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Governments & Communities in Partnership
From Theory to Practice

Conference hosted by
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Refereed Conference Paper

Government and Governance on Indigenous Communities: The Case of the APY Lands and Dysfunctional Government

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Refereed paper presented to the Governments and Communities in Partnership Conference, Centre for Public Policy, University of Melbourne, 25-27 September, 2006

Introduction

This paper examines changes in the structure of public administration in Indigenous communities in northern South Australia that has involved self determination, a whole-of-government approach, multi-agency engagement and local community involvement.

The Pitjantjatjara, and their nearest neighbours, the Yankunytjatjara to the east and the Ngaanyatjarra to the west, occupy the 'cross-border' region in the north-west of South Australia and adjacent areas in the Northern Territory and Western Australia. These people now refer to themselves as Anangu.[1]

Because of the remoteness of the region, contact between Europeans and the Anangu was limited until the mid-twentieth century. The South Australian Government, in line with the practice of all Australian governments at the time, pursued a policy of assimilation and administered the reserve through a traditional centralised bureaucracy. Developments on the Aboriginal land in the north-west of South Australia in the 1970s and 1980s led to a break with the old modes of public administration.

The Commonwealth government's entry into Indigenous affairs in the 1970s coincided with sweeping changes in the administration of Indigenous affairs: new policies were adopted, old administrative structures were dismantled, and a radical change took place in the relationship between the Anangu and government.

In 1981 the Anangu were granted title to 103,000 square kilometres of land, which is now referred to as the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) Lands, and in the name of self-determination service delivery was devolved to Anangu communities. There was great hopefulness about these changes which were seen to involve a fundamental transformation of administration of Indigenous affairs and the beginning of a new positive era for the Anangu.

Within a short time, however, another transformation was underway and by 2002 the conditions on the Lands were said to be characterised by 'poverty, hunger, illness, low educational levels, almost total unemployment, boredom and general feelings of hopelessness' (SA Coroner 2002, 1)

This paper analyses the transformed public administration; self-determination, devolution to communities and government-community partnerships. In particular, it examines the nature of the relationship between the communities on the APY Lands and the state. The paper argues that the actions taken by governments in the name of self determination, and local community decision-making, and more recently in the name of whole-of-government approach and partnerships have had a very negative impact on the people of those communities. Further, it is argued that

the experience of communities on the APY Lands raises the more general question about the value of devolution and government-community partnerships for marginalised communities that lack cohesion and political resources.

Background

In 1920-21, following public pressure to protect Anangu from intrusion by Europeans, three very large Aboriginal Reserves were established in Anangu country on adjacent land in Western Australia, South Australia and the Northern Territory. In South Australia an area of 61,400 square kilometres in the far north-west corner of the State gazetted as the North West Aboriginal Reserve. (Summers 2004, 6-7).

In 1937 a Presbyterian Mission was established at Ernabella on the eastern border of the Reserve to provide medical care and education and to act as a buffer against the intrusion of European commercial interests. In contrast with government Aboriginal settlements and most other missions of the time, Ernabella placed great stress on the preservation of (or at least non-interference with) Indigenous culture (Duguid 1972, 95-125; Hilliard 1968).

It was not until 1961 that the South Australian Government made its first direct intervention on the reserve. A settlement was establishment within the Reserve at Amata at the western end of the Musgrave Ranges with the stated intention of providing training in the cattle industry (APB 1961, 12).

At the same time, the South Australian government was making important changes in Indigenous policy. First, it took the initial steps in repealing the discriminatory laws which had denied Indigenous people basic civil and political rights and which had given the South Australian Department of Aboriginal Affairs an extremely wide range of powers over the lives of all Aboriginal people in the State. Second, it made a move away from the strict assimilationist position which had been adopted by all Australian governments. The liberalisation of the laws governing Aborigines lives and the move away from the uncompromising assimilationist policy accelerated after 1965 with the election of a Labor government and the appointment of Don Dunstan as the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs (APB 1961, 3; AAB 1964, 8; See Summers 1981a).

Despite these reforms and the changes in policy, the settlement at Amata was no different from most other Aboriginal institutions of the 1960s, exhibiting the characteristics of a 'total institution' as described by Goffman—an authoritarian structure with the white staff exercising authority over the Aboriginal residents (Goffman 1968, 11. See also Long 1970, 1-7 & 176-88; Stevens 1970). Amata quickly became a sizable community. Anangu from a wide area were attracted by the services—a reliable water supply, a store, (minimal) wages and a clinic—and within several years of its establishment Amata's population had reached more than 300. The rhetoric of the administration was that of 'progress', 'training' and 'advancement' for the Pitjantjatjara people, but the reality was that very limited

resources were provided and most, if not all, activity on the settlement related simply to keeping the institution running (Hope 1983, 218). Although the Anangu were not compelled to stay at the settlement, their growing reliance on European goods had resulted in dependence and loss of autonomy.

Two features of the relationship between the South Australian government and the Anangu living on the Reserve at the end of the 1960s are important to note. First, the South Australian Government had full legal and political capacity to exercise its conventional governmental powers in relation to the Reserve. Although section 51(26) of the Australian Constitution had been amended in 1967 to give the Commonwealth Parliament constitutional power to make laws for Aborigines living in the States, the Commonwealth government made very little use of this power until 1972 (See Summers 2000, 61-8). The State Government effectively had control over the delivery of services and the administration of the Reserve and the exercise of that authority was largely the responsibility of one government department which provided the services from a recurrent budget. The South Australian government was clearly responsible, and in the normal political sense accountable, for what happened on the Reserve. Second, Anangu living on the Reserve were a dependent and administered people whose lives were largely under the authority of the South Australian Department of Aboriginal Affairs. They had no bargaining strength or formal power to negotiate with the Government, or capacity to act independently in the broader political process.

