

Review of the Cape York COAG Trial



Final Report

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Appendix A
Organisations and Individuals Consulted

executive summary

- This is a first-stage report on the COAG Trial in Cape York, Queensland; it was commissioned by the Office of Indigenous Policy Co-ordination (OIPC) and prepared by Urbis Keys Young. The research was conducted in June-July 2006. As well as consideration of some relevant background documents, the study involved consultation with a range of relevant government and community stakeholders. Short visits were made to five Cape York communities which were involved in the Trial, namely Wujal Wujal, Hope Vale, Lockhart River, Aurukun and Napranum.
- The decision to conduct the COAG Trials and the choice of the Cape York as the Trial site for Queensland were made in 2002. The lead Australian Government agency for the Trial has been the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR), while the lead Queensland agency has been the Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy (DATSIP).
- Over the period of the Cape York COAG Trial there have been other major initiatives affecting the Cape's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities – for example, a range of State Government initiatives under the *Meeting Challenges, Making Choices* strategy, introduced in 2002 and involving a whole-of-government approach. Over this time there have also been significant changes in the Australian Government's Indigenous affairs arrangements – in particular the abolition of ATSI/ATSIC and the establishment of the Office of Indigenous Policy Coordination (OIPC), and the transfer to DEWR of responsibility for management of the Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) program.
- Although the Queensland Government was pursuing major initiatives on Cape York during the period of the Trial, and although there were many examples of active State/Commonwealth cooperation, stakeholders who were consulted during this study saw the Cape York COAG Trial itself as essentially an Australian Government (and specifically a DEWR) initiative. DATSIP was actively involved in a range of innovative activity on the Cape over the period, but it did not 'badge' this work as part of the Trial. While there was close contact between DEWR and DATSIP (for example, DEWR staff worked out of DATSIP's Cape York Strategy Unit in Cairns), conduct of the COAG Trial as such did not involve a State/Commonwealth partnership.
- Various stakeholders identified what they saw as achievements or positive outcomes resulting from the COAG Trial in Cape York. These included:
 - greater Australian Government interest in and engagement with Indigenous communities on Cape York;
 - numbers of initiatives involving both State and Commonwealth funding and support;
 - development of several consultative mechanisms involving various combinations of Australian Government, State Government and local representation - for example, Australian Government representation on the steering committee for Queensland's *Meeting Challenges, Making Choices* strategy and on the Partnerships Queensland CEOs Forum;
 - practical and financial support for a number of projects for Cape York in general or in particular Cape York communities – for example, development in Lockhart River of a commercial crayfishing venture;
 - ongoing Australian Government support for Cape York Partnerships and for the establishment of the Cape York Institute for Policy and Leadership;
 - demonstration of a practical model for working with communities that involved:
 - a substantial, on-the-ground presence by a public servant with sufficient expertise and seniority to work effectively with and on behalf of the community

executive summary

- continuity in this role
 - a degree of autonomy and capacity to make decisions
 - access to a flexible pool of funds
 - strong departmental support
 - active co-operation with other Australian and State Government agencies.
- On the other hand there was criticism of what was seen as a lack of clear objectives for the COAG Trial and of a strategic approach to achieving long-term changes.
 - While there have been a number of positive achievements related to the Trial, it cannot be said that the Cape York Trial has at this stage resulted in significant change in the ways that communities experience their dealings with government agencies. As community representatives describe them, such dealings remain complex, and confusing, and often frustrating, fragmented and unduly legalistic.
 - At the end of 2005 DEWR announced that it would no longer act as lead agency for the Cape York Trial, given that since the Australian Government's introduction of new Indigenous Affairs arrangements in mid-2004 the OIPC had increasingly played a key whole-of-government role. Since late 2005 there has not been any activity specifically relating to the Cape York Trial, and many stakeholders have accordingly concluded that the Trial is over. However, there has been no formal end to the process. There is a need for a COAG or Australian Government decision on whether there is to be any further action on the Cape York Trial, and clear communication of this to all relevant parties.

1 Introduction

This is an initial report on the Cape York COAG Trial. The study was commissioned by the Office of Indigenous Policy Co-ordination (OIPC) and was conducted by Urbis Keys Young.

1.1 The Cape York COAG Trial

In April 2002 the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) announced that a new approach to working with Indigenous communities would be trialled in up to ten regions across Australia. The Australian, State and Territory Governments were in agreement that both management processes and outcomes needed to be improved; the proposed new approach to Indigenous policy and service provision involved two key principles, as follows:

- *governments must work together at all levels and across all departments and agencies;*
and
- *Indigenous communities and governments must work in partnership and share responsibility for achieving outcomes and for building the capacity of people in communities to manage their own affairs.*

Queensland's Cape York was chosen as one of the COAG Trial sites.

For each COAG Trial there is a lead agency acting on behalf of the Australian Government and another representing the relevant State or Territory Government. For the Cape York Trial the lead Australian Government agency was the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR); the lead agency for Queensland has been the Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy (DATSIP).

