elected Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people;
- take some real ownership of issues in terms of agendas that are set by others and build on the opportunities they offer;
- accept the challenge for Regional Councils to reach some consensus representing a diverse group of users.

Appendix 4

Table A 4.1: Census topics	Census year		
Question item or information available	2001	1996	1991
A. Population characteristics			
Demographic and social characteristics			
Age	√	√	√
Sex	√	√	√
Marital status	√	√	√
Citizenship	√	√	√
Indigenous status:			
(a) Aboriginal	√	√	√
(b) Torres Strait Islander	√	√	√
(c) Both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander	√	√	x
Ancestry	√	x	x
Religion	√	√	√
Language spoken at home other than English	√	√	√
Relationship to the reference persons (1st person)	√	√	√
Family/household	√	√	√
Children ever born (for women 15 years and over)	x	√	x
Geographic and migration characteristics			
Place of enumeration	√	√	√
Place of usual residence	√	√	√
Previous residence (a) residence 1 year ago	√	√	√
Previous residence (b) residence 5 years ago	√	√	√
Country of birth	√	√	√
Birth place of parents (whether born overseas)	√	√	√
Section-of State	√	√	√
Literacy and education			
Ability to speak English well	√	√	√
Education:			
(a) whether attending a school or any other educational institution	√	√	√
(b) type of educational institution attending	√	√	√
(c) highest level of primary or secondary school completed	√	√	√
(d) age left school (for persons aged 15 years or more)	√	√	x

√ = Available

x = Not available

* = Hours worked in the main job.

Table A 4.1 continued over page

Table A 4.1: Census topics <i>(continued)</i>	Census year		
Question item or information available	2001	1996	1991
<i>Educational qualification:</i>			
(a) whether any trade certificate or other educational qualification completed	✓	✓	✓
(b) level of highest qualification completed	✓	✓	✓
(c) year of completion of the qualification	✓	✓	✓
(d) main field of educational qualification completed	✓	✓	✓
(f) name of institution	✓	✓	✓
(g) year of completion of highest qualification	✓	✓	✓
<i>Economic characteristics</i>			
Employment (or activity) status	✓	✓	✓
Whether has a full-or part-time work (job) (ref: last week)	✓	✓	✓
Type of work in the main job held (ref: last week)	✓	✓	✓
Occupation	✓	✓	✓
Business/industry	✓	✓	✓
Employment sector	✓	✓	✓
Hours worked in all jobs (ref: last week)	✓	✓	✓*
Whether actively looking for work			
any time during the four weeks before the census	✓	✓	✓
Availability to start work (ref: last week)	✓	✓	✓
Income	✓	✓	✓
<i>Other</i>			
Whether used a Personal Computer at home			
(ref: week before the census)	✓	x	✓
Whether used an internet (ref: week before the census)	✓	x	✓
Journey to work/mode of travel (ref: previous day)	✓	✓	✓
B. Dwelling characteristics			
Details of usual residents absent on the census night	✓	✓	✓
No. of registered vehicles owned/used			
by residents of the dwelling	✓	✓	✓
Number of bedrooms	✓	✓	✓
Ownership status/tenure/occupancy	✓	✓	✓
Rent or mortgage payment or site fees			
(per week, fortnight or month)	✓	✓	✓
Dwelling furnished or not (for rented dwellings only)	✓	✓	✓
Landlord/ownership (for dwellings being rented)	✓	✓	✓
Dwelling structure/type of dwelling	✓	✓	✓
✓ = Available x = Not available * = Hours worked in the main job.			

Appendix 5: Terms of reference

Evaluation of ATSIC Regional Councils' information needs for effective planning

Background

Section 94 (1) of the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission Act 1989* (the Act) requires each Regional Council established under the Act:

to formulate, and revise from time to time, a regional plan for improving the economic, social and cultural status of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander residents of the Region.

Purpose

The Office of Evaluation and Audit will evaluate the information needs of ATSIC Regional Councils to:

- develop regional plans that respond to the needs and aspirations of Indigenous residents of the region; and
- review regional plans to respond to changing and emerging needs and to identify opportunities.