Turning Points

During the 1970s several interconnected developments led to a transformation of the Anangu from dependent administered people into independent political actors with the capacity to operate effectively in the wider political structures in Australia.

The Commonwealth enters the field of Indigenous affairs: a change of policy

The election of the Whitlam Labor Government in December 1972 was a turning point in Indigenous affairs. Whitlam came to office promising to commit more resources to Indigenous affairs and to replace the objective of assimilation with one of self-determination which, Whitlam said, would '…restore to the Aboriginal people their lost power of self-determination in economic, social and political affairs' (Whitlam 1973, 697). From that time until the election of the Howard Coalition in 1996 all Commonwealth governments espoused, in general terms, a commitment to some form of Indigenous autonomy, variously termed 'self-determination' or 'self-management' and some recognition of Indigenous rights.

An element in the Whitlam government's plans in Aboriginal affairs that had direct impact on South Australia's North-West Aboriginal Reserve was an initiative which was designed to by-pass the States. The Commonwealth dealt directly with Aboriginal communities, facilitating their incorporation, and funding them for programs, which would normally have been State responsibilities, such as housing,

health, and community development. The Commonwealth also made conditional grants to the States for Indigenous health and housing (DAA 1974, 19-22, 24, 34, 58-9).

Transformation of Anangu.

Hope has described how the '…relationship between [the South Australian] Government and Pitjantjatjara changed from that of guardian and welfare recipient, to Government and pressure group…' (Hope 1983, 346). He attributes this transformation to a number of developments including a growing sense of identity among the Anangu and 'empowerment' through access to government resources. Crucial to this transformation were the developments at the Commonwealth level. The incorporation of, and funding of, Indigenous organisations gave impetus to a movement which was already underway among the Anangu. In the early 1970s access to Commonwealth resources greatly aided attempts by Indigenous groups on remote settlements across northern and central Australia to move away from the centralised government settlements and missions and establish outstations or homeland communities (Edwards 1988; Hope 1983, 396-404. See also HRSCAA 1987 and Coombs 1973). Throughout the 1970s a number of homeland communities were established across Anangu country. Some were very small and temporary but others grew into the permanent communities, which exist today across the region, with their own community advisers, stores, clinics and other facilities.

Another important factor in the transformation of the Anangu was the payment of Commonwealth government benefits. In 1976 all social security benefits, including unemployment benefits became available to people living in remote communities and on Aboriginal reserves (Summers 2000, 39-40). These payments became a significant source of income for Indigenous people on remote reserves.

In 1976 the Pitjantjatjara Council was formed by Anangu from across all three jurisdictions—South Australia, Western Australia, and the Northern Territory (Hope 1983, 368).[2] The Council became the principal representative body in negotiations with governments on behalf of Anangu and in the late 1970s played a central and very prominent role negotiating with the South Australian Government over land rights.

Obtaining Land Rights

The campaign to achieve land rights by the Anangu was determined and unified and received widespread public support and sympathetic treatment from the media. In the process Anangu became effective actors in the political process. After protracted negotiations between the Pitjantjatjara Council and the South Australian Government an agreement was reached on legislation and in 1981 the *Pitjantjatjara Land Rights Act* was passed. This was the first land rights legislation in Australia that was the product of a negotiated agreement between an Indigenous group and a government (Toyne and Vachon 1984, 77-109; Summers 1980, 426-7; Summers 1981, 80-1).

The land rights legislation was drafted at a time when the Anangu appeared united and of one mind. The Pitjantjatjara Land Rights Working Party, which in 1978 made recommendations on the content of the Land Rights Bill, saw the Anangu as united 'people'. They reported that,

> the trend among people of the [region] to see themselves as a broadly related entity has been expressed in the formation of the Pitjantjatjara Council …. More than 20 communities in South Australia, Western Australia and the Northern territory are members….[T]he meetings have a unique vitality and grass roots involvement. Matters of concern are discussed in communities and at Council meetings and any decisions are reached on a basis of consensus….The Council has nurtured the development of an identification of the Pitjantjatjara as one people with a unity of law and land. It is based on an awareness of the greater strength of the communities in united action and their desire to deal with outside bodies as a united people (PLRWP 1978, 39).

The *Pitjantjatjara Land Rights Act* provides for a total of 103,000 square kilometres of land to be held as inalienable freehold by the *Anangu Pitjantjatjara*, a legal entity created by the legislation and made up of all Pitjantjatjara people who had a traditional attachment to the land.[3] The Act relates largely to land ownership, and establishes a minimal governance structure to deal with management of the land. It requires the *Anangu Pitjantjatjara*, as owner, to administer matters relating to the land and to protect the interests of the traditional owners.

Devolution by Governments to Communities

During the 1970s the Commonwealth had increasingly funded programs on the Aboriginal Reserve, including direct funding to the various communities. In 1978 the South Australian government withdrew from the administration of those communities, and Community Councils became responsible for their management (CRDHS 1987, 21, 47-8).

With the achievement of land rights a number of government services were, in effect, handed over to Anangu associations. In the mid-1980s, for example, an Anangu organisation, the Nganampa Health Council (NHC), took over the provision of primary health care from the South Australian Health Commission. The NHC (with a budget of over $9 million in 2004) runs clinics in nine communities and provides other specialist programs including aged care, dental services, women's health, STD control and HIV prevention (SCPLR 2004, 37).