In July 2004 (that is, some time after the COAG Trials commenced) the Australian Government abolished the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Council (ATSIC) and

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Services (ATSIS), and established the Office of Indigenous Policy Coordination (OIPC) with responsibilities relating to a whole-of-government approach to Indigenous affairs. It also set up Indigenous Coordination Centres (ICCs) in regional locations across Australia (usually locations where there had previously been ATSIS offices). Staff of the ICC office in Cairns have subsequently been involved in various aspects of the Cape York Trial, as have OIPC officers based in Canberra and in Brisbane.

1.2 This Study

Through the OIPC the Australian Government has commissioned independent reviews of all of the COAG Trials. The plan is for a two-stage evaluation process, with a first stage focused on learning from the Trials and contributing to their future development, and the second stage (scheduled for 2007-08) intended to involve a more comprehensive assessment of trial outcomes and achievements.

This report represents a *first stage* review of the Cape York COAG Trial. The report was intended to provide information on the history of the Trial, processes, lessons learnt to date, and possible next steps. The study brief specified that the report should be relatively short, and should focus in particular on what is working well and on what could be improved.

Conduct of the study involved short visits to each of the five Cape York communities (Wujal Wujal, Hope Vale, Lockhart River, Aurukun and Napranum) which were the primary focus of DEWR's work relating to the Trial. In each community Urbis Keys Young's researcher spoke with people such as Council members, Council staff, and representatives of other service providers. Face-to-face or telephone consultations were also conducted with representatives of Australian Government agencies (DEWR, OIPC, the Cairns ICC) and

Queensland Government agencies (DATSIP, Department of the Premier and Cabinet, Department of Communities) based in Brisbane, Cairns or Canberra.

The background documentation available to the study team was limited. However it was possible to refer to relevant documents such as the earlier evaluation report on the Queensland Government's *Meeting Challenges Making Choices* initiative, the Shared Responsibility Agreements (SRAs) that have been signed with communities participating in the Cape York Trial, and some background materials made available by DEWR's Queensland office.

Appendix A lists the stakeholders consulted by the study team, either face-to-face or by telephone. The consultations undertaken in relation to the Cape York Trial were notable for the diversity of opinion that they revealed; for example there were both some strong supporters of the Trial, and other people who were quite critical or dismissive.

2 History of the Cape York Trial

2.1 Choice of the Trial Site

Cape York was originally chosen as the COAG Trial site in Queensland because of its large Indigenous population and because a number of significant and innovative activities were already occurring there – for example initiatives involving the organisation Cape York Partnerships (CYP). On the Cape, it was said, there was thus '*something to build on*'.

Originally the intention was that the Queensland Trial would cover the whole of Cape York (which was an ATSIC region). However, during 2003 DEWR and the Indigenous Communities Coordination Taskforce (ICCT)¹ came to the conclusion that this was too large and too diverse an area for effective conduct of the Trial. It was accordingly decided to focus the Cape York Trial on five communities in particular – Wujal Wujal, Hope Vale and Lockhart River on the eastern coast of the Cape, and Aurukun and Napranum on the west coast. While there were Trial-related activities that did relate to the Cape York region overall, work with specific communities was generally limited to these five. People consulted during this study were not familiar with the rationale for the choice of these particular communities.

Given the range of innovative government, community and private sector activity taking place in the Cape York region over recent years, the Cape was (as one stakeholder described it) '*a crowded playing field*'. In the words of another observer, the COAG Trial on the Cape was '*not the main game*'. One result for the present study was that the task of identifying activities or outcomes that related specifically to the COAG Trial was far from

¹ The Indigenous Communities Coordination Taskforce, which was responsible to the Secretaries Group on Indigenous Issues, played a significant early role in promoting a whole-of-government approach and, in effect, getting the COAG Trials off the ground. Among other things the ICCT had the task of defining the emerging roles and responsibilities of the lead agencies.

straightforward. When consulted about the Trial, both government and community representatives often found it hard to recall and to disentangle the various players and roles involved. Turnover in staff within both community and government bodies was another factor contributing to limited memory of the Trial and of the people directly involved with it.

2.2 History of the Trial

2.2.1 Relevance of State Government Initiatives

In understanding the way in which the Cape York Trial developed, it is essential to note that over recent years the Queensland State Government has been pursuing its own significant initiatives in relation to the Cape's Indigenous communities. One key event was the preparation by Justice Tony Fitzgerald, in 2001, of what became known as the Cape York Justice Report. That report examined many of the problems being experienced by the Cape communities, with particular emphasis on issues relating to the misuse of alcohol. The Queensland Government in 2002 responded to Fitzgerald's report with an innovative strategy (*Meeting Challenges Making Choices*) that was designed both to improve conditions in communities and to establish more effective relationships between communities and State Government departments and service providers. A whole-of-government approach was proposed, with all Queensland agencies working in partnership with each other and with communities. Primary responsibility for implementation of *Meeting Challenges Making Choices* (MCMC) was given to DATSIP which, as noted above, was also nominated as the lead State agency for the Cape York COAG Trial.

In the words of the evaluation report later prepared on MCMC, the strategy included:

...the development of alcohol management plans; transfer of canteen licences to independently managed, local entities; treatment and rehabilitation services; the

development of a Family Violence Strategy; and creation of a statutory basis for Community Justice Groups.

... community development plans; negotiation tables; and action plans agreed between communities and the Government. The Government Champions program was adopted by Government in parallel to the MCMC policy.