Methodology

The evaluation will:

- review current Regional Council planning processes;
- review previous reports on Regional Council planning;
- survey all Regional Councils on planning information needs;
- conduct at least two (2) case studies on Regional Council planning information needs;
- identify the information available to Regional Councils on:
 - regional statistical / profile data;
 - qualitative and quantitative data on regional programs and services delivered; and
 - outcome and output data from regional programs and services.
- report on information inadequacies or “data gaps”; and
- recommend mechanisms to improve Regional Council access to data for regional planning and planning review purposes.

Appendix 6: Putting the pieces together

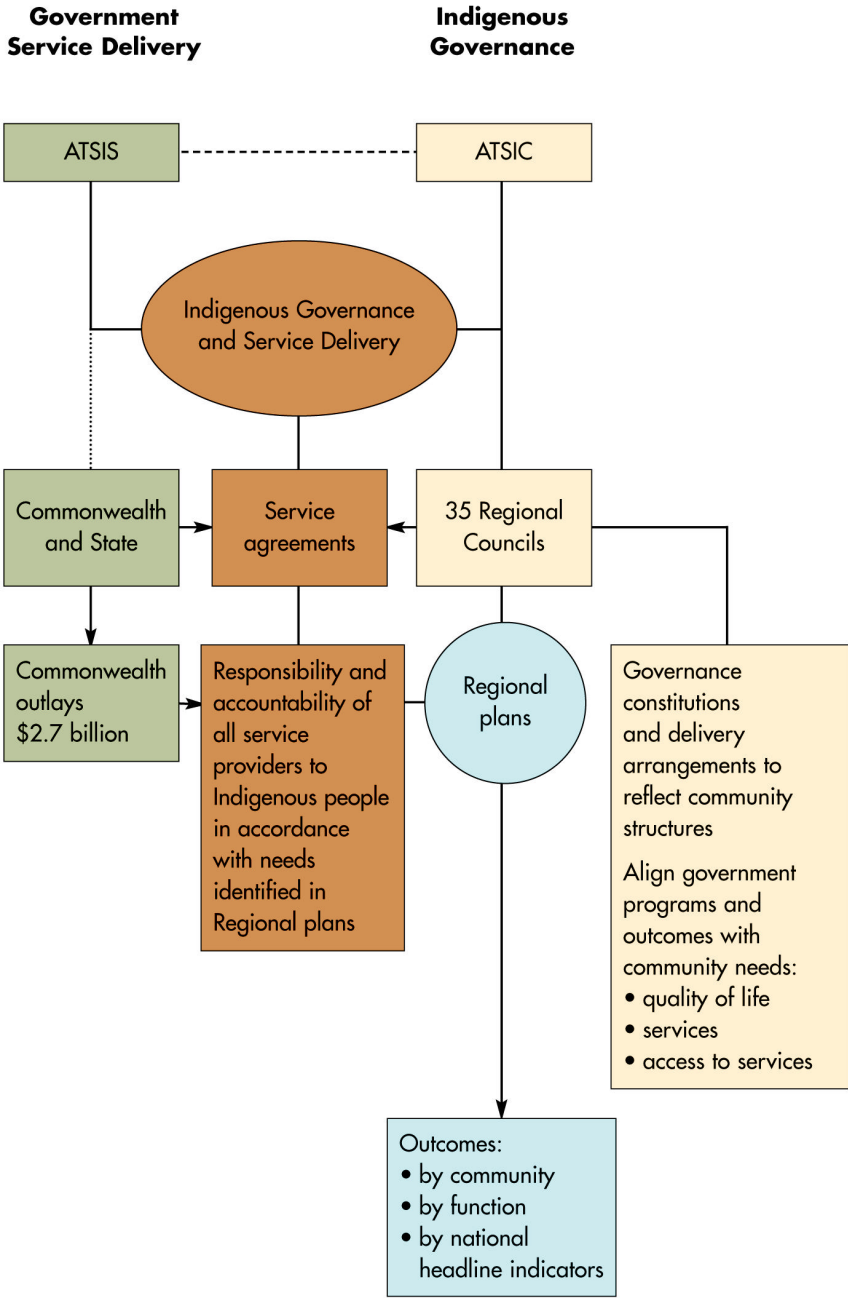
The following charts suggest a number of actions and their sequence in the planning process that might be followed to assist Regional Councils. The framework outlines the linkages within formalised Indigenous governance and service delivery arrangements between:

