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Submission to

**The Northern Territory Government
Outstations Policy**

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Table of Contents

1	INTRODUCTION	3
2	BRIEF OVERVIEW OF TJUWANPA OUTSTATIONS.....	3
2.1	History and Culture	3
2.2	The Tjuwanpa Outstation Service Environment.....	4
3	DISCUSSION OF KEY QUESTIONS	5
3.1	Eligibility for Support.....	5
3.1.1	Government objectives for overcoming Indigenous disadvantage	5
3.1.2	Sole or principle residence	5
3.1.3	Land tenure.....	6
3.1.4	Water supply	7
3.1.5	Access.....	7
3.1.6	Other considerations	8
3.1.7	Principles for the determination of eligibility for government support to outstations.....	10
4	OUTSTATION DEFINITION	11
5	OUTSTATION SERVICE LEVELS.....	12
6	THE SERVICE MODEL.....	14
6.1	What are the principles for service design and delivery?	15
6.2	What needs to be done at the local level?	16
6.3	What external support needs to be provided?	17
6.4	How could funding and contracting be structured?.....	17
6.5	What implications does this have for planning, monitoring and evaluation?.....	19
7	ADDITIONAL ISSUES FOR COMMENT.....	19
8	IN CLOSING.....	19
9	REFERENCES	21

1 Introduction

This submission responds to the Northern Territory Government's Outstations Policy Discussion Paper. Preparation of the submission has been undertaken by Annie Kennedy, a visiting PhD student from Southern Cross University and the Desert Knowledge Cooperative Research Centre (DK CRC) who has been undertaking research over the past two years at the Tjuwanpa Outstation Resource Centre (Tjuwanpa) focusing on Aboriginal engagement in government service delivery and programs. The research is pertinent to the Territory Government's current Outstation Policy Discussion Paper and the submission draws extensively on this body of work. The submission also draws on models of service delivery to remote communities from elsewhere in Aboriginal Australia and internationally and places these in the context of administrative arrangements in the Northern Territory.

The submission has been authorised by Jane Rosalski, the Tjuwanpa CEO and has the support of the Desert Knowledge CRC and Southern Cross University. The Ngurratjuta/Pmara Ntjarra Aboriginal Corporation which provides outstation services in the Central Desert also fully endorses the submission.

In this response, the submission provides background information to the settlement history of the Western Aranda outstations serviced by the Resource Centre and as well as a brief overview of the current service delivery environment. It then elaborates on the question of eligibility for support, drawing on information from the outstations to suggest key principles that need to be considered by governments in deciding eligibility for funding. The question of outstation definitions is then considered. Before the question of the service model is discussed the submission discusses service levels, as an understanding of basic service requirements in the outstation context underpins any discussion of appropriate service arrangements. While a number of the issues raised in Question 5 (Additional Issues for Comment) are dealt with in this submission under the preceding four questions, Tjuwanpa makes comment in this section to questions of process with respect to future outstation policy development and planning.

2 Brief Overview of Tjuwanpa Outstations

2.1 *History and Culture*

The 37 outstations serviced by Tjuwanpa are home to Western Aranda¹ kin groups. They are scattered across some 4,500 square kilometres of ranges and plains that surrounds the historic Hermannsburg mission settlement. Although six of the outstations in the western region require travel of an hour or more, 31 are within a 20 to 40 minute drive to the Resource Centre and Hermannsburg.

Despite the encroachment of pastoral leases Western Aranda families have maintained constant occupation of their lands, in large part as a result of the granting of a lease to the Finke River Mission in the late 1800s. The combination of Government policy and mission interventions over the next 100 years resulted in the settlement of Western Aranda families in and around the Hermannsburg Mission. In 1974, changes in both mission philosophy and Federal Government arrangements for Indigenous people resulted in the movement of large numbers of people from Hermannsburg back to their traditional land. Between 1974 and 1977 this movement saw 27 outstations settled, with the population of Hermannsburg over that time dropping dramatically from around 650 to 150 residents (Stoll, Ziersch & Schmaal 1979).

Western Aranda is spoken as the first language throughout the lands. Traditional cultural and spiritual practices linked to the land are a part of everyday life and outstation land is

¹ Aranda is the preferred local spelling

fundamental to Aboriginal identity. Family relationships and responsibilities also underpin every daily interaction. People talk of the peace and quiet on the outstation. For some the outstation is a place where they feel free to be who they are. For others, particularly women, the outstation is a safe and healthy place for themselves and their families; where they can avoid the risks of alcohol, drugs and gambling that they encounter in Hermannsburg and Alice Springs.

2.2 The Tjuwanpa Outstation Service Environment

Since the incorporation of the Resource Centre in 1984, government grants for outstation housing, water reticulation, and electricity and employment services have been channelled through Tjuwanpa. Government revenues underpin the local economy and all service delivery arrangements.

Although the 2006 census enumerated an outstation population of 300 the population on the Tjuwanpa outstations is highly mobile. Deaths, health needs, children's schooling, family disputes, work opportunities or imprisonment of a family member can mean that families move for weeks, months or in several cases, for many years. Funerals and cultural business, particularly the men's camps which take place in the hot summer months, can see the area's population swell by hundreds of people as families travel in from the Pitjantjarra lands to the south or from the areas to the west, north-west and north around the settlements of Papunya and Santa Theresa. Enumerating outstation population statistics is therefore problematic and beyond the scope of this submission.

While 42 outstations have been registered as members of the Corporation at various times, there are currently 39 members, with 37 serviced from Tjuwanpa². Of the 37 serviced outstations, 30 are permanently occupied, 5 are not occupied and two are inhabited intermittently. Of the five not permanently occupied, one is unable to be occupied at present due to 'sorry business'; one has no power³, and one family has been forced to relocate to Hermannsburg due to poor health of a family member.

For many years Tjuwanpa has managed a large Community Development Employment Program (CDEP) of between 150 to 300 participants, who are resident on outstations and in Hermannsburg. CDEP has been central to the outstation economy and underpins Tjuwanpa's service delivery arrangements. A successful initiative emerging from this program has been the Tjuwanpa Rangers group, which has secured independent contracts for land management activities and in 2007, won the Northern Territory's Landcare Award.