... simplified arrangements with Indigenous communities; reforms to community governance legislation coupled with a Community Governance Improvement Strategy; improved recruitment, training and retention of public sector personnel working in the communities; establishment of the Cape York Strategy Unit; and a Cape York budget strategy involving identification of the quantum of resources applied to endorsed priorities and pooled funding.

These changes were to be supported by strengthened service delivery in the areas of Child Protection, Health, Education and Training (including youth diversion, skill and leadership development and facilitating pathways to employment), Economic Development and Land and Sustainable Resource Management. Housing was added as a ninth domain of action when a revised MCMC Implementation plan was endorsed in October 2004.

The Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy led the implementation of MCMC.

As this extract from the MCMC evaluation makes clear, alcohol management was one of a broad range of inter-related approaches embodied in the strategy.

As well as the five Cape communities targeted by DEWR through the COAG Trial, a further twelve communities were included within the scope of MCMC (namely Bamaga, Cherbourg, Doomadgee, Injinoo, Kowanyama, Mapoon, Mornington Shire, New Mapoon, Palm Island, Pormpuraaw, Seisia, Umagico, Woorabinda and Yarrabah).

Initiatives within MCMC, or parallel to it, which have been taken by the Queensland Government on Cape York over recent years and which had important implications for the COAG Trial include the following:

- appointment of a State Government 'champion' for each Indigenous community (this was a departmental head or other senior State Government officer with specific responsibility for consulting and working with the given community on behalf of the Queensland Government);
- establishment of Negotiation Tables as a mechanism for regular consultation between communities and government (these were normally held every few months, and chaired by the relevant champion)²;
- establishment by DATSIP of the Cape York Strategy Unit (CYSU) as a mechanism to improve consultation and co-ordination among relevant Government agencies and between Government and community;
- appointment of an Interchange Officer for each community (a person seconded from a State Government Department, working within the CYSU, and responsible for day-to-day community liaison and consultation);
- development and implementation of Alcohol Management Plans (AMPs) for most Cape communities.

Other governmental issues that have been important (and in some cases difficult) for the Cape York communities in recent years have been significant changes to the CDEP arrangements (now administered by DEWR) and changes in the Local Government framework within which communities operate.

² Negotiation Tables had earlier been trialled in three Cape York communities, through Cape York Partnerships.

2.2.2 State/Commonwealth Relationships

Conduct of this review made it clear that, since the COAG Trial began, there has been a significant degree of cooperation between DEWR and other Australian Government agencies on the one hand, and a range of Queensland Government bodies on the other, in relation to Indigenous affairs on the Cape. For example, as explained below, there has been joint State/Commonwealth membership of various relevant committees and working groups. Numbers of those consulted during the study commented on the positive and co-operative relationships that developed between Queensland and Australian Government agencies.

On the other hand, despite DATSIP being identified as the lead Queensland agency for the COAG Trial, there was little if any DATSIP activity which was specifically 'badged' as part of the Trial. The point was made that, although the Queensland Government was making large commitments of funds for work on Cape York over this period³, DATSIP had no budget allocation for work on the COAG Trial as such. DATSIP was actively engaged in a range of work across Cape York, but its officers appear to have seen all this as part of its general departmental role, including its responsibilities for *Meeting Challenges Making Choices* and other State Government initiatives. While DEWR focused on the five 'Trial communities' previously listed, *DATSIP* did not treat those communities differently from others. As a result, the parties whom the study team consulted largely saw the *COAG Trial* as an Australian Government (and specifically DEWR) activity rather than as a Commonwealth /

³ The Queensland Government's significant investment in MCMC and related policies included the following:

- some \$13.5 million in MCMC funding over four years
- the Partnerships Queensland Incentive Pool - \$5 million over two years
- Indigenous health package - \$69 million over four years
- Alcohol Demand Reduction program - \$12 million over four years (plus \$2 million from the Commonwealth)
- Indigenous child safety - \$31 million over three years
- significant funding for Balkanu Cape York Development Corporation and other economic and enterprise development projects
- Nurturing Families initiative - \$1 million
- \$1 million in additional support for the operation of Community Justice Groups.

State partnership. By the same token, the Queensland Government was clearly supportive of the Trial and saw its own strategies as complementary.

2.2.3 DEWR's Approach

In developing its lead agency role for Cape York, DEWR made reference to broad objectives for the COAG Trials as outlined by the ICCT, as follows:

- *tailor government action to identified community needs and aspirations;*
- *coordinate government programs and services where this will improve service delivery outcomes;*
- *encourage innovative approaches traversing new territory;*
- *cut through blockages and red tape to resolve issues quickly;*
- *work with Indigenous communities to build the capacity of people in those communities to negotiate as genuine partners with government;*
- *negotiate agreed outcomes, benchmarks for measuring progress and management of responsibilities for achieving those outcomes with the relevant people in Indigenous communities;*
- *build the capacity of government employees to be able to meet the challenges of working in this way with Indigenous communities.*

Conduct of the study did not reveal any further set of objectives relating specifically to the Cape York Trial. However, one of DEWR's project officers for the Trial reported having had a clear brief to work on a whole-of-government, systematic approach to addressing Indigenous disadvantage and the problems of government in servicing remote communities. It was also said that DEWR recognised the difficulty of solving deep-seated problems within a short timeframe, and placed an emphasis on underlying factors such as

the need for improved and better integrated infrastructure, and capacity building within Indigenous organisations and communities.