- the centrality of the regional plan;
- service agreements at the regional and community level;
- the responsibility and accountability of all service providers to work with Indigenous people in the development and implementation of regional plans;
- the translation of goals, priorities and action areas identified by the regional plan into agency outputs involving programs, projects and funding; and
- the reporting on the impact of the various coordinated inputs on the quality of life of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders communities, families and individuals.

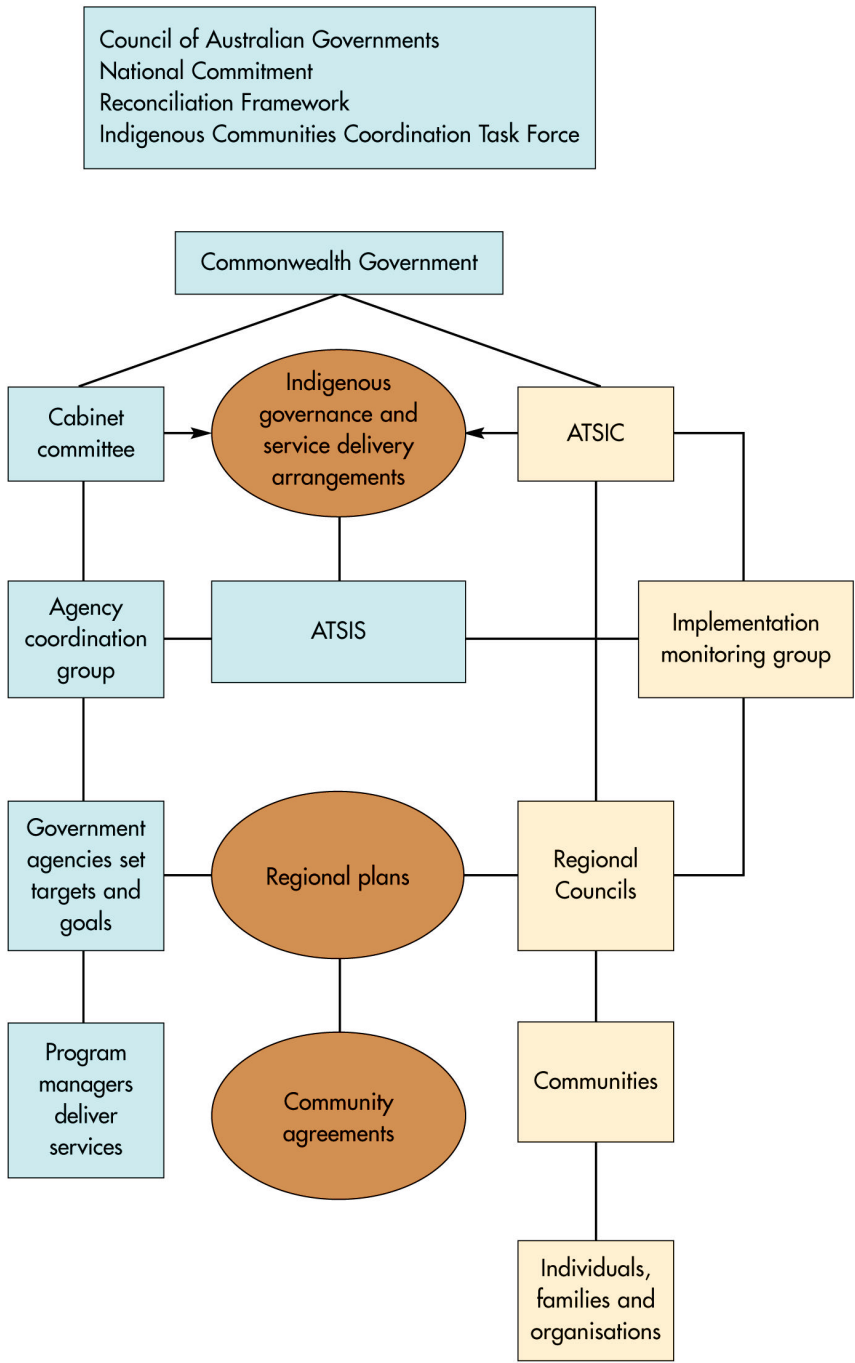
The starting and end points flow from the requirements of the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission Act 1989*.