The outstations are accessed by a 600 kilometre network of dirt roads which are maintained by the Resource Centre as funding permits. Tjuwanpa also services 200 kilometres of water lines and 15 major bore sites. Between 2004 and 2005, Federal Government funding enabled power to be reticulated to 19 outstations from the Hermannsburg solar grid. Eight bores reticulating water to more than 20 outstations were also electrified. Tjuwanpa also services 17 outstation diesel or solar energy systems which power both bores and domestic systems.

In addition, Tjuwanpa is responsible for the repair and maintenance of outstation housing stock and the management of septic and rubbish. It hosts a Centrelink agency for Commonwealth Government income and family support payments, and prepares and administers a range of small government project grants for community activities including an art centre.

Tjuwanpa also plays a critical role in the daily life of residents that is unfunded by governments. It acts as the distribution point for a twice weekly mail service; manages utilities payments on behalf of households; assists individuals with police and court matters;

² Two outstations with membership do not have housing and do not receive services.

³ The cost of generator power is currently a disincentive for the family who wish to live there

provides emergency support to families in times of illness or death; brokers contact for residents with government agencies; provides Western Aranda interpreter assistance and deals with the host of requests and grievances characteristic of a small community. With only 8 of the 37 outstations connected to a phone, Tjuwanpa also provides residents with access to land lines and computer connections.

Government, business and non-government agencies with business in the area rely on Tjuwanpa as an essential contact point for the outstations. It hosts visiting researchers and official government visitors, provides data and information to a range of government agencies and disseminates information about upcoming events, meetings and consultations.

3 Discussion of Key Questions

3.1 Eligibility for Support

3.1.1 Government objectives for overcoming Indigenous disadvantage

The question of outstation **eligibility** for government funding raises questions regarding government obligations and objectives with respect to Aboriginal wellbeing. Under its obligations to international human rights conventions, the Australian Government has responsibilities to meet the basic needs of its citizens. The fact that the Territory Government has agreed to a limited package of assistance to outstations under its September, 2007 Memorandum of Understanding with the Australian Government, should not preclude basic citizenship entitlements for Aboriginal people. The question of resourcing is therefore a matter of political will and commitment to Australia's international obligations on the part of both governments. Australian obligations are reflected in the Key Indicators outlined in the Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage Report (Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision 2007). In line with this a question may be posed that asks, 'What would be the implications for Aboriginal welfare if governments withdraw current levels of service delivery to outstations?'

In the case of Tjuwanpa the answer is relatively clear. Withdrawal of power and water services would effect movement of people into nearby Hermannsburg. This has the potential to severely exacerbate housing stress in a settlement which already experiences overcrowding. As Tjuwanpa currently has 69 permanent dwellings⁴ constructed on outstations (in addition to a number of transportable sheds – up to 10 of which are occupied), this move could prove counterproductive to other government policy intentions that aim to reduce housing pressures in Aboriginal communities as a means to improving Aboriginal quality of life. An assessment of the cost to government for replacing outstation housing with new housing in Hermannsburg is considered significant. Such a decision would also see millions of government dollars already invested in outstation power, water and education infrastructure abandoned.

Withdrawal of services to fund Tjuwanpa outstations may also be counterproductive in terms of both Territory and Australian governments' concerns about ameliorating the conditions that lead to child abuse and neglect. As noted in section of 3.6 of this submission, the SCU/DK-CRC research at Tjuwanpa over the past two years shows that many Tjuwanpa residents, particularly women, live on outstations as a social safety strategy to protect themselves and their children from dysfunctional behaviours in nearby Hermannsburg.

3.1.2 Sole or principle residence

Eligibility for funding for services in the Tjuwanpa context cannot be determined by whether an outstation is occupied or not. Most outstation water and power systems connect multiple

⁴ Of a housing stock of 70, one is unsuitable for occupation

settlements. A break in the power or water reticulation system in one area subsequently affects those down line. The issue here is the impact that cessation of services would have on availability of power and water to neighbouring settlements that are occupied. Tjuwanpa already exerts judgement on a case-by-case basis with respect to services to outstations that are not continuously occupied.

The application of the principle of sole or principle residence in the Tjuwanpa context is likely to be unworkable for other reasons. The SCU/DK-CRC research at Tjuwanpa has found that houses in both Hermannsburg and on outstations are occupied according to clan and family groupings. Individuals move between the township and outstations according to a variety of circumstances including employment, health, education needs, family dynamics and bereavement. A family group of 20 to 40 or more people may therefore have access to both outstation and Hermannsburg housing under the name of the recognised family leader. Some families may also access public or private rentals in Alice Springs. This is not unreasonable given the numbers of people in the family group that may need to be accommodated.

While it is difficult to enumerate the actual housing occupancy rates, it appears that some Tjuwanpa residents have over time, developed housing arrangements which ameliorate housing pressures to some extent. For example, an elder may move into Hermannsburg for health reasons at which time the family may negotiate for younger members to replace them on the outstation. This feature is noted by other writers (Seemann et al. 2008). What appears to be considered at this time is the ability of the incoming family to meet their obligations to family and country. The application of a principle of sole or principle residence would therefore be extremely complex given the realities of Aboriginal lives, social structures and housing arrangements in very remote settlements.

3.1.3 Land tenure

Land tenure arrangements at Tjuwanpa are currently legislated under the Northern Territory Aboriginal Lands Right Act, 1976. Five Aboriginal Land Trusts were established in 1984 after an extensive process of community consultation supported by Lutheran Mission authorities that recognised five clan groups associated with specific Aboriginal dreaming sites across the Finke River Mission lease (Lindsay 1983). Outstation affiliations, settlement patterns and rights of residence follow these connections to country.

The SCU/DK-CRC research at Tjuwanpa has found that outstation residents are extremely concerned about policy initiatives which seek to privatise or lease outstation lands. Aboriginal cultural and spiritual connections to land create enormous complexities when non Aboriginal notions of land as a commodity are introduced. While lease and private ownership arrangements can potentially be considered in township areas where sacred sites are not in contention, Aboriginal families in the Tjuwanpa area consider their relationship to traditional land on outstation areas to be inalienable. Land rights are a function of birth and are intricately linked to identity and as noted earlier, permission to live on outstation land is granted by family elders. Public housing and land rights arrangements which vest power over residence and property access to government authorities are therefore viewed with deep suspicion and mistrust. Such arrangements present substantial issues for Aboriginal elders in terms of traditional authority and responsibilities.