In order to pursue its role as lead Australian Government agency, DEWR in 2003 appointed a departmental officer to work in Cairns on the planning and implementation of relevant activities. This DEWR representative (over time there were four separate people involved) was based in DATSIP's Cape York Strategy Unit (CYSU) in Cairns – an arrangement which numbers of stakeholders described as appropriate and useful in ensuring clear State Australian Government communication.

Rather than seeking to set up any separate consultation structures for the purpose of the Trial, DEWR chose to work through the systems established by the Queensland Government. For example, DEWR's project officers usually took part in the Negotiation Tables for the five Trial communities.

The longest-serving of DEWR's Cairns-based project officers took up her post in the start of 2004 (that is, some six months before the abolition of ATSIC/ATSI and the creation of OIPC), and continued to work in Cape York until late 2005. Her role focussed on the three *east coast* communities of Hope Vale, Wujal Wujal and Lockhart River. A second officer was appointed at much the same time, to work with the west coast communities of Aurukun land Napranum; however she remained in this role for only about six months⁴. (Before making these two appointments DEWR had had two other officers, one after the other, based in Cairns to work on the COAG Trial.)

⁴ This officer then took up a position with the ICC in Cairns. One effect of this is that stakeholders interviewed by the study team in mid-2006 were even more confused than they might otherwise have been about what was and was not related to the COAG Trial.

The officer who worked with the east coast communities commented that her role had been to listen to communities and to share responsibility with them. She saw herself as an 'independent broker' whose task was to 'make connections' and to support, (and where possible identify funding sources for) worthwhile community initiatives. She was also a 'facilitator' aiming to identify and overcome barriers to action (*'How can we make this happen?'*)

There was generally positive comment on the role played, over a two-year period, by this Cairns-based DEWR officer who worked with the communities of Wujal Wujal, Hope Vale and Lockhart River. Drawing together comments and observations from various sources, we can say that the role involved the following characteristics:

- This was a dedicated DEWR position, and one that involved working 'on the ground' with particular communities.
- The Department appointed a senior and experienced departmental officer to play this role.
- The officer enjoyed a substantial degree of autonomy (comparable, it was said, to that of a Regional Manager), backed up by direct communication with and very strong support from the Departmental Secretary.
- The fact that the officer remained in position for two years gave a reasonable degree of continuity to her work.
- The officer took a flexible and collaborative approach to her role.
- In Cairns she was co-located with the staff of DATSIP's Cape York Strategy Unit.
- DEWR sensibly chose to 'piggy-back' on community consultation and communication arrangements set up by the State Government.

- There was access to the COAG Trial Flexible Funding Pool, which simplified the task of funding financial support for appropriate initiatives.

A number of people noted that DEWR had taken its role as lead agency seriously, that it had devoted substantial resources to the Trial, that it had appointed senior members of staff to work on the Trial, and that these staff had had strong support at the most senior level of the Department.

2.2.4 Change in Lead Agency Arrangements

Towards the end of 2005 the Secretary of DEWR announced that his Department would no longer be acting as the lead Australian Government agency for the Cape York Trial. This was because of OIPC's growing role in representing the Australian Government in a whole-of-government context. The DEWR officer who was at that time still working in Cape York accordingly returned to Canberra.

Since late 2005 there has been no activity explicitly related to the Cape York COAG Trial. DEWR's expectation was that the Cairns ICC would take over its role in the Trial, but for various reasons this has not happened. The ICC has relationships with the communities of Cape York as part of its core business, but it has had no additional contact with DEWR's five Trial communities, and has not undertaken any activity that it describes as part of the Trial. DATSIP's work across the Cape continues but, as previously explained, none of DATSIP's activities is regarded as relating specifically to the COAG Trial.

In consequence, a number of the people interviewed in the course of this study took the view that the Cape York Trial effectively finished in late 2005 (though the comment was also made that presumably the Trial would officially end only if COAG made a decision to that effect).

2.3 Community Involvement in setting Objectives and Priorities

DEWR's intention was that priorities for action would be identified by communities participating in the Trial through their development of Community Action Plans, their participation in Negotiation Tables (see below) and the development of Shared Responsibility Agreements (SRAs). It was also reported that Cape York Partnerships, and its Director Noel Pearson in particular, were important early sources of information and advice.

Given the limited documentation that has been available to the study team, it is difficult to know to what extent there was active community involvement in determining the priorities which DEWR and its dedicated officers sought to pursue. The comment was made, for example, that DEWR initially aimed to follow a broad, whole-of-government agenda, and that health, education and employment (and the linkages among these) were key concerns. It was also said, however, that after the 2004 establishment of OIPC (which had explicit whole-of-government responsibilities), DEWR officers tended to give greater emphasis to the Department's own Indigenous programs and to other matters that fell within the DEWR portfolio. Nevertheless it seems clear that the DEWR project officers appointed at the start of 2004, for example, did adopt an approach that sought active community consultation on key issues and needs.