In the case of educational services, there was some delegation of responsibilities but the South Australian Government remains directly involved in the running of the schools. There are nine schools on the APY Lands which are provided and staffed by the South Australian Department of Education and Children's Services and are

jointly with the Education Department the responsibility of the Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara Education Committees (SCPLR 2004, 44).

The arrangements for the provision of most other basic government services were devolved to various Anangu organisations. For example, the provision of infrastructure and maintenance—road building and grading, supply and maintenance of power and water supply—has gone to a number of different bodies; the Pitjantjatjara Council, the Anangu Pitjantjatjara and the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Services Inc.

Public Administration Transformed: Anangu Self Determination, Partnerships and Local Involvement

The developments described above gave rise to what was seen to be a fundamental transformation in the mode of public administration, and in the relationship between the Anangu and government.

One aspect of the transformation was the growing homeland movement which was seen to give the Anangu greater autonomy and control over their own future. The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs, in a 1987 report spoke of the '…strong desire of Aboriginal people to traditional land to meet their responsibilities in relation to their land…' and to escape '…the stresses of living in settlements, reserves and missions…' (HRSCAA 1987, 14). The Committee said that the movement to homelands was '…a clear statement by the Aboriginal people involved of the sort of future they wished for themselves and their children, a future on land to which they have spiritual and economic ties and *a future over which they have much greater control*' (HRSCAA 1987, 257. Italics added.).

The passage of the *Pitjantjatjara Land Rights Act* 1981 contributed to the sense of hopefulness about the future for the Anangu. The Anangu were seen to have been united and to have determinedly pursued their own goals against the opposition of political, bureaucratic and commercial interests. The *Act* provided a statutory underpinning to the policy of self-determination and the new mode of administration. It created a statutory representative entity, the *Anangu Pitjantjatjara*, through which the broad Anangu community could negotiate with governments.

On the face of it, this change entailed a fundamental transformation in public administration: the traditional centralised bureaucratic administration had been displaced by partnerships between community groups and the state. A system in which local Indigenous communities in partnership with a variety of government agencies could manage their own affairs and provide their own services had replaced one in which a single government department within a bureaucratic public sector structure was primarily responsible for the management of Indigenous settlements.

In the terminology of recent governance literature, there had been the creation of new flexible and responsive instruments which entailed the democratic participation of local communities in policy making in collaborative partnerships (see Considine 2005).

The change in public administration went beyond simple modifications to the old mode. Structures, some with a statutory base, had established a qualitatively different way of conducting the business of government. In partnership with government the Anangu could manage their own services, administer their own affairs and, it was said, play a decisive role in shaping their own future.

It was a development that had wide spread approval. Supporters of the Anangu saw challenges ahead but the sustained and united campaign for land rights gave cause for optimism (see Toyne & Vachon 1984).

Events that followed, however, revealed a negative, and in human terms very costly, side to the transformation. Within a short time the prospects for the Anangu appeared much bleaker and within two decades conditions on the APY Lands appeared desperate. Government involvement in the Lands was chaotic, a number of communities had become dysfunctional and social problems were taking a massive toll. The Anangu had undergone a second transformation; from a people who had been united, purposeful and positive about their future to a population who were deeply divided, welfare dependent, despairing about their future and powerlessness to alter their circumstances.

The Second Transformation

Two inquests by the South Australian Coroner, in 2002 and 2005, and a report by a South Australian Legislative Council Select Committee in 2004 described what they saw as terrible conditions on the APY Lands. In his 2002 Findings the Coroner concluded that the deaths of three young Anangu were the result of petrol sniffing which he said was 'endemic' in the communities. Substance abuse, he said, had resulted in '[s]erious disability, crime, cultural breakdown and general grief and misery…' and took place in an environment of '[p]overty, hunger, illness, low educational levels, almost total unemployment, boredom and general feelings of hopelessness…' (SA Coroner 2002, 1; SA Coroner 2005). The Select Committee came to similar conclusions:

> [g]rief, trauma and hopelessness permeate the lives of many Anangu living on the [APY] Lands. The number and extent of the problems engulfing Anangu communities—including substance abuse, family violence, poor health, unemployment and poverty—are substantial.

The Select Committee quoted Mick Dodson, a person with wide experience of Indigenous communities; 'I think that there are very few places which I have seen which are as desperate, despairing and sad as the [APY] lands'(SCPLR 2004, 11 & 29). Since that time, there have been numerous media reports which portrayed

deplorable conditions on the APY Lands and on many other Indigenous communities throughout central and northern Australia (*The Australian* 24/11/04, 13/12/04, 20/5/06, 24/5/06; *Sydney Morning Herald* 16/9/05, 20/5/06, 27/5/06).

In examining the reasons behind these problems, both the Coroner and the Select Committee addressed issues relating to governance (in the sense of decision-making and accountability *within* the communities) on the APY Lands. Both described a situation in which the communities had become dysfunctional—the communities were factionalised and divided, the various internal governance structures had become ineffective and there was a mood of hopelessness and resignation.

However, the Coroner and the Select Committee also pointed to issues relating to the role and actions of government and the relationship between government and the Anangu communities that had contributed to the situation on the Lands.