Under these circumstances, substantial difficulties are likely to be encountered in proposals which suggest that outstation tenure decisions can be determined by external authorities. It is highly likely that Aboriginal families will be reluctant to agree to leasing arrangements unless assurances could be given with respect to the inalienability of land, and unless provisions are made whereby authority over who has rights to residence remains with traditional authorities. Any attempts to link service provision to leasehold arrangements would therefore require extremely careful and time consuming negotiations. This is not to say that such arrangements

cannot be considered, as is indicated by the Memorandum of Understanding signed in September 2007 between elders of the Gumatj Clan and the Commonwealth which enables the concept of strategic leasing under Section 71 of the Northern Territory Aboriginal Land Rights (1976) Act (Dalrymple 2007). However the SCU/DK-CRC research indicates outstation families have a very limited understanding of potential leasing options, with most people expressing a deep sense of mistrust about government intentions with respect to leasing proposals and considerable anxiety regarding any prospect of loss of authority over access rights.

The Outstation Discussion Paper questions whether outstation housing should be treated as private housing or as a Territory Housing asset. The above discussion would indicate the answer will lie in whatever leasing provisions would be acceptable to outstation clans. It will also be dependent on any government policy conditions that would force them to agree to a lease. Therefore, public housing models which assume government authority to evict tenants are likely to be unworkable on traditional Aboriginal land unless legislative arrangements provide Aboriginal people with no alternative.

It is noted that under current Emergency Response legislation and policy arrangements for the Northern Territory, Federal Government housing funding is limited to prescribed communities, and infrastructure investment in excess of \$50,000 requires a lease (Parliament of Australia 2007). Further outstation housing stock is ineligible for Community Clean Up funding. There is also inequity with respect to housing funding with prescribed communities eligible for repair and maintenance upgrades of up to \$6,000 per house against outstation housing where the maximum is \$2,500. This situation could see outstation housing stock and power and water assets deteriorate should the Territory Government be unable to adequately fund outstation housing and related infrastructure.

3.1.4 Water supply

Water supply necessarily deals with questions of availability, reliability and quality of supply. The first outstations established in the Tjuwanpa area between 1974 and 1976 were located in areas with access to existing soaks, bores and waterholes. Since that time the reticulation of water and sinking of additional bores has enabled the establishment of newer outstations. Water supply is therefore available to all existing outstations. Reliability, however, is a significant problem. Although most bores are now linked to solar or reticulated electricity supply, the research shows that feral horses are a constant problem; digging up water lines and damaging taps and tanks in their search for water. This issue becomes acute during the dry season and during extended drought periods. Repairing water infrastructure on Tjuwanpa's outstations represents a substantial service cost. While water quality could be improved through available technologies, reliability of supply will demand that outstations agree as a group about ways to manage feral horses, and that resources are available to help them tackle this problem.

3.1.5 Access

Transport networks

Decisions assuming that all outstations are extremely remote and therefore problematic in terms of service delivery need to be cautiously addressed. Of the 37 outstations with permanent housing and facilities, 25 are within a drive of some 30 minutes from Hermannsburg. Only three outstations require travel of more than an hour and all these outstations are currently occupied.

In most cases, outstation access roads can be, and often are, traversed in a sedan. The road that presents the most difficulties is the main highway to the west of the Resource Centre which is a Territory Government responsibility. This has significant problems with sand and

corrugations as a result of a high volume of tourist traffic to and from Kings Canyon and Areyonga. Although the Territory Government has promised for many years to pave this road, budget allocations have yet to be forthcoming.

Education

Policy makers should also be careful about assuming that being on an outstation results in less access to education or poor school attendance. Evidence from the SCU/DK CRC research at Tjuwanpa suggests that outstation families in the Tjuwanpa area implement a number of strategies to ensure their children are educated. These include sending children to boarding school, bringing them daily to school in Hermannsburg or having them stay with other family members in Hermannsburg or Alice Springs so they can attend school.

Although most outstations are within 30 minutes travel time to the school in Hermannsburg, there is no school bus service. Such services are normally available in similar circumstances in most rural and regional areas in Australia where school attendance can require bus travel of up to an hour or more. In addition, of the three Remote Learning Centres constructed on outstations, only one remains open. It is understood that outstation residents were not fully consulted prior to government's decision to close these two schools. In these cases, valuable educational infrastructure exists to service the needs of primary children on outstations in the Tjuwanpa area but the Territory Government has discontinued the placement of teachers in these facilities.

Telecommunications

Telecommunications access to Tjuwanpa outstations remains limited and is of poor quality. Eight outstations have either private or public phone lines but these are not of a quality to install broadband. This limits access to banking, phone and other services. It is highly likely, however, that in the near future new technologies will be introduced capable of servicing the needs of remote and very remote areas (Abolhasan & Wright 2008).

It is important to note that outstation families cope with limited telecommunications in a number of ways. Banking, mail and any business that needs to be conducted via phone is usually undertaken on days when families do their shopping or have other business in town.

In line with the above, the issue of access to outstations requires consideration of a number of factors.

- First are government policy assumptions that equate living in very remote settlements with a lack of access to services. Here we note that Tjuwanpa outstation families put in place a variety of coping strategies to ensure access to basic health, education and telecommunications services, including at times, moving away from the outstation and into town to meet these needs. These coping mechanisms need to be recognised.
- Access is also a function of government decision making. Access to education for Tjuwanpa residents could be significantly enhanced if educational authorities consulted with outstation families with respect to the possibility of introducing school bus services and with respect to the future of the two Remote Learning Centres that are currently closed. Road access to western outstations would be significantly enhanced if government proceeded with its commitment to seal Larapinta Drive west of Hermannsburg.
- Further, access to services across the board is influenced by available technologies that are changing rapidly.