- Section 94 (1) (a) of the Act requires Regional Councils to formulate and revise from time to time a regional plan for improving the economic, social and cultural status of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander residents of the region.
- Section 94 (1)(b) requires councils to assist, advise and cooperate with the Commission, other Commonwealth bodies (now to include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Services as the program delivery agency), and State, Territory and local government bodies in implementing the regional plan.
- Section 99 (1)(b) requires each Regional Council to report each year on the implementation during that year of the regional plan.

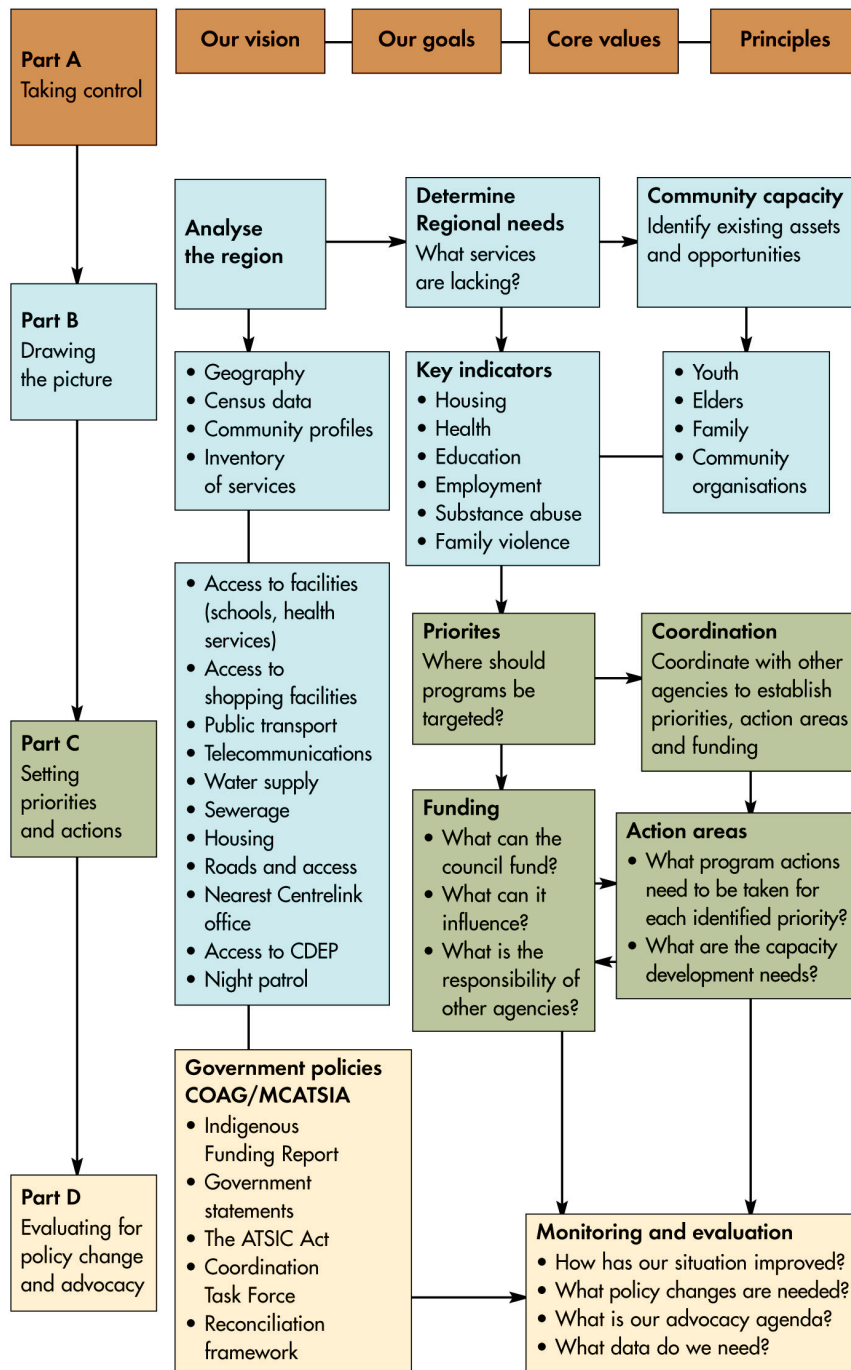
Linking Indigenous governance and service delivery