Dysfunctional Communities, Dysfunctional Government

In the public debate about the conditions on the APY Lands governance has been an important focus of attention. The dysfunctional nature of many remote Indigenous communities in northern and central Australia has prompted research into community governance (see esp. Smith 2004; Hunt & Smith 2006). The research has examined the impact on community governance of factors such as the level of resourcing, the cultural mix of the residents, the number of incorporated groups on the community, the level of management and financial skill in the community, the size and number of communities in the region, the existence of regional bodies and the rate of turn-over of non-Indigenous staff. Also there are factors that are part of what Hunt and Smith call 'the governance environment' which they describe as the influence of the wider environment of governance within the Indigenous community. They argue that at the community and regional level 'Indigenous organisations and leaders are operating within complex, highly politicised community environments—characterised by shifting family and group alliances and tensions, webs of social support and resource redistribution, and a multiplicity of agencies and organisations all competing for constituencies and scarce resources' At the State and Commonwealth levels the 'governance environment' includes, 'policy, regulatory, legal and funding regimes of the State/Territory and [Commonwealth] governments'. These dimensions of the governance environment, they argue, 'are characterised by their own internal tensions, alliances, institutions, silos and competing objectives' (Hunt & Smith 2006, 40-2). The following section will examine some of the effects of the 'governance environment' that has been created by the actions and policies of Commonwealth and State governments on the APY Lands.

Problems of Coordination and Multi-level Governance

From the time of the Whitlam government's rapid expansion of the Commonwealth's role in the area in 1972, Indigenous affairs have been a cause of intergovernmental conflict, and intergovernmental relations have been seen as a problem in Indigenous

affairs. On taking office the Whitlam government generated conflict with the States by asserting Commonwealth pre-eminence in Indigenous affairs. Significantly, however, in terms of the nature of the intergovernmental relations that developed and continues to the present, the Whitlam Government did not attempt to exclude the States or to take over the whole administration of Aboriginal affairs. Under Whitlam's plan the service delivery departments of the States would continue to function in Aboriginal affairs but would carry out Commonwealth policy. In April 1973, he said that:

> [the Commonwealth] does not ... aim to establish an omnibus Commonwealth Department of Aboriginal Affairs. It will instead seek to devolve upon a wide range of Commonwealth, State and local authorities ... responsibility for carrying out the policies decided upon by my government (quoted in DAA 1982).

The Whitlam government was careful not to make an open-ended financial commitment. Speaking to the Aboriginal Affairs (Arrangements with the States) Bill in 1973, the Commonwealth Aboriginal Affairs Minister, Gordon Bryant, said that:

> [t]he Australian Government does not seek to transfer from the States particular responsibility in the fields of health, housing, education and other functional areas, which in its view should preferably be carried out by the appropriate Australian and State departments having responsibility in these areas (CPDHR 22/8/73, 223).

The *Aboriginal Affairs (Arrangements with the States) Act 1973* authorised the Commonwealth to negotiate an agreement on Aboriginal affairs with each State. The agreement with South Australia explicitly stated that it would in no way affect the State government's powers to manage or control Aboriginal reserves. Further, the agreement preserved 'the existing right of the South Australian government to implement measures to meet the special needs of the Aboriginal people in the ordinary course of providing services ... such as education, health, community welfare and housing' (GGA/GSSA 1975, 4-5). The agreement left the State with large areas of responsibility including the important matter of Aboriginal land. As with most intergovernmental agreement, it did not, and could not, provide a clear distinction between the responsibilities of the two levels of government.

Self-determination and Representative Indigenous Organisations

The policy of self-determination as it was adopted by the Whitlam Government (and reformulated by subsequent governments), of necessity, required the establishment of representative Indigenous organisations. A number of questions about these bodies—how they should be constituted, what should be their powers, how should they obtain their mandate—have never been satisfactorily answered. At a national level the issue of an Indigenous representative body has continued to be problematic and a matter on which opinion is deeply divided (Robbins 2004).

In the case of the Anangu a complex multi-level arrangement of community and regional or umbrella organisations developed alongside numerous specific purpose organisations. There are three regional or 'umbrella' organisations. The Pitjantjatjara Council was established by the Anangu from all three jurisdictions in the cross-border region. Second, the Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (NPY) Women's Council represents women from across the whole cross-border region. Third, the Anangu Pitjantjatjara, the statutory land owning body, was created by the land rights legislation, the *Pitjantjatjara Land Rights Act* (1981). At another level, a multitude of community and specific purpose organisation were also established. On coming to office the Whitlam Government, in order to by-pass the States and to give effect to it policy of 'self-determination', encouraged the incorporation of Indigenous communities. The South Australian government also encouraged the formation of some Anangu organisations on the Lands. The process at both levels of government was *ad hoc* and uncoordinated. Within only a few years a number of Anangu communities and other groups had been incorporated. Hope observed that '[b]y 1974 in the Pitjantjatjara Lands there was a tangle of groups, some incorporated others not, with housing societies, communities, community councils and sporting bodies, each claiming primacy of purpose—and all competing for funds' (Hope 1983, 368).

Devolution and Partnerships—Uncoordinated Services

It is against this background that the devolution of government functions took place. A number of different Commonwealth and State agencies began directly to fund individual Indigenous communities and groups as well as 'peak' or 'umbrella' groups to provide basic government services, either by the community itself or by private or third sector providers. In addition, a number of Commonwealth departments make tied grants to a number of different State agencies to provide services or programs to Anangu communities, either as special State programs or as joint Commonwealth-State programs. Government dealings which Anangu organisations became characterised by complex intergovernmental and interdepartmental arrangements often involving a multiplicity of government and non-government agencies. The direct funding of special programs by the Commonwealth and the devolution of normal State government services to Anangu organisations and communities was *ad hoc*, fragmented and uncoordinated.