3.1.6 Other considerations

The SCU/DK-CRC research at Tjuwanpa confirms that for Western Aranda residents, outstation living is highly valued. A growing body of research suggests that these values result in substantial health and social benefits that are poorly recognised by government

policy makers (Garnett & Sithole 2007; Rowley, O'Dea & Anderson 2008). Evidence at Tjuwanpa also suggests that outstations demonstrate potential for new business and employment opportunities linked to the land. Some writers have referred to the broader security and conservation benefits to the nation as a result of populating Australia's very remote areas (Dillon & Westbury 2007).

Social identity

Outstations enable connection to country to be sustained and nurtured in new generations. As with other outstation settlements across remote Australia, the research at Tjuwanpa shows that connections to country are a driving force in people's decision to live on the outstations. It is their home - the place where they were raised; where their families are buried, and where their parents and grandparents told them the stories that maintain their link to the land and its spirits. Living on the land creates their sense of identity. Outstation lands are also critical to the future identity of their children and grandchildren.

Aboriginal elders and leaders interviewed as part of the SCU/DK-CRC research project at Tjuwanpa talked about their responsibility for fostering this identity. Some residents noted that passing on traditional knowledge to children and adolescents is facing new challenges. English is replacing Aranda as the first language, particularly where children go away to school, meaning that detailed understanding of traditions and practices which are central to Western Aranda identity are being compromised. Families therefore ensure that children are on the outstations during school holidays and on weekends so that they can be exposed to Western Aranda language, knowledge and culture.

Family safety and welfare

Outstations are also seen as safer places than Hermannsburg to raise families. During interviews, women spoke of the importance of raising children on outstations as a means of avoiding petrol sniffing, ganja, alcohol, and youth violence. Outstations also provide havens for people away from other 'trouble' in town. Families deliberately move themselves or other family members to outstations to avoid opportunities for gambling, alcohol and potential violence. Outstations also play an important role in the conduct of sorry business, thereby reducing the risk of social pressures and conflict in Hermannsburg at times of emotional stress.

Health benefits

Outstation living offers the opportunity for more physical activity such as horse riding, swimming, hunting and collection of bush tucker. These activities are a regular feature of outstation life in the Tjuwanpa area. Recent research at Utopia indicates that traditional lifestyle activities associated with outstation living brings significant health benefits that over the longer term, can potentially reduce the cost of health services (Campbell, Davies & Wakerman 2008).

Employment and business opportunities

Tjuwanpa outstations are located in the West MacDonal Ranges providing significant potential opportunities for tourism, with associated training and employment benefits over the longer term. The NT Department of Tourism has already been in discussion with traditional owners in the area and agreed to support three eco-tourism ventures, one of which is already in operation. Horticulture also has potential, although the experience of two such ventures at Tjuwanpa suggests a risk of failure when Aboriginal people are not the drivers of these business opportunities.

During the tourism season there is also evidence that Aboriginal artists are using local venues such as the Finke River Park Camp site and Hermannsburg Tea Rooms to sell their art. Artists draw their inspiration for their work from the stories and landscapes of their country. Living on country also enables a number of Aboriginal families to supplement income through sales of locally produced artefacts and feral horses.

Provision of services to outstations also provides Aboriginal employment and training opportunities. The Tjuwanpa Rangers undertake a variety of feral weed and animal control programs and contract work on behalf of NT Parks and other groups. The group also works in partnership with universities where they have been instrumental in identifying endangered species and new species habitat areas. What is significant about the Rangers group has been its ability to attract and retain Aboriginal trainees and staff. The program also provides opportunities for Rangers to learn new skills and take up new technologies. Interviews with Tjuwanpa Rangers staff undertaken as part of the SCU/DK-CRC research indicates that working on country; which builds on existing local knowledge and skills; is a strong incentive to participate.

In an area where employment opportunities are extremely limited, the outstation environment offers jobs and learning opportunities that are highly sought after by outstation residents. There are strong indications workforce participation is an important strategy used by outstation families to enable them to live on their outstations. As of November 2008, 20 of the outstations which are permanently occupied had at least one family member in employment at either Tjuwanpa or Hermannsburg, with a total of 35 people from these outstations currently employed locally in full or part-time work. None of these are CDEP positions. The Tjuwanpa Rangers program currently accounts for 8 of these jobs. One outstation, which is currently intermittently occupied, has family members working in full time positions in Alice Springs. An additional 10 full-time Ranger positions are to be funded in February, 2009. New funding opportunities through the MacDonnell Shire could also see an additional five outstation people employed in jobs in Hermannsburg in the near future.

A consideration in determining service delivery is therefore the likely impact on small business development and employment opportunities if outstation housing, water and power services are unavailable. In the case of Tjuwanpa, eco-tourism ventures would be affected should outstation water and power services be compromised and if roads deteriorated significantly. Key service jobs could also be lost. Further, as the SCU/DK-CRC research suggests that outstation families use employment as a strategy to support outstation living, workforce participation rates could be affected if people are forced to relocate to Hermannsburg or Alice Springs.

The importance of outstation living to Aboriginal families is evidenced by their preparedness to invest their limited income to maintain cars, buy fuel and purchase the diesel necessary to generate outstation power, despite rising fuel and food costs. Diesel is currently \$2.50 per litre at the Hermannsburg bowser and towing fees from Hermannsburg to Alice Springs are \$250. Vehicle running costs are exceptionally high due to wear and tear on tyres and batteries. Outstation residents continue to absorb these costs despite increasing problems with finding cash under the Federal Government's income management arrangements. The value of outstation living is also evidenced by outstation family employment and education strategies. These behaviours provide strong evidence of the value to families of outstation living.

3.1.7 Principles for the determination of eligibility for government support to outstations

Taking into account Australian Government obligations under human rights conventions and in considering the role outstations play in the social, psychological and physical health of Aboriginal residents; the first principle in determining eligibility for support to outstations should therefore be:

*That government financial support for services to outstations is considered when the social and economic costs of **not** providing basic services to these settlements would lead to deterioration in Aboriginal quality of life.*

Application of this principle would require government accountability against Indigenous Disadvantage Indicators in any decision to defund outstation services. It would go some way

to putting the onus on governments to defend service delivery decisions on the basis that they *do no harm*. It would also require that governments provide sufficient evidence that decisions which result in movements of Aboriginal people from outstations to communities and urban settlements can demonstrably improve Aboriginal quality of life.