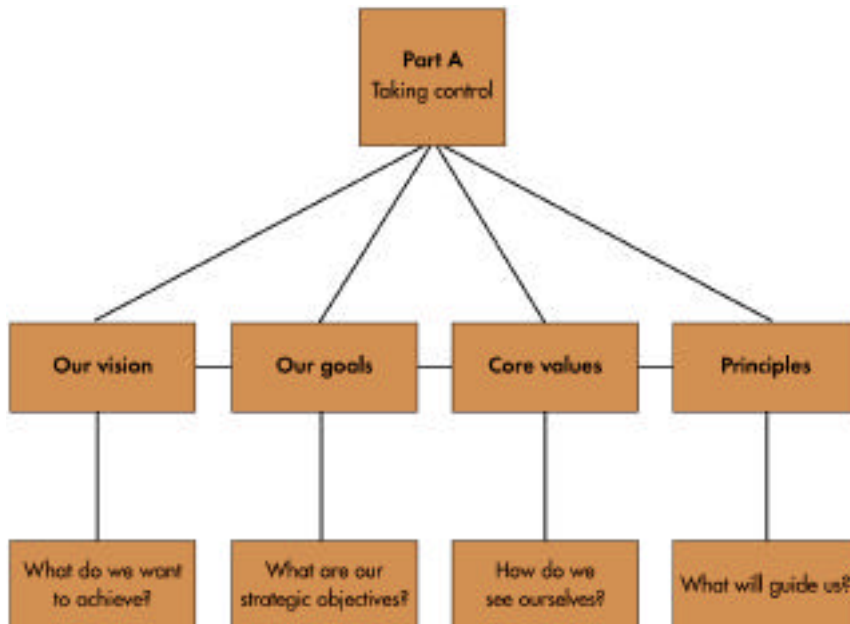
Coordination and monitoring arrangements