The problems arising from the 'silo' approach taken by government agencies—the lack of coordination and the fragmented services—have been repeatedly mentioned in reports and inquiries into Indigenous services throughout Australia (See for example Gordon 2002; HRSCATSIA 2004, 57-9; HREOC 2004, chpt. 4). Numerous reports in relation to the APY Lands, over twenty years or more, have identified coordination of service and program delivery as a major problem, both within each tier and between each tier of government. A Commonwealth Review in 1985 into Aboriginal Employment and Training (the Miller Report) concluded that there was a complete lack of planning in the provision of these services (CRAETP 1985). At the State level a South Australian Review of the Delivery of Human Services to the

Aboriginal Community in 1987 reported that there was a lack of coordination and a 'patchwork of arrangements across human services' and concluded that on the APY Lands the situation was 'chaotic' (Review of Delivery of Human Services 1987, 46).

Another review of the Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara Aboriginal communities by Neville Bonner in 1988 argued that the structures and funding arrangements that were in place were not appropriate, either in terms of providing adequate services or achieving any sort of self determination for Anangu. He said that the structures for the management of the resources were '…marked by chaos and confusion' and argued that a proliferation in the number of homeland communities and local incorporated bodies, both regional or umbrella, contributed to this situation (Bonner 1988, 25-6).

A Report by Don Dunstan on Aboriginal Community Government in 1989, came to similar conclusions. Dunstan observed that the situation of the Pitjantjatjara people had deteriorated since the gaining of land rights. He described the 'maze' of procedures and the problems created by the large number of uncoordinated Commonwealth and State funding sources (Dunstan 1989, sect. 1 & para. 5.1.1). In 1990 the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs came to similar conclusions about problems caused by lack of coordination (HRSCAA 1990, 67-76).

Over a decade later, in 2002, the South Australian Coroner reported on the '…fragmentation of effort and confusion and alienation of service-providers…' which, he said, were features of service delivery to Anangu communities (SA Coroner, 2002 para. 13.2.5). Both the Coroner (in 2002 and 2005) and the Legislative Council Select Committee on Pitjantjatjara Land Rights (2004) came to similar conclusions and specifically addressed the question of the problem of coordination in relation to programs designed to ameliorate social problems and to tackle petrol sniffing. A range of proposed programs appeared to be almost impossible to implement because of inter-agency and intergovernmental 'gridlock'. Typically these programs entailed joint funding and joint action, with the involvement of a number of agencies from each jurisdiction, and a number of Anangu communities as well as one or more umbrella Anangu organisation and several NGOs.

One detailed study of the administrative response to petrol-sniffing in South Australian communities in 1993 had made this point. The research found that over 14 State and Commonwealth agencies were directly involved in dealing with different aspects of tackling petrol sniffing. An interdepartmental committee had reached broad agreement about the involvement of communities in the design of programs and about the type of approach required. Despite the agreement in principle, cooperation foundered over differences in departmental guidelines and priorities. The Commonwealth's insistence that no 'umbrella' organisations be funded ruled

out funding to the APY Lands because of the nature of the organisations involved in the plans to reduce petrol sniffing among the children (Robbins 1993).

The time and resources expended in achieving agreement is enormous. Although the Coroner did not make the specific observation, evidence to the inquests indicates that the seemingly endless rounds of negotiation and the attempts at coordination have, for some agencies, become almost an end in themselves. In some cases months or years pass in the process of attempting to achieve even the most basic agreement (see SA Coroner 2002, sect. 9; SA Coroner 2005, sect. 9). Attempts at coordination of programs or service delivery appeared in some cases to simply increase the complexity by adding another layer to the labyrinthine structures and creating another forum for disagreement and delay.

Devolution—Shifting the duty and the responsibility to the Anangu

Another feature of the devolution of government functions to local communities is that responsibility for some services was simply handed over to communities with little or no assistance given to people who did not have the training, skills or resources to manage them adequately. Governments have not only devolved the service but have also divested themselves of responsibility for the failures in service or program delivery. The policy of self-determination or community involvement became a rationale for governments withdrawing from service provision and simply dumping the responsibility on the community.

The South Australian Coroner argued that attempts to provide disability services with Anangu employees through Community Councils were 'ill considered'. He said that '…it cannot be expected that Anangu can deliver relatively sophisticated services to severely disabled people without proper training supervision and support…' (SA Coroner, para. 10.105-10.107). Communities that did not have the necessary administrative capacity, or were already overloaded with programs, were not in a position to manage new programs that were simply handed over to them. In the Senate Committee on petrol sniffing it was argued that many programs aimed at reducing petrol sniffing were predicated on community involvement. In communities that were already stretched these programs could not be handled adequately (SCARC 2006 para. 5.42).

Communities that have the greatest difficulties and are most in need of government programs and services do not have the resources to manage the programs. The Northern Territory Coroner, discussing an Anangu community said that communities that are disadvantaged, lack physical and human resources have suffered a complete breakdown of governance and have had decades of petrol sniffing:

> '…it is simplistic in the extreme to suggest that the answer to the problems of petrol sniffing is for the addicts and their communities to help themselves. ...[T]he horrors of [some remote communities] are not sensibly addressed by

> peddling the myth that such disadvantaged citizens might simply help themselves and solve the problem. They and their families are not able to do so by themselves (NT Coroner, 33).