Leading from this, the second principle we put forward considers the benefits of service delivery to outstations. Eligibility would therefore be determined by:

Evidence that outstation living contributes to Aboriginal social, emotional, physical and economic welfare.

Both of the above principles could go some way to building evidence based understanding about the benefits and costs of outstations to Aboriginal welfare, and challenge the rhetoric and myths associated with notions of outstations as ‘holiday houses’, ‘cultural museums’ and deserted shacks. It would also provide an opportunity to draw on Aboriginal perspectives about what, in their respective contexts, are quality of life indicators and what contributes to these. This is important, as the SCU/DK CRC research at Tjuwanpa indicates that non-Aboriginal notions of well-being differ from Western Aranda perspectives, not necessarily from the point of view of outcomes, but the means to achieve them.

The application of a principle of sole or principle residence does not recognise the complex social arrangements and high mobility that underpins Aboriginal residential living patterns. Nor does it take into account the prospect that cessation of basic power and water services in one location can have an impact on services in other outstation localities. With this in mind the following alternative principles are suggested:

That support for services to an outstation takes into account demonstrated family or clan occupancy of, and investment in living on an outstation over time, and,

That service provision takes into account an outstation’s importance to the liveability and viability of other outstations in the area.

Given the constraints in the employment market in very remote areas, and the growing importance of conservation, security and tourism in very remote areas to Australia’s national interests, government funding of outstation services should also consider:

That services support the viability or development of identified and potential local Aboriginal business and employment opportunities.

Overall the research at Tjuwanpa demonstrates that outstations contribute in many different ways to Aboriginal well being; contribute substantially to workforce employment opportunities; appear to be an incentive for work participation, and have demonstrated potential for small business development. The aim of service delivery should therefore be to support an environment in which identified opportunities can be retained and enhanced.

4 Outstation Definition

The term outstation appears to have been first coined in the 1960s to describe service delivery to small settlements around Elcho Island. There was some criticism of this view which represented outstations as affiliated with a central hub, when in fact Aboriginal perceptions consider them as settlements in their own right (Coombs 1978 p.150). In seeking to develop a policy for small, remote settlements, the Commonwealth Government in 1986 distinguished between outstations and homelands, describing outstations as, ‘*Small decentralised communities of close kin, established by the movement of Aboriginal people to land of social, cultural and economic significance to them*’, and homelands as, ‘*The traditional country of Aboriginal people.*’ (1987 p.4)

In more recent discussions, Altman (2006 p.4) uses the term outstations to refer to both the place and the people associated with it. As ‘**the place**’, ‘*They are locales where small groups*

of generally related people live on land to which they have statutory ownership and/or descent-based affiliations. As **‘the people’**, outstations represent, *‘distinct Indigenous social groupings.* People belonging to the group may not necessarily reside on the outstation but have rights and obligations with respect to the land.

In Central Australia, Western Aranda clans tend to use the term outstation to describe the settlement area and the ancestral land surrounding the settlement. People associated with this land are generally referred to locally as ‘outstation people’. Outstations are also distinguished from small Aboriginal communities, settlements or townships by population size. Thus Wallace Rockhole; which has a population of around 80 and was originally settled as part of the outstation movement from Hermannsburg; is generally no longer considered locally as an outstation. Most Tjuwanpa outstation populations have varied considerably over time, but are usually considered to be those settlements having discrete infrastructure and a population of less than 50.

In terms of definitions, Altman’s definition *‘the place’* provides a more contemporary description of outstations. It is not clear why the Outstation Discussion Paper seeks a new definition other than to accommodate larger settlements under government funding definitions. Tjuwanpa believes that the substantive issue is not one of definition, but rather a question of whether governments understand and support the values inherent in outstation living and are subsequently willing to fund these kinds of very remote settlements in order to achieve these benefits.

5 Outstation Service Levels

If Australia is to reduce Indigenous disadvantage, Aboriginal people living on outstations require first and foremost a healthy living environment. Service priorities must therefore concentrate on:

- Ensuring a reliable and safe supply of drinking water,
- Ensuring that the living environment addresses the key risk factors to public health, and
- Ensuring a reliable and safe power supply.

Access to health, education and employment or business opportunities are also extremely important considerations but as indicated earlier, local variability in service needs and arrangements needs to be considered.

The discussion paper suggests that because of the difficulty and cost associated with ensuring delivery of potable water, that an alternative would be to have the requirement *‘that outstation residents have access to a sustainable water supply suitable for domestic purposes.’* This is a reasonable proposition but only in the context that outstation residents are fully aware of health risks in existing water supplies. This implies that government would need to ensure that adequate measures are put in place to not merely inform, but to educate residents about possible risks, causes and consequences of drinking existing supplies.

In the context of Tjuwanpa, the most pressing issue is the reliability of water supplies. By far the greatest service cost to Tjuwanpa is the repair and maintenance of water hardware. This is largely caused by environmental factors such as calcium build-up, but more particularly feral horses. There is subsequently a need for technical staff capable of undertaking urgent repairs and ongoing maintenance of water hardware. This is achieved more cost effectively and efficiently locally. At the same time, there is the need for back up access to specialist bore technicians in the event that bores break down. Local staff are often adept at many of the repairs needed to restore bore functioning but there are health and safety risks when they do this in the absence of proper equipment and advice. This could be achieved through agreements with regional specialists capable of providing phone or on line advice, or who are available under contract on an as-needs basis.

Reliability of water supplies and a reduction in the cost of repairs, however, will require a more lateral approach involving the control of feral horse populations. There is significant potential to do this with assistance from the local Rangers group but inherent in this is the need to work with outstations to understand the problem and address social issues relating to their control. Further, it implies a funding and services model that enables the integration of different sources of government funding towards agreed upon local outcomes. The potential to do this is discussed in Section 6.

While technology improvements in recent years have seen the majority of outstations move onto the Hermannsburg grid or stand alone solar systems, regular maintenance of backup generators and batteries is required. Most of these tasks can be performed by local Aboriginal staff but technical backup from visiting specialist technicians is required for more sophisticated issues. The exception to this is for electrical repairs which necessitates bringing in outside contractors. We note that Tjuwanpa already has local staff trained by PowerWater who are qualified to undertake minor repairs to the Hermannsburg grid. This exemplifies the potential for local servicing when appropriate training opportunities are provided to Aboriginal people. It also points to the need for a more holistic and integrated approach to service delivery than is currently the case. Service staff in remote areas also need to be able to access technical specialists when required. The elements of such an approach are briefly described in Section 6.