2.4 Government and Community Commitments

Conduct of this review suggested that neither governments nor communities made very clear or explicit commitments relating to the COAG Trial in Cape York. It seems that DEWR's project officers saw their role as being to improve communication and

understanding between communities and government, to promote inter-government and inter-agency cooperation and, as facilitators or advocates, to find ways of supporting worthwhile community projects and activities. It seems fair to conclude, however, that outside DEWR there was limited understanding of government objectives or commitments even in these broad terms.

DEWR's five priority communities had no explicit obligations relating to the Trial as such (unless the broad-brush SRAs involving Hope Vale and Lockhart River – see section 3.3. – are seen in this light). At the level of individual projects there were implicit or explicit community commitments to 'play their part' – for example in pursuing the commercial fishing project at Lockhart River (see section 4.1.1). It can also be said that communities on the Cape have responded to the opportunity to work with the Queensland Government champions, and to take part in the work of Negotiation Tables – adopted by DEWR as part of its consultation strategy.

3 Working Together

3.1 Australian Government, Queensland Government and Community Roles

Over the period of the COAG Trial, as explained in section 2 of this report, DATSIP in particular was responsible for a range of activities relating to planning and service provision for the communities of the Cape. For example the Interchange Officers based in the CYSU worked closely with their designated communities, and Negotiation Tables were held on a fairly regular basis. While undertaking some initiatives that related to the Cape as a whole, DEWR's project officers were particularly concerned with the five 'Trial communities' and on identifying ways in which they could access government support for projects or initiatives that were important to those communities.

People in the communities (especially Council members) were involved in ongoing consultations with both State Government and DEWR representatives, and took part in the Negotiation Tables (typically co-chaired by the local Mayor).

3.2 Coordination Mechanisms

One stakeholder who was familiar with the history of the Cape York Trial commented that it had involved streams of activity at both regional and community level. It was said that at a *regional* level the focus was on inter-government and inter-agency communication and co-operation, as evidenced in numbers of joint State/Australian Government funding arrangements and in numbers of committees, working groups and the like which involved both State and Commonwealth representation.

Examples of these arrangements included DEWR representation on the steering committee for the MCMC Strategy, and Australian Government representation on what is now called the Partnerships Queensland CEOs Forum and the corresponding Senior Officers group. DEWR, Queensland Education and the Australian Government Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) have been involved in the Cape York Education Reference Group, which sought to tackle long-standing education problems such as the very small numbers of Indigenous students completing Year 12.

As a result of its lead agency role, DEWR was instrumental in the establishment of a Commonwealth Regional Managers forum for Queensland, which still meets on a regular basis. A so-called 'hundred day planning agenda' was set up to provide a government/community forum for regular monitoring of current initiatives in Cape York and for assessing new project ideas and proposals; this process involves OIPC, DEWR, Cape York Partnerships and other relevant organisations.

There were some stakeholders who felt that this collaborative effort had fallen off somewhat over the past year or so. Others regarded it as a valuable legacy of the Trial; it was said to be the first 'the first time that all these senior people came together like that'. 'The Trial did move us further down the whole-of-government track', said a senior Commonwealth officer.

As noted elsewhere, there have been numerous examples of programs or projects on Cape York jointly funded by Queensland and Australian Government agencies.

3.3 Shared Responsibility Agreements

There have to date been relatively few Shared Responsibility Agreements (SRAs) signed with communities on Cape York. There have been just three SRAs involving the five communities which were targeted by DEWR for the COAG Trial.

In December 2003 an SRA was signed between Lockhart River Community Council and Community Representatives, the Australian Government (through DEWR) and the Queensland Government (through the Department of Employment and Training). The Agreement is expressed in broad terms and has the following objectives:

- *establish partnerships and share responsibility for achieving measurable and ... improvements for people living in the Community;*
- *support and strengthen local governance, decision making and accountability;*
- *learn from a shared approach – identify what works and what doesn't and apply future approaches both at the community level and more broadly.*

A Schedule to the Lockhart River SRA lists the following community priorities:

- *To develop their outstations and improve access by road and sea.*
- *Break the unemployment cycle.*
- *Celebrate and teach traditional ways.*
- *Improve housing and community facilities.*
- *Have the best possible education for their children and build their capacity.*

Under this SRA the government partners committed to providing \$80,000 to fund two local people to undertake drug and alcohol diversion activities; there were no explicit obligations on the part of the community or families/individuals.

Another SRA (with objectives expressed in the same broad terms) was signed in December 2003 between Hope Vale Aboriginal Community, the Australian Government (through DEWR) and the Queensland Government (through the Department of Premier and Cabinet, or DPC). The community priorities set out in a Schedule to the Hope Vale Agreement are as follows:

- *Stronger community governance and improved community pride and cohesion.*
- *Reduced alcohol and substance abuse.*
- *Improved housing and water.*
- *Reduced suicide and stress and improved environmental, physical and mental health.*
- *Reduced crime, violence and disputation, and improved observance of the law.*
- *Improved school attendance and educational attainment, and improved skills.*
- *Improved sport, recreation and cultural opportunities, especially for young people.*
- *Enhanced employment and enterprise opportunities and economic participation.*
- *Resolution of land related issues.*

Again no obligations on the part of the community or families/individuals were specified.

The Australian Government agreed to provide in-kind support to:

Facilitate improved relationships between and across agencies, organisations and communities, share information regarding what does and doesn't work and why. Negotiate agreed priorities and actions.