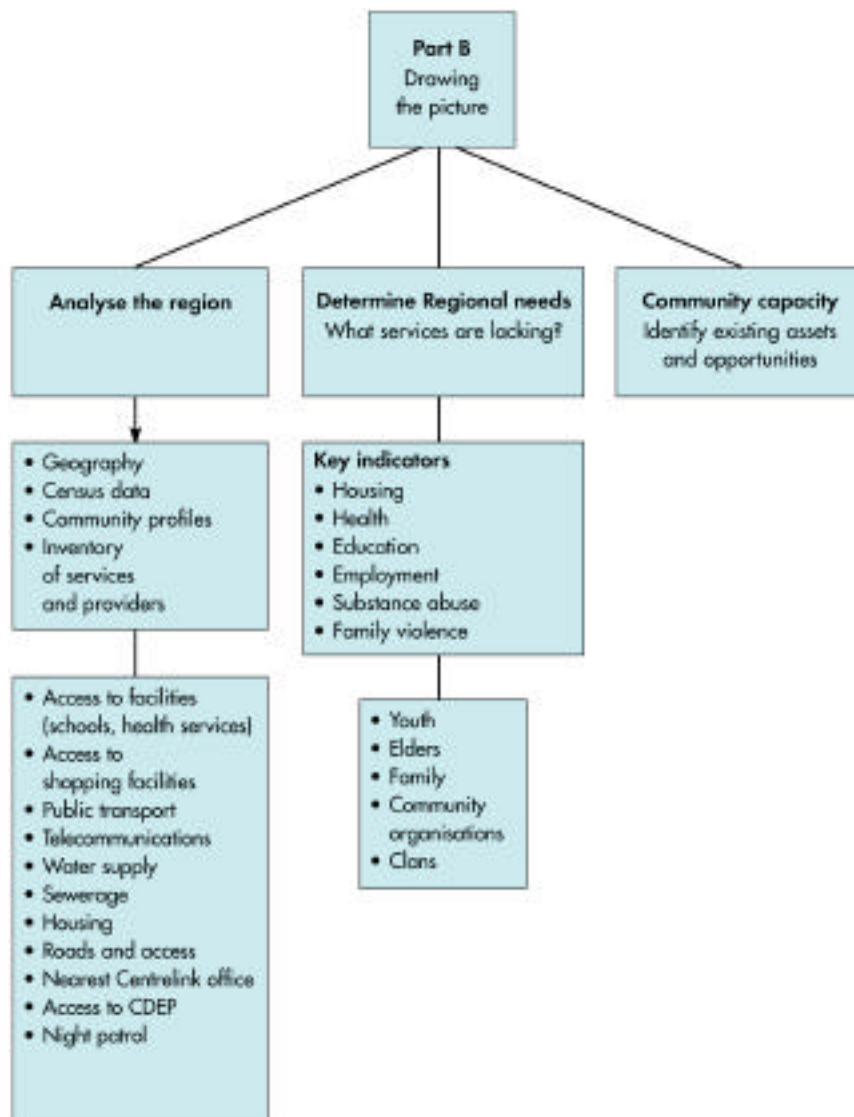
Putting the planning pieces together



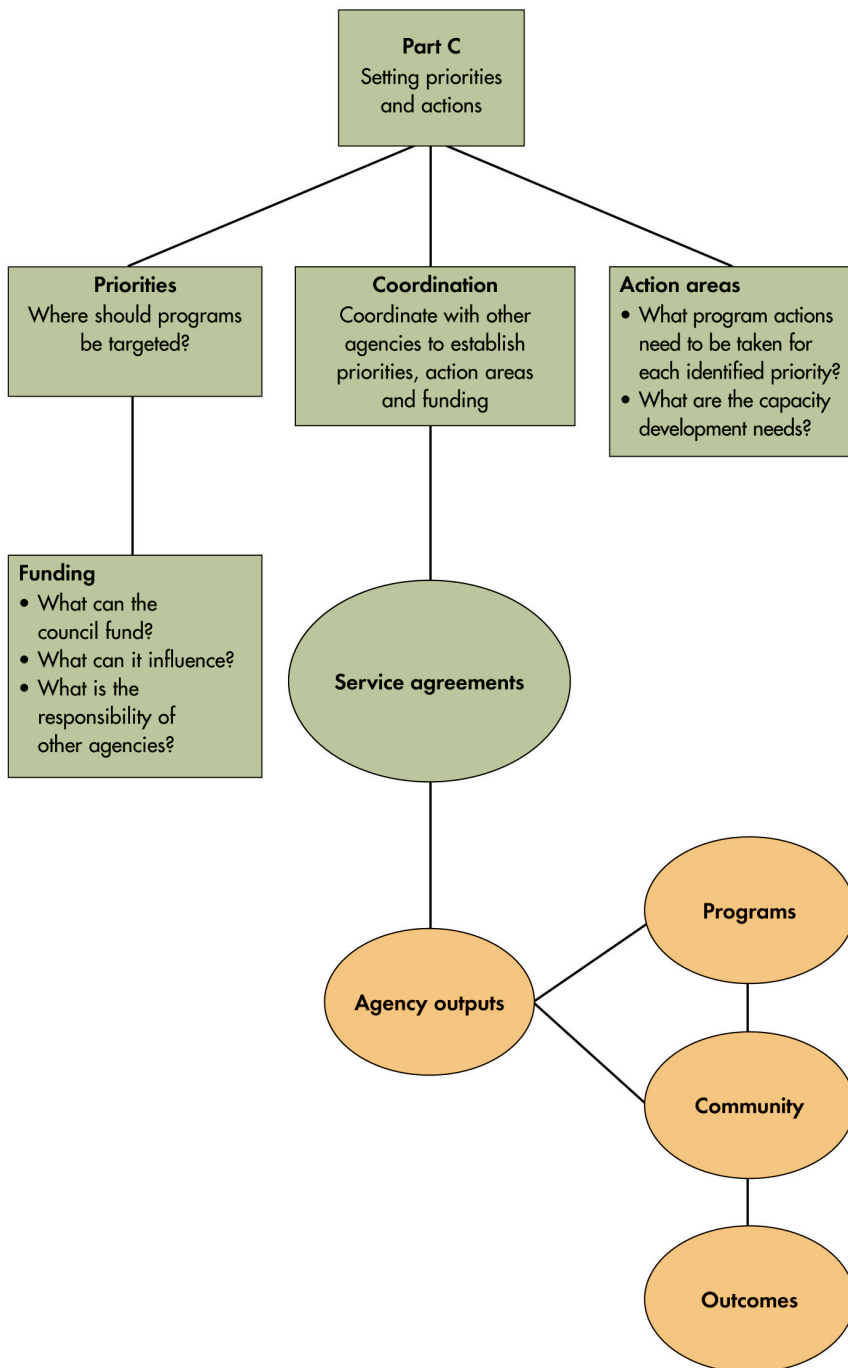
A regional planning framework: empowering communities