A larger issue is the need for an approach to the management of housing stock in a way that meets requirements for healthy living. There is significant potential to train householders and local staff using the healthy housing model approach (Pholeros 2003), but this will require resources and staff dedicated to developing the system and able to provide professional training and mentoring. It is conceivable that this could be achieved under a model of service delivery such as has been developed in the Murdi Paaki region of NSW (Guenther & Conatus 2006) and through contracting arrangements between the Resource Centre or the Shire, and the Northern Territory Government. Implementing such a model implies a change to the structure of current outstation housing funding allocations where housing budgets are determined by a set amount per house. It would also mean that service planning include resources for appropriate on-the-job training. This could be linked to accredited training provided such training reflects local needs rather than being driven by industry requirements.

To retain opportunities for Aboriginal employment and achieve healthy housing outcomes, there will need to be sufficient provision for training, supervision and mentoring on the ground. At Tjuwanpa, the research shows Aboriginal staff are keen to gain recognised technical competence but are hampered in their efforts to do so by training models that require English language proficiency, emphasise classroom learning, and are delivered by people they don't know against industry outcomes that bear little relevance to the outstation context. Aboriginal people struggle in these environments. This situation is reflected in research findings from other Indigenous areas in remote Australia which recommend that the content and delivery models currently adopted in Vocational and Educational Training (VET) need to merge with local livelihood opportunities and respond to Aboriginal learning styles and the conditions which support Aboriginal participation (Rea, Messner & Gipey 2008; Young, Guenther & Boyle 2007). Thus housing and essential services plans and budgets would have to be determined locally and incorporate training and supervision (in the case of Tjuwanpa this would be at the area level or Ward), with different government agencies agreeing to pool funds in support of integrated local plans.

In the Aboriginal environment, factors other than technical competence also come into play. An important consideration is the relationship that the householder has with housing staff. Research at Tjuwanpa shows that this impacts on residents' willingness to report problems and whether they accept housing staff into the house or onto the property. Relationships and local knowledge subsequently impacts on costs. One example to consider from Tjuwanpa's experience is where an outside electrical contractor arrived, found no problem and returned to Alice Springs at a cost of \$1,300. Not knowing the local geography, he had gone to the

neighbouring outstation. The residents who experienced the problem watched him go by but not knowing the technician, they failed to follow him to advise he was in the wrong place. A second visit was required at a further cost of approximately \$1,500. Outstation relationships with housing and essential services staff at Tjuwanpa also enable people to borrow equipment and undertake simple repairs themselves. These examples highlight the importance that local knowledge and relationships have in the service environment. They can contribute to reducing service costs and provide a more efficient response to emergencies such as a break in a water main. Services models need to take these factors into account.

As outlined earlier, the question of whether it is feasible for Territory Housing to take over management of outstation housing stock will be dependent on lease options and negotiations with traditional owners regarding issues of authority. What remains to be seen, however, is whether Territory Housing management of housing stock does in fact deliver better outcomes for housing in remote and very remote areas. Regardless of who manages housing, it will be the quality of service delivery on the ground that matters. Qualified tradespeople are hard to find and retain in the current remote employment environment (Haslam-McKenzie 2007). Employment of outside tradespeople would also come at the cost of jobs for local Aboriginal people who generally do not have recognised technical qualifications. The issue here is not the administrative arrangements for managing housing stock, but how delivery of outstation housing and essential services could incorporate cultural relationships and aspirations, knowledge of the people and the area, and at the same time support Aboriginal employment and training objectives.

6 The Service Model

Findings at Tjuwanpa challenge the notion that service delivery can be delivered more competently and with greater cost effectiveness by outside contractors under government administrative arrangements. What it suggests is that the service delivery model needs to take into account the following elements:

- The potential to build on householder capacity to undertake basic repairs,
- The importance of cultural relationships and local knowledge in the recruitment and deployment of services staff,
- The difficulties of applying public housing leasing provisions to Aboriginal clan lands,
- The need to integrate specific provision for appropriate training, supervision and mentoring for Aboriginal residents, staff and non-Aboriginal tradespeople at the regional level within the service model,
- The advantages of taking a holistic approach to service planning and delivery arrangements,
- The advantages of pooling government resources in support of local services plans.

Tjuwanpa believes that there is significant potential to improve service delivery outcomes and to reduce the overall direct cost of services over the longer term. The principles of the model proposed here draw from the Tjuwanpa service environment, including the socio-cultural and localised aspects of the physical environment, as well as approaches that are currently being used by a range of government, bi-lateral and multi-lateral agencies in remote and very remote areas across the developing world as well as in Indigenous Australia. In proposing the elements of this model we have asked ourselves the following questions:

- What are the principles that need to underpin the design and delivery of services? (This is distinct from questions of eligibility.)
- What needs to be done at the local level?
- What external support needs to be provided?

- How could funding and contracting be structured?
- What implications does this have for planning, monitoring and evaluation?

6.1 *What are the principles for service design and delivery?*

- ❖ That services and the technologies that support them, are **appropriate** to the local social and physical environment and take into account future costs,
- ❖ That service beneficiaries **understand** the issues and service delivery options, including the likely benefits and costs of services and technology options, and are **involved** in determining those options that best fit their particular situation,
- ❖ That Aboriginal culture, particularly **the role that family and clan relationships and authority** play in local decision making and service delivery, are recognised in planning and service delivery decisions,
- ❖ That service delivery funding is **integrated** and holistic rather than siloed, in recognition of the need in remote areas to maximise the use of limited human, capital and financial resources.
- ❖ That service delivery takes an **asset-based or strengths-based approach**, which identifies the human, physical and stakeholder resources available locally to support agreed upon outcomes.
- ❖ That service delivery models take a **flexible, phased and long-term** approach in their development.
- ❖ That governments' role is to support and monitor **outcomes** in support of the aim of bridging the gaps in Indigenous disadvantage, with the strategies to achieve this determined in collaboration with local stakeholders.