Consultation by a Multitude of Agencies

A characteristic of the relations between government agencies and Anangu communities is the amount of consultation that leads nowhere. Anangu spokespersons have expressed frustration with the seemingly endless consultation by an ever-changing cast of officials, most of whom have little or no background in the field, have never been seen before and will never be seen again, have no authority to make any decision and whose visit will not result in any action. This feature of government relations with the Anangu has created extreme frustration among the Anangu and shaped their perceptions about governments and their reactions to it. It also raises the question about the extent to which the dysfunctional nature of communities, and the failure of communities to establish sustainable functioning governance, is in part a direct consequence of this feature of their treatment by government (SA Coroner 2002, papa 13.2.6; SA Coroner 2005, para. 13.4.6. See also Hunt & Smith 2006, 49).

Short-term Funding

A feature of the financial arrangements is that most Commonwealth funding is largely for specific short term projects. Most programs have no continuity and the decision about whether or not a program will be continued is largely the product of interdepartmental and intergovernmental manoeuvrings rather than any real appraisal of its effectiveness or of the wishes of the local communities. Programs aimed at dealing with petrol sniffing are an illustration of this. In a much quoted study d'Abbs and Brady conclude that,

> [t]he situation today remains in many respects little different to what it was thirty years ago. There are still practically no clear policies at any levels of government; there is no accumulated body of knowledge about the nature and causes of sniffing, or even about the efficacy or effectiveness of different kinds of interventions, and most initiatives are forced to rely on short-term project funding, the continuance of which rarely has anything to do with program effectiveness (d'Abbs & Bradey 2003, 2).

Because of the short-term funding, there is no continuity in programs, recruitment of qualified staff is more difficult, staff have little opportunity to gain experience or develop local knowledge and an enormous amount of staff time and resources are devoted to complying with reporting requirements and applying for new grants (SA Coroner 2002, paras. 9.51, 10.6, 10.99; SCARC 2006, paras. 3.51-3.61).

Accountability and Responsibility

Another obvious consequence of these arrangements, and a point that has been made repeatedly, is that no-one can be held accountable. Much of the literature on

Indigenous governance focuses on the need for Indigenous organisations to be accountable both internally (or downwards) to their own constituency and externally (or upwards) to the funding bodies and to the requirements of the non-Indigenous system (and in the context of a policy of self-determination, of the problems of potential conflict between the two) (Smith 2004,4; HRSCATSIA 2004, 75; Hunt & Smith 2006, 58-64). There has been less emphasis on the desirability of governments being accountable for their actions, or lack of action, in Indigenous affairs, either to the normal democratic governmental structures of the nation or downwards to the Indigenous communities with which they deal (cf Smith 2004, 4; SCARC 2006, 34; Hunt & Smith 2006, 58-64).

On every score the arrangements on the APY Lands obscure government responsibility. It is often impossible to identify who, or what agency, or indeed what tier of government, is responsible for the program or the service. At one level the rhetoric of self-determination has placed the onus on Anangu communities. With the exception of policing and education, governments have retreated from directly providing services in the APY Lands. At another level the intergovernmental arrangements allow blame shifting for inaction or mismanagement. In the programs that involve multiple agencies from both tiers of government and a number of Indigenous organisations, no agency has responsibility and none is accountable.

Whole-of-Government, Local Communities and Partnerships

In recent years, governments have acknowledged the problem of a lack of coordination and have announced a number of measures that, it was claimed, would address the problem. The most recent arises from a resolution in 2000 by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) to commit itself to,

> an approach based on partnerships and shared responsibilities with indigenous communities, programme flexibility and coordination between government agencies, with a focus on local communities and outcomes (COAG 2000).

In 2002, COAG decided that a number of remote-area communities or regions would be selected for a 'trial of a whole-of-governments cooperative approach' with the aim of 'improv[ing] the way governments interact with each other and with communities' (COAG 2002). The COAG initiative was made in the context of a wide range of other changes in Indigenous policy that were implemented over the next several years.[4] Of particular concern here, however, is COAG's decision in relation to a whole-of-government approach, partnerships with Indigenous communities and local community participation (Management Advisory Committee 2004, 158).

In 2002 the APY Lands were chosen as a COAG trial site with aims which included 'coordinating government programs and services…cut[ing] through blockages and red tape to resolve issues quickly [and] work[ing] with Indigenous communities to build the capacity of people in those communities to negotiate as genuine partners

with government' (Management Advisory Committee 2004, 158. See also Vanstone 2005).

The States and the Commonwealth have, in very general terms, claimed some success for their whole-of-government approach and partnerships with communities. On the APY Lands extra funds have been promised, new programs and plans have been announced, new agreements with Indigenous organisations have been entered into, some capital works have been started or foreshadowed and interdepartmental committees have been formed or restructured (See for example SADPC 2005; SGIA 2005).

However, there is little evidence that the announced initiatives have yet made any difference to the desperate conditions on the APY Lands, or that the COAG initiatives have made much difference to most other remote communities.[5] Nor is there any evidence that the claims of a whole-of-government approach has significantly broken down the silos or resulted in much improvement in the delivery of services and programs to communities, or that the partnerships between government and local communities have empowered the communities (Humpage 2005, 57; NT Coroner 2005, paras. 30-33; HRSCATSIA 2004, 47 & 89).