Another SRA was signed in October 2005 between the Aboriginal Community of Hope Vale, the Queensland Police–Citizens Youth Welfare Association, the Australian Government (through OIPC) and the Queensland State Government (through DPC). The signatories to this Agreement included the Prime Minister and the Queensland Premier.

The objectives of the SRA are again expressed in the same broad terms as the two 2003 agreements mentioned above, but in this instance the Schedule refers to Government responsibilities relating to refurbishment of a local community hall, purchase of sport and recreation equipment, and encouragement of other bodies '*to provide or support youth related activities in Hope Vale*'. The Hope Vale Shire Council also commits to contributing funds for the refurbishment of the hall, as well as ensuring community participation in the sport and recreation steering committee, encouraging regular school attendance, and encouraging local people to become community sport and recreation officers to assist in running the program. Families and individuals are to contribute to the initiative in various ways, such as ensuring that the hall and sport and recreation equipment are kept in good repair.

Some of the stakeholders consulted believed that the early SRAs, even if 'light on content' , had an important symbolic role in reflecting the concept of shared objectives and commitment. It was clear at Lockhart River, for example, that community representatives still attached considerable importance to the 2003 Agreement. The comment was made that the Lockhart River SRA provided a plank for the subsequent development of the important Lockhart River Community Development Plan 2005-08.

3.4 Knowledge of and Support for the Trial

As other sections of this report indicate, the COAG Trial did not have a very high or clear profile among the range of programs and strategies that have been pursued in Cape York over recent years. The study team found relatively few people who had a clear understanding of the Trial or strong opinions about it.

We have noted that, in general, DATSIP did not see itself as jointly undertaking the Trial with DEWR; on the other hand it was certainly interested and supportive, as reflected in the

fact that DEWR officers were based in its CYSU office in Cairns. The various consultation arrangements that are mentioned in section 3.2 of this report also reflect broad agency support for the principle of collaboration.

It is not easy to generalise about community responses to the Cape York COAG Trial. On the one hand Urbis Keys Young spoke with some community representatives who referred very positively to the role played by DEWR's dedicated officers. At Lockhart River, for example, it was said that the DEWR officer who worked with the community through 2004-2005 had been very helpful in a number of ways. The point was made that she was prepared to make extended visits of a week or more to Lockhart River, rather than simply flying in for a day or two as was so common. This meant that she got to know the community and its issues well, and was thus able to present an informed perspective to other agencies. She was also willing to visit at times that suited the community, rather than simply telling them when she would be there. She had played a role that was of great value to the community by helping them find their way through the complexities of departmental responsibilities, requirements and potential funding sources. Since her departure there had been nobody to work with in the community in this fashion. *'Not one person came up here'*, it was said, since the DEWR officer went back south; someone on the spot was needed to *'link us up again'*.

On the other hand there were community representatives elsewhere who took the view that DEWR and its people had achieved little, or that any progress had been slow and modest. There were some who saw the COAG Trial as simply another manifestation of governments being all talk and no action. (*'All these planeloads of people coming in to talk'; 'All talk, talk, talk'*).

4 Lessons Learnt

4.1 Successes and Limitations

4.1.1 Specific initiatives

One stakeholder who had had fairly close involvement with the Cape York Trial saw its achievements in terms of promoting better communication between the Australian and Queensland Governments around Indigenous affairs, and supporting '*some good projects*' at both regional and community level. A number of relevant projects are listed below.

- Together with DATSIP and the Queensland Department of Employment and Training, DEWR funded the development of *Local Jobs for Local People*, a strategy designed to identify strategic employment opportunities for Indigenous people in Cape York.
- Through the Flexible Funding Pool, DEWR was able to offer funding support in 2005 and 2006 for the Cape York Strategic Leadership Program originally developed by Education Queensland, building on a successful pilot scheme undertaken in 2004.
- DEWR supported and helped promote use of the Cape York Digital Network, and funded a marketing position for the Network.
- Together with the Department of Family and Community Services, DEWR was a key funder of the Family Income Management project in the communities of Hope Vale, Aurukun, Coen and Mossman Gorge.
- DEWR funded an initiative designed to develop innovative solutions to the need for better accounting services available to communities and organisations across the Cape (the Cape York Accounting Service Solutions).

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- DEWR made a three-year commitment of funds to support the work of the Indigenous business organisation Balkanu, underpinning the role played by private sector companies such as Westpac and Boston Consulting Group.
 - DEWR supported and served on the Steering Committee for a major Apunipima study of health issues and needs on Cape York, funded by the Department of Health and Ageing.
 - At Napranum, DEWR was one of several agencies involved in an initiative to provide pre-vocational training for prospective Indigenous employees of the Comalco mining enterprise and to support emerging Indigenous businesses. This work led to the establishment of the Weipa Multipurpose Facility, which is jointly funded by a number of Australian and State Government agencies.
 - At Lockhart River DEWR supported a workshop designed to explore and promote possibilities for developing appropriate commercial enterprises, and has subsequently been one of several government agencies which have assisted in developing the Puchi Wu commercial crayfishing venture.
 - In Aurukun DEWR worked with the Queensland Department of Development and Innovations (DDI) on issues relating to a proposed tourism venture involving use of a cruise boat. Other organisations such as DEST, Westpac and Balkanu were also actively involved in various aspects of this project.
 - Another achievement that some stakeholders saw as very important was a program to support senior-year students to attend boarding schools in locations such as Cairns, Rockhampton and Brisbane. This is now the responsibility of the Transition Support Unit. It was reported that there are currently some 300 Cape York students enrolled in such schools with the aim of completing secondary education. This was described as a

significant initiative and one to which DEWR's officers had made a valuable contribution.