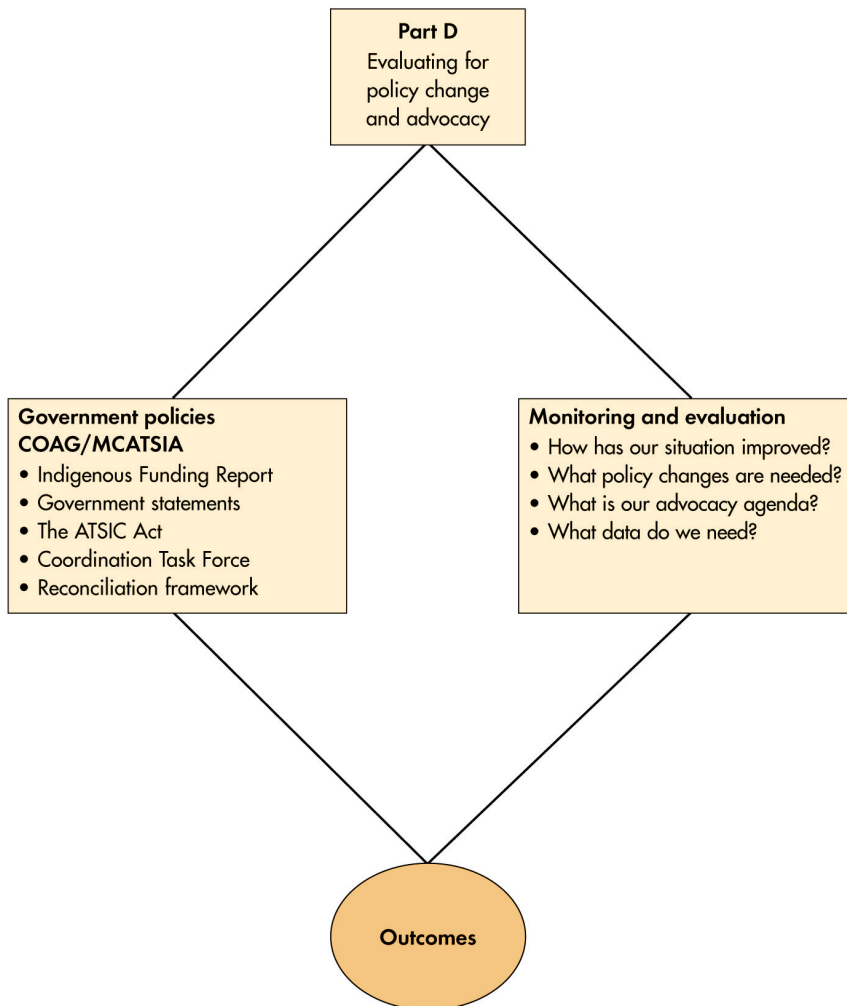
A regional planning framework: establishing the environment