The above principles imply a localised approach to service delivery that is negotiated with outstation residents within culturally appropriate processes and with government and other stakeholders in the area. For example, in the Tjuwanpa area providing reliable water supplies in a cost-effective way cannot be isolated from issues in the broader environment such as feral horses. Dealing with this will require the ability to engage and negotiate with recognised clan leaders in the local community over a period of time; the capacity to draw on local resources such as the local Ranger group; the potential to negotiate other sources of funding such as royalties or the Aboriginal Benefits Fund, and the ability to tap into appropriate training opportunities that enable outstation householders to better manage housing and associated hardware. It will also require the preparedness of government(s) to provide flexibility and longer term commitments in the planning and contracting of service delivery, including the potential to pool funds. The potential to do this is reflected in the November 2008 agreement for the Torres Strait and Northern Peninsula Area. This foreshadows the development of regional service delivery agreements, with governments working together on the implementation of an integrated regional plan.

Localised, community driven approaches are well tested and demonstrated in international experience and in Australia. The Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (Davies, J. et al. 2008), Demand Responsive approaches to service delivery (Deverill et al. 2002) and Community Driven Development (Wong & Guggenheim 2005) approaches all build on these principles. What is interesting is that the 2007 Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage report states that the success factors in programs which influence attainment of positive Indigenous outcomes reflect these same principles - the presence of Aboriginal-government-private partnerships; the use of bottom-up approaches to decision making; the presence of good governance and availability of on-going government support (p.11).

6.2 What needs to be done at the local level?

As noted earlier in this submission, the key services that enable outstations to healthy and habitable relate to water, power, housing and transport. The cost of providing these services is reduced if:

- ❖ The need for service is reduced. This would require that householders are equipped with the skills and basic tools needed to undertake simple repairs and the knowledge required to understand how housing and essential service technologies function. Work being undertaken by Bushlight and recent work undertaken in remote communities as part of a Dessert Knowledge initiative involving community management of outstation water supplies (Grey-Gardiner 2008), are examples of these approaches in use in the Territory. Reducing the need for service will also mean tackling the underlying causes that lead to technology breakdowns and the need for repair, such as control of feral horses. It also implies involving householders in choices about introduced technologies and that these are linked to outstation service agreements. Numerous examples of the application of this approach can be found in water supply and sanitation service delivery models applied in remote communities in developing countries (Parry-Jones 1999) although the introduction of user-pay systems must be approached with caution in remote Aboriginal communities (Pearce et al. 2008).
- ❖ A single visit by services staff can achieve multiple outputs. Tjuwanpa already attempts to integrate various programs in order to maximise resource allocations. For example, housing and essential services staff share responsibilities for essential repairs to water lines, bores and housing. Out of necessity, equipment and vehicles are also shared. Employment and training opportunities work in support of service delivery. What is currently lacking, however, is access to appropriate training and expertise that would enable provision of a service similar to the Healthy Housing Worker approach used by Murdi Paaki in Western NSW.
- ❖ Householders have agreements with respect to sharing responsibilities for the care and maintenance of housing and essential services technologies. Reaching this point will necessitate that a participatory approach to community engagement is valued by agencies and properly resourced in terms of time, expertise and funding. The current drive-in/drive-out, 'one hit wonder' processes characteristic of Federal and Territory governments has been replaced by engagement processes throughout the program cycle that incorporate appropriate local people and experienced outside facilitators and factor in sufficient time through which real engagement can take place. The approach also requires that sufficient attention is given to Information, Education and Communication (IEC) processes that enable *informed*, local decision making.
- ❖ Recruitment processes will also need to recognise Aboriginal cultural sensitivities and outstation work participation strategies. As noted earlier, in the Tjuwanpa context, employment appears to be a means employed by outstation families to stay on their outstations. Householder relationships with services staff can also potentially reduce service costs. In addition, cultural sensitivities come into play regarding who has permission to enter particular areas of land.

In line with this, the model would incorporate community engagement processes through which outstation groups would be informed of options and costs; responsibilities and service costs would be negotiated through a properly resourced process of community engagement; householders would receive sufficient training and education through which they could meet their service obligations, and local staff would be recruited, trained and supported to deliver a package of agreed services at the householder level.

The above presumes a local hub that would undertake necessary planning, and provide appropriate management, training and supervision to teams and at the household level. In the

case of Tjuwanpa, this could be done at the level of the Resource Centre or alternatively, at the Ward level under the overall management of the Shires Services Manager. At this level there would need to be agreement to use of vehicles and equipment for service delivery across the area; staff recruited who have the capacity to supervise service staff and potentially to take on apprentices, and the introduction of services management systems that build on healthy housing models of service.

What would also be required is a planning process that builds an area plan for housing and related services and roads maintenance. Ideally this would be based on the Healthy Housing principles and include programmed maintenance schedules. Such a plan would take time to develop as it would need to be underpinned by a sound assessment of service needs, employment and business opportunities, and a process of community engagement through which service priorities and responsibilities would be determined.

Changing administrative arrangements for the delivery of services needs to be approached carefully. There are local sensitivities involved. Tjuwanpa's outstation residents identify strongly with the Resource Centre as *their* centre. Apart from questions of ownership and identity, there are Aboriginal governance considerations to take into account. The retraction in Aboriginal organisations as a result of local government reforms; the closure of Aboriginal Housing organisations under housing reforms, and the potential impact of changes to CDEP arrangements means that opportunities for local Aboriginal representation and leadership opportunities in the Northern Territory have diminished. Changes would therefore need to involve detailed discussions at the local level about the relative advantages of different administrative arrangements.

6.3 What external support needs to be provided?

Beyond the ward level, service managers and supervisors also need access to appropriate technical and contractor assistance on an as-needs basis. The capacity also needs to exist for ad-hoc inputs in relation to training and expert assistance. This could be provided by the Shire or some such regional organisation but would require provision under contracting arrangements for a pool of funds for technical assistance. This could be done on a regional or Shire basis through 'period' offers or similar mechanisms that enable the contracting of services on an as-needs basis.

6.4 How could funding and contracting be structured?

The discussion above suggests that what could work in the Tjuwanpa context is an area or Ward based, community driven planning and services delivery model that would establish a negotiated level of service with outstation residents for water, power, roads and requisite housing and environmental sanitation services.