A DEWR representative reported that during the period of the Trial the Australian Government – chiefly through DEWR, OIPC and Indigenous Business Australia – provided more than \$7 million in additional funding for initiatives such as those listed above.

Since the start of the Trial there have been over 300 STEP employment placements on Cape York, nine Indigenous Small Business Fund contracts signed, and around 20 Indigenous Community Volunteer projects supported.

4.1.2 Cape York Partnerships and the Cape York Institute

It was reported that early in the period of the COAG Trial the Australian and Queensland Governments decided jointly to work with Cape York regional organisations (in particular Cape York Partnerships), which had played an active role in support of alcohol management initiatives and which were developing other innovative approaches designed to address such issues as welfare dependency. In the context of the COAG Trial, the Australian Government agreed to share with Queensland the cost of funding the work of CYP. One of the significant developments that grew out of work by CYP was the establishment of the Cape York Institute for Policy and Leadership, which is again funded by both the Australian and Queensland Governments, as well as through the corporate sector. Both DEST and Education Queensland continue to be represented on the Board of the Institute. One of the stakeholders consulted by the study team referred to the Institute as 'one of the most successful initiatives from the COAG Trial'.

In turn the Cape York Institute has played a key role in developing proposals around welfare reform, and the Australian Government has now earmarked funds for trialling welfare changes in four Cape York communities – namely Hope Vale, Aurukun, Coen and Mossman

Gorge. The Australian Government has also provided funding to support community leadership programs in these four communities.

DEWR and OIPC also funded CYP to develop and implement a Work Placement Scheme that is designed to provide Cape York young people with 'real life' work experience in the fruit picking industry in Victoria and South Australia, together with intensive job-seeking assistance when they return home.

The COAG Trial also provided the opportunity for Indigenous Enterprise Partnerships (IEP)⁵ to approach the Australian Government with a view to co-operating in various activities such as support for establishment of Indigenous business enterprises. Through OIPC the Australian Government continues to provide some funding for IEP's Cape York activities.

4.1.3 Broader impacts

Broader impacts or outcomes of the conduct of the Trial, as some stakeholders saw it, included:

- promoting a 'meeting of minds' between the State Government and the Australian Government on the need for systemic change in relationships with Indigenous communities
- bringing an informed Australian Government presence to negotiations and consultations on community needs, and the possibility of a clear and prompt response
- direct community engagement on behalf of the Commonwealth – for example through participation in the Negotiation Tables
- helping 'demystify' government for communities.

⁵ A Cape York body which involves contributions both from local Indigenous leaders and from private sector corporations such as Westpac and Boston Consulting

4.1.4 The Trial in general

Among stakeholders consulted during this study there was some criticism of the 'fuzziness' surrounding the concept of the COAG Trials, including the Cape York Trial. It was argued, for example, that despite the use of the term 'trial', there was neither any clear hypothesis being examined nor any particular strategy being tested; it was not necessarily clear, even to people quite closely involved, what the Trial was expected to achieve. A related point made by some of those consulted was that many of the activities undertaken as part of the Trial seemed ad hoc or opportunistic: *'there didn't seem to be any sort of strategic approach'*. It was said that this was not just a theoretical objection: there was a 'real opportunity cost' in undertaking an initiative of this kind but doing it in an ill-considered or 'half-baked' fashion⁶. On the other hand, as previously noted, DEWR argued that its approach was designed to address underlying factors important for achieving change, such as infrastructure, employment and community capacity building.

The point was also made that there had been very limited level of contact among those responsible for the various COAG Trials across Australia. Apart from a '*fantastic*' early workshop in Canberra, organised under ATSSIS, those involved in the Cape York Trial reportedly had little communication with those working on the Trials elsewhere.

In relation to the change in its role at the end of 2005, DEWR representatives noted that the Department informed all key parties including DATSIP, the Mayors and Councils of the Trial communities and other Indigenous organisations, and that the relevant Senate Estimates statement by the Secretary of the Department was widely reported. However, it appeared from the community visits undertaken during this study that there was inadequate communication with communities about the changed arrangements and their implications. In mid-2006 there were some community representatives, for example, who were still

waiting to see whether the last DEWR officer who had worked on the Trial would be replaced.

4.2 New Ways of Doing Business?

The Cape York Trial generated some new ways of doing business in the form of joint Commonwealth/ State working groups, consultative committees and the like, as outlined in section 3.2. It can also be argued that in some communities the Trial helped to reinforce the Negotiation Table arrangements introduced by the Queensland Government, by providing meaningful Australian Government involvement in these.

On the other hand it was noted that the Trial did not involve any breakthrough in terms of the 'silos' within which each government agency operates. There was no progress, for example, towards joint contracts or an integrated approach to funding; these remain major barriers on the road to effective collaboration and coordination.