Glaring evidence of the lack of success of the COAG trial came from the South Australian Government. In March 2004, in response to continuing reports of problems and the announcement of a further coronial inquest into more deaths from petrol sniffing on the APY Lands, and the fact that an election for the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Executive had not been held within the time required by the *Pitjantjatjara Land Rights Act*, the South Australian Government announced that it would 'intervene' in the APY Lands. The Deputy Premier said that self-government on the APY Lands had failed and that the South Australian Government would 'not tolerate an executive unable to administer civil order, community services, social justice and quality of life for their community' (*The Australian* 16/3/04). Within a short time, however, the Government backed away from the proposition that it intended to 'take control' in the Lands and instead appointed a 'coordinator' who had no specific powers in relation to the existing organisations on the Lands. In 2005 the Government did legislate to increase penalties for trafficking in 'regulated substances', including petrol for inhalation on the APY Lands, and to amend the *Pitjantjatjara Land Rights Act*, to change some provisions relating to the reporting requirements of and election of the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Executive, but made no significant changes to the powers of the government in relation to the Lands (Morley 2005. See *The Pitjantjatjara Land Rights (Regulated Substances) Act* and *Pitjantjatjara Land Rights (Miscellaneous) Amendment Act*).

In 2005 the Coroner made a detailed report on the steps that had been taken since his previous inquest in 2002—the year the APY Lands were designated as a COAG trial site. With the exception of a couple of measures—the recruitment of a Male health

Program Coordinator and the provision of additional funds for NPY Women's Council's anti-domestic violence program—none of the steps taken by the South Australian Government had actually resulted in the provision of additional services or programs. The Coroner detailed the steps that had been taken: terms of reference for the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Inter-Governmental Inter-Agency Collaboration Committee (APLIICC) had been agreed to, working groups of the (APLIICC) had been established (although they had not met), a statement of intent in relation to priorities had been signed, management of the APY Lands issues had been transferred to the Department of Premier and Cabinet, a new body—the Anangu Lands Task Force—had replaced the APLIICC, a two year strategic plan had been approved by Cabinet, consultation protocols had been established with the newly elected Anangu Pitjantjatjara Executive, funds had been set aside for the training of the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Executive and agreement had been reached on the establishment of a new broadly based representative peak body for the Lands (SA Coroner 2005, paras. 9.10-9.49. See also SADPC 2005). What had not been achieved was the establishment of the suggested (or half-promised) facilities for the treatment and rehabilitation of petrol sniffers or long-term funding for the implementation of the much discussed youth, family, capacity building or anti-petrol sniffing programs, or the appointment of staff to assist in the organisation or oversight of such programs. The Coroner noted that, after two years of the COAG trial, progress had been very slow and most of the steps that had been taken did not actually translate into 'prompt, forthright, properly planned, properly funded action' (SA Coroner 2005, para. 9.49. See also SCARC 2006, 5.32-5.40; Costello & O'Donoghue 2005).

Dysfunctional Government

The Findings of the Coroners of South Australia, Western Australia and the Northern Territory convey a sense of bewilderment at the inaction of governments in the face of the human tragedy. The South Australian Coroner, commented on the inexplicably long time it had taken two different intergovernmental bodies concerned with petrol sniffing on the APY Lands to do anything. Both bodies, he argued, had taken too long to act and despite the time taken 'they still seem[ed] stuck in the "information gathering" phase'. The Coroner said that,

> [t]here is no need for further information gathering… What is missing is prompt, forthright, properly planned, properly funded action (SA Coroner, 2002, para. 11-12).

The Western Australian Coroner, in his findings in relation to the deaths of two teenage boys who, when affected by petrol inhalation, had hanged themselves, commented on the apparent inability of governments to take action. He said,

> [i]n reality many of the problems are simple, some of the solutions would appear to be relatively simple, but the mechanisms which are being employed to achieve the solutions are complex.

> If people have inadequate or poor quality food, then they need to be provided with more and better food. If they live in dirty and unhygienic environment, them the environment needs to be cleaned up. These propositions seem to be simple and yet their achievement appears to be beyond the capacity of both Commonwealth and State governments…(WA Coroner 2004, 30)

In 2005 the Northern Territory Coroner in his Report on the death of three young Anangu men from petrol sniffing said that '…the problems leading to the deaths are manifest, well known and well researched'. He observed that witnesses were 'getting tired of cooperating with inquiries' that produced 'no result'. A submission to the Inquest by the NPY Women's Council expressed extreme frustration that after three inquests so little action had been take by governments (NT Coroner 2005, paras. 30-33).

In 1983 Hope argued that after the Anangu had achieve land rights there was a tendency for the State to assume that Anangu problems 'would look after themselves'. He said that,

> it needs emphasizing, however, that the social situation of the Pitjantjatjara is a complex and fragile one and there is much untested water ahead. [It would be] a profound mistake for the Government to view continuing interest as unnecessary on one hand, or on the other eschew it as paternalistic. The inescapable reality is that the Pitjantjatjara are South Australian citizens (Hope 1983, 540-1).

Hope's concerns were well founded. The combination of the ingrained rhetoric of partnership, self-management and local participation on the one hand, and, on the other, the involvement of numerous unaccountable agencies from two tiers of government, appears to have rendered governments incapable of acting decisively or effectively (SCARC 2006). In the face of an enormous human catastrophe, governments in Australia appear to be unable to take action in relation to remote Indigenous communities (other than to establish frameworks and agreements for future coordination or forums for consultation or the like). It seems that it would now take enormous political will to break through the murky administrative tangle that has been created supposedly in the name of self-management, a whole-of-government approach, partnership and local participation in decision-making and service delivery.