There are a number of existing planning and contracting models used by the Australian International Development Assistance Agency (AusAID) through its international development assistance program that are worth examining. One approach that would lend itself to the Tjuwanpa outstation context would be what is commonly referred to as a 'Design-Implement' approach, although there are aspects of the Australian situation that would require incorporating some features that are usually aligned to 'block', 'pooled' or Sector Wide Approach (SWAp) funding models (United Nations Family Planning Association 2005) or regional agreements currently being considered for the Torres Strait Islands region. Based on these frameworks the key features of the model could therefore be:

1. The development of a long-term (usually 10 year) strategic plan that sets out the broad goals and outcomes in relation to settlement services (potentially for both outstation and township). This would be in line with indicators and processes articulated under the Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage framework.

2. The development of a five year conceptual framework for area service delivery that outlines objectives, outcomes and the broad strategies for service development and delivery that fit within the strategic plan. The framework would be developed at the area level, (possibly involving a number of Resource Agencies or the Shire), and negotiated with the Territory Government (and potentially other governments) for provisional commitments over the five year period.

Features of these agreements would be:

- Preparation of a rolling Annual Plans that sets forward service strategies and resourcing needs for an area.
 - Agreement to a use a pool of funds or trust fund arrangement over the time period for technical and contractor 'period' services on an as needs basis.
 - The use of the first 12 to 18 months to undertake a detailed assessment of service needs and the community engagement processes needed to negotiate local service agreements.
 - Provision within the plan to undertake a comprehensive review of the program at the end of two to three years through which any significant contracting adjustments can be negotiated with government funding agencies. This would involve a resourced program of community engagement in the review.
 - The potential to bring different government agencies, NGOs, Aboriginal entities and the private sector into the agreement to fund particular aspects of the plan such as training. (This draws on principles inherent in SWAp models).
 - Flexibility within budget allocations to use funds 'as needed' with ceilings or conditions applied to areas such as capital purchases.
 - Provisions that would ensure that the Local Ward Board reviews and recommends adoption of the various plans (strategic, five year and annual).
3. The development of annual service delivery plans and budgets. These plans would take a holistic approach to service delivery, incorporating strategies for housing, water, power, environmental sanitation and related training.

The model proposed has the following assumptions:

- Planning would be undertaken at the local area level.
- Services would be delivered across an area or Ward and managed by the Resource Agency or Shire Services Manager.
- A long-term strategic plan would provide the overall operating framework.
- A five year plan would set resourcing and staff estimates that can be subsequently funded by a number of government agencies including Federal Government, or other sources.
- Outstation residents would engage in the process of planning, evaluating and negotiating service levels and householder responsibilities, and that this would be adequately funded under the overall contract provisions.
- The Resource Agency Committee or Local Ward Advisory Board would engage in review and recommendation of plans put forward.

6.5 What implications does this have for planning, monitoring and evaluation?

Under this framework the approach to monitoring and evaluation would use current Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage indicators (Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision 2007). Strategies developed to achieve these would be developed locally. Here there is the potential to harness synergies and local partnerships between communities and government agencies towards common ends.

Internationally there is increasing interest and attention being given to monitoring and evaluation approaches that would be appropriate to the model proposed. Frameworks include Contribution Analysis (Kotvojs 2006) and Outcome Mapping (Earl, Cardon & Smutylo 2001). These frameworks recognise that the most successful programs are those that devolve power and decision making to local actors, and focus on the contribution of programs to desired outcomes rather than claiming that outcomes can be attributed to single programs or actions. Internationally and in Australia innovative processes, such as the Most Significant Change Approach (Davies, R. & Dart 2005), are also being used to facilitate community engagement in review and assessment of programs. There is significant potential to do this in remote Aboriginal areas, bringing with it substantial benefits in terms of local knowledge, Aboriginal engagement and local empowerment.

7 Additional Issues for Comment

It is likely that different outstation groups reflect very different environments for service delivery and present very different challenges and opportunities. Tjuwanpa would therefore welcome the establishment of an Outstation Advisory group at Territory level. This initiative, however, should not be a stand alone activity. It will need to be linked to monitoring and evaluation of outstation service delivery across the Territory, and also be linked to research efforts. It must also involve Aboriginal outstation representatives as part of its membership.

This submission highlights some areas where further research could be of considerable value in informing both Territory and Federal Government policy with respect to outstations. These include research which:

- Identifies the contribution of outstations to Aboriginal health and welfare, including the role of outstations in protecting families and children, enhancing conservation and the protection of culture,
- Identifies the coping strategies used by Aboriginal families which support their ability to live on their outstations,
- Identifies the preparedness and capacity of outstation groups to negotiate service delivery agreements and the factors which influence this, and,
- Estimates the relative benefits and costs of different models of government service delivery in remote and very remote areas, including the longer term costs and savings to governments of outstation living.

8 In Closing

At Tjuwanpa, we believe that the discussion paper puts forward a contestable assumption – that being that “*There will never be sufficient resources to meet the complex service demands of outstations.*” This assumes that government is the only agency that brings resources to bear. This fails to consider Aboriginal agency and capacity to negotiate and support service delivery. It also fails to acknowledge the potential to pool local resources and build on

Aboriginal strengths, capacities and aspirations through genuine partnerships between outstation groups, Aboriginal organisations, and across the range of government programs.

It is disappointing that the Territory Government has committed its consultation on future arrangements for service delivery to Aboriginal outstations to such a limited timeframe. While Tjuwanpa understands that the Northern Territory faces substantial constraints with respect to funding outstation services, the attempt to put in place arrangements that affect the lives of more than 10,000 Aboriginal outstation residents, within the space of nine months, misses important opportunities to develop approaches that may have real benefits for both governments and outstation people.

Tjuwanpa remains committed to seeking workable solutions that take into account regional and local variability. We believe that the approaches and considerations suggested in this submission are a starting point. We also believe that they will require further exploration with outstation residents and other stakeholder groups. This would enable outstation families the opportunity to understand and make informed decisions about future service delivery arrangements and to identify where potential synergies and potential partnerships exist. We would be more than happy to participate in any future discussions and opportunities with the Northern Territory Government to explore the outstation environment and the service delivery framework outlined here.

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