A number of the community representatives consulted in the course of the study emphasised their frustration with what they saw as government inefficiency and unresponsiveness. Some believed, for example, that over time government agencies were becoming less helpful and more rigid and legalistic. Communities had to deal with complicated contracts and 'a whole folder of documents' even in relation to minor issues or small (eg \$500) grants.

Community perspectives on the Australian Government's new Indigenous affairs arrangements seemed to be largely negative. There was uncertainty about what role the ICCs were intended to perform; did they, for instance, have any influence over other Australian Government agencies? if not, what function did they have? ATSI/ATSIS, by

⁶ Several of those consulted made the point that it was by no means an easy task for a lead agency like DEWR to take on a role as facilitator of a whole-of-government approach.

comparison, was described as having been better informed and more realistic, more flexible, more interested, and more accessible. Government agencies in general were seen as weak on consultation (*'They always think they know what's best for us'; 'They come in and tell us what's going to happen'*).

4.3 Value of DEWR's Approach

As noted in subsection 2.2.3 of this report, numbers of those consulted during the study saw value in the kind of approach that was reflected in DEWR's work in 2004-2005, particularly in the east coast communities of Hope Vale, Wujal Wujal and Lockhart River.

Key aspects of this 'model' of working with Indigenous communities included the following:

- a substantial, on-the-ground presence by a public servant with sufficient expertise and seniority to work effectively with and on behalf of the community;
- continuity in this role;
- a degree of autonomy and capacity to make decisions;
- access to a flexible pool of funds;
- strong departmental support;
- active co-operation with other Australian and State Government agencies.

4.4 Unintended Consequences

There was nothing specific identified as an unintended or unexpected result of the Cape York Trial. As we have seen, however, there was a sense in which the Trial was to some extent 'lost' among the range of other activities, strategies and changes which were affecting the Cape York communities at the time.

5 Next Steps

5.1 Is the Cape York COAG Trial Finished?

As earlier noted, numbers of the people consulted during this study believed that the Cape York Trial had effectively come to an end with the change in DEWR's role in late 2005. In the eastern coast communities, however, some people were unsure of what the current situation was and whether DEWR would be appointing any more project officers in the future.

Given that there is current uncertainty about the future of the Cape York Trial, it is not possible to say whether there will be value in a later and more detailed evaluation of the Trial.

5.2 Remaining Challenges

As the previous subsection implies, one outstanding task is for COAG or the Australian Government to make it clear – especially to the relevant communities – what further action, if any, there is to be on the Cape York Trial.

There are also, of course, the ongoing challenges of improving inter-governmental, inter-agency and community/government communication and of making genuine progress towards more adequate coordination in the planning and delivery of services. Numbers of those consulted during this study identified issues that they believed would have to be addressed in this regard – for example the need for much simpler contracts (possibly common across agencies) and for progress towards pooling of funds from various sources.

Some of the State Government stakeholders who were consulted identified lessons for the future which they believed had emerged from experience with the Cape York Trial. These included the following:

- a trial or pilot approach requires a clearly defined hypothesis and methodology;
- effective Commonwealth/State liaison requires clearly defined and shared priorities;
- central agencies need to play a significant role in the identification of these shared priorities and the development and maintenance of collaborative arrangements.

Appendix A – Organisations and Individuals Consulted

appendices

Australian Government

Department of Employment and Workplace Relations

Mike Burris, Deputy State Manager Queensland
Marian Pettit, former COAG Trial project officer
Jane Whyte, former COAG Trial project officer
Alison Stanley, former State Manager Queensland

Office of Indigenous Policy Coordination

Diane Hawgood, State Manager Queensland

Indigenous Coordination Centre, Cairns

Mike Fordham, Senior Executive Manager
Robert Willmetts, Deputy ICC Manager
Michael Bible

Queensland State Government

Department of Premier and Cabinet

Anna Moynihan, Executive Director Social Policy
Ros Walker, Director Social Policy

Department of Communities and Disability Services

Michael Hogan, Assistant Deputy Secretary

Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy

Rodney Goodbun, Strategic Policy and Partnerships Directorate (Brisbane)
Wayne Dodson, A/g Regional Director (Cairns)
Alan Butler, A/g Deputy Coordinator, Government Coordination officer
Rose Manzini, A/g Assistant Regional Director FNQ Region

Cape York Strategy Unit

Paul Loney, Manager

appendices

Cape York Communities

Hope Vale

Lee Robertson, CEO

Eileen Deemal-Hall, Interchange Officer (CYSU)

Wujal Wujal

Cr Desmond Tayley, Mayor

Cr Keith Rush, Deputy Mayor

Cr David Jackson

Peter Opio, CEO

Lockhart River

Cr Johnson Chippendale, Mayor

Cr Dorothy Hobson

Peter Buckland, CEO

Denise Hagan, Executive Director Community Development, DATSIP

Aurukun

Grant Crossley, A/g CEO

Charlie Walker, CDEP consultant

Charlie Street, Arts program coordinator

Andrew Shaw, Deputy School Principal

John Longhurst, Interchange Officer (CYSU)

Napranum

Peter Solly, CEO

Robert Barry, Finance Manager

Diane Nona, CDEP Coordinator

Other Stakeholders

Ian Mackie, Principal, Western Cape College