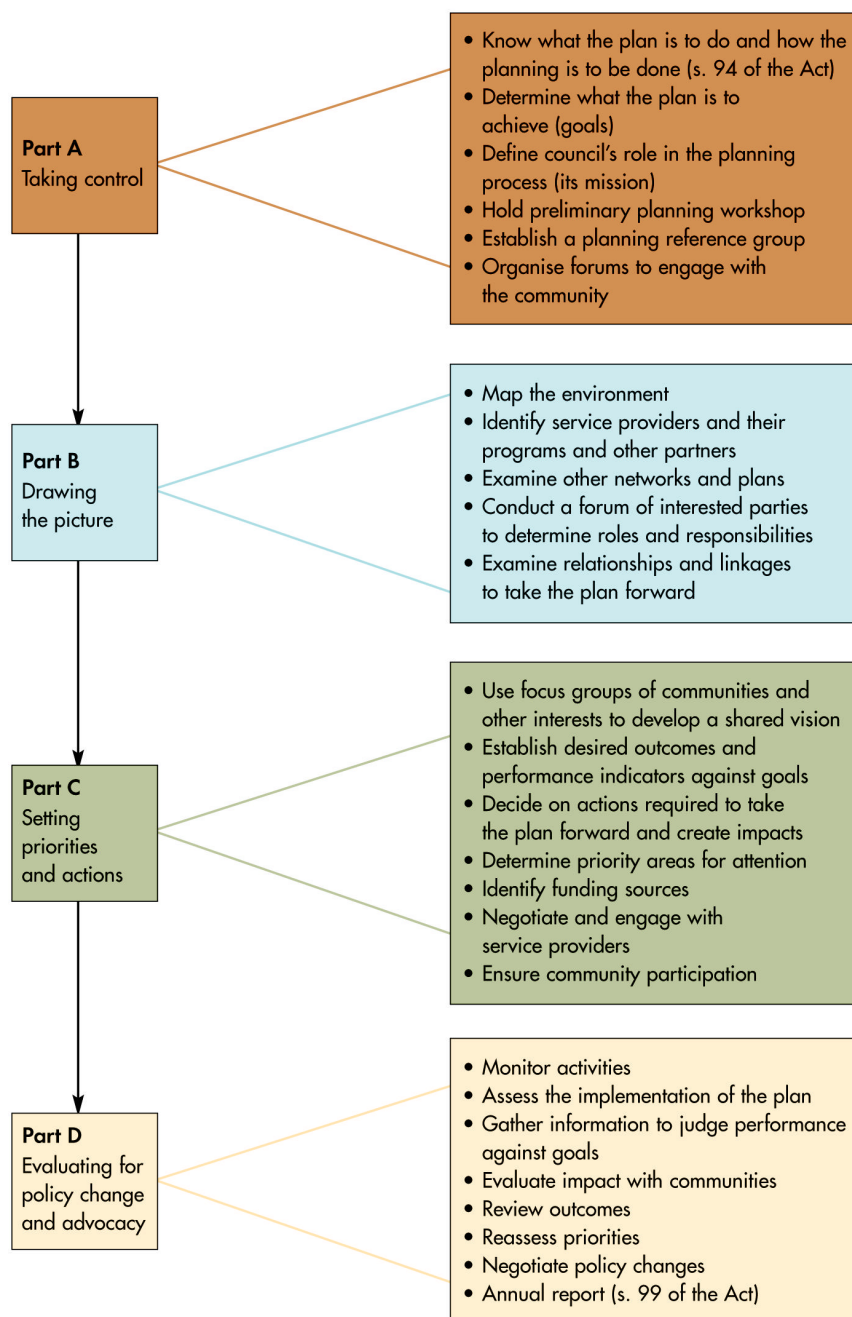
A regional planning framework: taking action



A regional planning framework: monitoring and evaluation



A regional planning framework: checklist



From vision to outcomes: connecting communities and agency responsibility