Powerless Anangu

All the features of the relationship between local communities and government contribute to Anangu powerlessness. The uncoordinated provision of programs and services, the *ad hoc* arrangements, the stop-start funding, the unaccountability of governments and the repetitive, pointless and meaningless consultation all contribute to this powerlessness. Local concerns have little or no impact on the actions of governments. Desperate appeals from communities result in protracted

interdepartmental and intergovernmental discussions about coordination or, more likely, glacial discussions about establishing a forum in which discussions about establishing a framework for coordination can take place. (See for example SA Coroner 2002, paras. 9.5-9.28).

What purported to be partnerships between government and an empowered self-managing local communities has in reality left the people of the APY Lands deprived, divided and powerless. The whole-of-government approach and partnerships between government and communities have not altered this situation. In the mean time the massive social problems are not dealt with and young people on Indigenous communities go on living in hopelessness and engaging in self destructive behaviour.

Conclusion

This paper argues that in the particular case of the APY Lands the developments that have taken place, initially in the name of self-determination, local community control and partnership with government, and more recently in the name of whole-of-government, partnership and local community participation have left the Anangu largely powerless and deprived of the normal government services and protections that are available to other citizens. This raises the more general question about the possibilities and limitations of a new kind of structure in public administration.

The recent experience of the people of the APY Lands in particular, and remote Indigenous communities more widely, suggest that communities that are divided and lack the necessary political resources the new structures can have extremely negative consequences. Contrary to the promise of democratic empowerment and local engagement through open, responsive, flexible and collaborative partnerships the Anangu have remained impoverished, marginalised and powerless and are denied the benefits and protections of some basic government services.

In the name of local engagement and partnership, governments have been able, in the political debate, to shift some of the responsibility for the problems of the communities onto the communities themselves. Where there is no clearly identifiable agency, department or ministry that can be held accountable for the government failures, communities that are politically marginalised and divided are not in a position to exert any influence in the 'partnership'. The marginalised community remains a side show to the intergovernmental, inter-agency and bureaucratic politics.

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[1] The term Anangu has been adopted by a group of closely related Indigenous communities in the South Australian, Northern Territory and Western Australia 'cross-border' area. The *Report of the Select Committee on Pitjantjatjara Land Rights* states that,

> [t]he names "Pitjantjatjara", "Yankunytjatjara" and "Ngaanyatjarra" are commonly used to identify and distinguish three groups in terms of their affiliations with a specific language and/or geographic territory….For more than two decades, a number of Indigenous

> communities in Central Australia have used "Anangu" as a term of self-identification and cultural affirmation. The term is now frequently used by Pitjantjatjara, Yankunytjatjara, Ngaatjatjarra, Ngaanyatjarra and Antikirinya people, among others. "Anangu" affirms commonalities across a range of Indigenous groupings whilst differentiating that shared identity from the identity of outsiders, be they non-Indigenous Australians or non-Anangu Indigenous Australians (SCPLR 2004, 9).

See also Edwards (2004, 91) and Hope (1983, 75-7).

'APY Lands' refers to 103,000 square kilometres of land in the far north west of South Australia vested in a legal entity called the Anangu Pitjantjatjara which was created by the *Pitjantjatjara Land Rights Act* 1981 and is made up of the traditional owners of the land. The land was previously referred to as the AP Lands, but recently is more often referred to as APY Lands in recognition of the fact that two groups—the Pitjantjatjara to the west and Yankunytjatjara to the east—occupied the land covered by the Act.

[2] Membership of the Pitjantjatjara Council extended to a number groups other than Pitjantjatjara—Yankunytjatjara, Ngaatjatjarra, Ngaanyatjarra—who did not regard themselves as Pitjantjatjara. The name Pitjantjatjara was accepted, however, because a fully inclusive name would have been too unwieldy. It was in this context that members of all groups began to adopt the term 'Anangu' to describe themselves. (See Hope. 1983, 370).

[3] In the original legislation the name of the land holding entity was Anangu Pitjantjatjaraku but that was changed to Anangu Pitjantjatjara in an amendment to the Act in 1987.

[4] These measures including the mainstreaming of many services, the adoption of a national reporting framework for Indigenous disadvantage, the abolition of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC)—the national Indigenous representative body—and its replacement with the National Indigenous Council (NIC)—an appointed body of people with 'expertise and experience in particular policy areas', the adoption of a policy of 'practical reconciliation', with an emphasis on addressing social and economic disadvantage, in place of 'self-determination' which the Howard government saw as separatist and the adoption of Shared Responsibility Agreements (SRAs) under which Indigenous communities 'need to offer commitments and undertaking changes that benefit the community in return for government funding' (OIPC 2005, 18)

[5] An example of a case in which claims of progress were made by the Commonwealth government relates to the Wadeye Community in the Northern Territory. In its 2004-05 *Annual Report* the Commonwealth government's Secretary's Group on Indigenous Affairs—a body made up of the Secretaries or other senior members of Commonwealth agencies which responsible for overseeing the Commonwealth's whole-of-government approach to Indigenous affairs—claimed that the Wadeye Community in the Northern Territory had reported encouraging achievements and that it provided an example 'of how governments can work together with Indigenous communities to improve outcomes for Indigenous people' (SGIA 2005, 7). In 2006 a number of press report described a completely dysfunctional situation at Wadeye. Wadeye was described as a 'war zone' in which many of the residents lived in fear of gang violence. (*The Sydney Morning Herald* 23/5/06, 27/5/06; *The Australian* 23/5/06, 24/5/06) Contrary to the suggestion by governments that ample resources had been spent on Wadeye, governments spent approximately $1,800 more per head on other Territorian than were spent on the residents of Wadeye (Taylor & Stanley 2005, 4-5, 56-8)

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