



TWO WAYS TOGETHER
REGIONAL REPORT
Public Report

North Coast

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report gathers data¹ about Aboriginal people and the government services provided to them in the North Coast region of NSW. The report has been developed as part of the regional implementation of *Two Ways Together*.

Two Ways Together 2003-2012 is the NSW Government's plan to improve outcomes for Aboriginal people and communities. *Two Ways Together* recognises that in order to affect real and sustainable improvements in the wellbeing of Aboriginal people, a whole-of-government approach is required. It recognises that effective partnerships with Aboriginal communities must underpin government action if policies and programs are to be relevant to Aboriginal people. In developing sustainable partnerships between Aboriginal people and government it, aims to strengthen Aboriginal people's capacity to exercise their inherent rights as the first peoples of Australia.

At a state level, *Two Ways Together* targets seven priority areas to positively improve the lives of Aboriginal people. These areas have been identified as priorities by Aboriginal communities in New South Wales. They are: Justice; Health; Housing and Infrastructure; Education; Culture and Heritage; Economic Development and Families and Young People. Four cross-agency Cluster Groups have been established with responsibility for developing innovative initiatives that meet the needs of Aboriginal people in these priority areas. Each of the Cluster Groups is chaired by a lead agency and includes representation from 60 relevant NSW and Australian Government agencies and five Peak Aboriginal Bodies. *Two Ways Together* Action Plans for 2005-2007 are currently being implemented by the Cluster Groups.

At the regional level, Regional Engagement Groups (or REGs) have been established to ensure that government agencies are meeting community needs in the regions. The Regional Reports will be used by REGs to develop regional action plans to focus regional government activity on locally identified priority issues and areas. In most of the regions, regional action planning will include particular focus on up to three Partnership Communities. REGs are coordinated by the Department of Aboriginal Affairs' Regional Managers. The regional reports have been developed to inform the work of REGs and government agencies in the regions.

A description of the contents and major findings of the report is provided below.

Chapter 1 outlines the characteristics of the region noting its geographical location, the local government areas that fall within its borders and its population. This chapter also outlines the Aboriginal cultural and language groups and the Local Aboriginal Land Councils in the North Coast region. There is a brief overview of the local regional economy in which the rate of unemployment amongst Aboriginal people is higher than the unemployment rate for the non-Aboriginal population across all regions. At 27% in 2001, the North Coast region had one of the highest unemployment rates in New South Wales. Employment is most commonly in construction, government, retail trade, manufacturing, education, property and business services, and health services.

Chapter 2 presents a statistical profile of the region, focused on the demographics

¹ All data is from the Australian Bureau of Statistics' 2001 Census unless otherwise specified.

and population projections. This chapter reveals that the Aboriginal population has a relatively large proportion of young people, with 42% aged under 14 years. By contrast the older age group is very small with only 3% of the Aboriginal population aged 65 and over. There is also a trend of Aboriginal people migrating into the North Coast region from throughout Australia.

In Chapter 3, socio-economic indicators are analysed to determine the areas in which Aboriginal people are particularly disadvantaged. This data reveals a high unemployment rate, high levels of diabetes and cardio-vascular disease. The North Coast had the third lowest rate of juveniles diverted from court in New South Wales in 2002, very high prosecution rates for offensive language or conduct in the Richmond River LGA, comparatively low home ownership rates, and low birth-weights.

Chapter 4 provides a snapshot of the current environment by summarising the needs identified through demographic and socio-economic data and the community's priorities. Chapter 4 concludes by suggesting some areas for further examination at the local and regional planning levels.

Important note:

The *Two Ways Together* regional reports have been written based on the ten Regional Coordination Management Group (or RCMG) regions in New South Wales. REGs are constituted as sub-committees of RCMGs, which are coordinated by the NSW Premier's Department.

However, much of the data relied upon in this report is collected by ATSI region, and these boundaries are not consistent with the RCMG boundaries. Where this creates possible issues in interpreting the data contained in this report, it is noted. **Figure 1** notes the six ATSI regions, outlined in black, the ten RCMG regions by colour, and the Local Government Areas, outlined in white and by name. The six former ATSI regions are:

- Sydney
- Many Rivers (on the north coast)
- Kamilaroi (including north-west NSW)
- Murdi Paaki (including western NSW)
- Binaal Billa (including mid-west and south-western NSW)
- Queanbeyan (on the south coast).

The ten RCMG regions are:

- Coastal Sydney
- Western/South Western Sydney
- Central Coast
- North Coast
- North Coast
- New England/North West
- Western NSW/Murdi Paaki
- Mid-Western NSW
- Riverina/Murray
- Illawarra/South East.

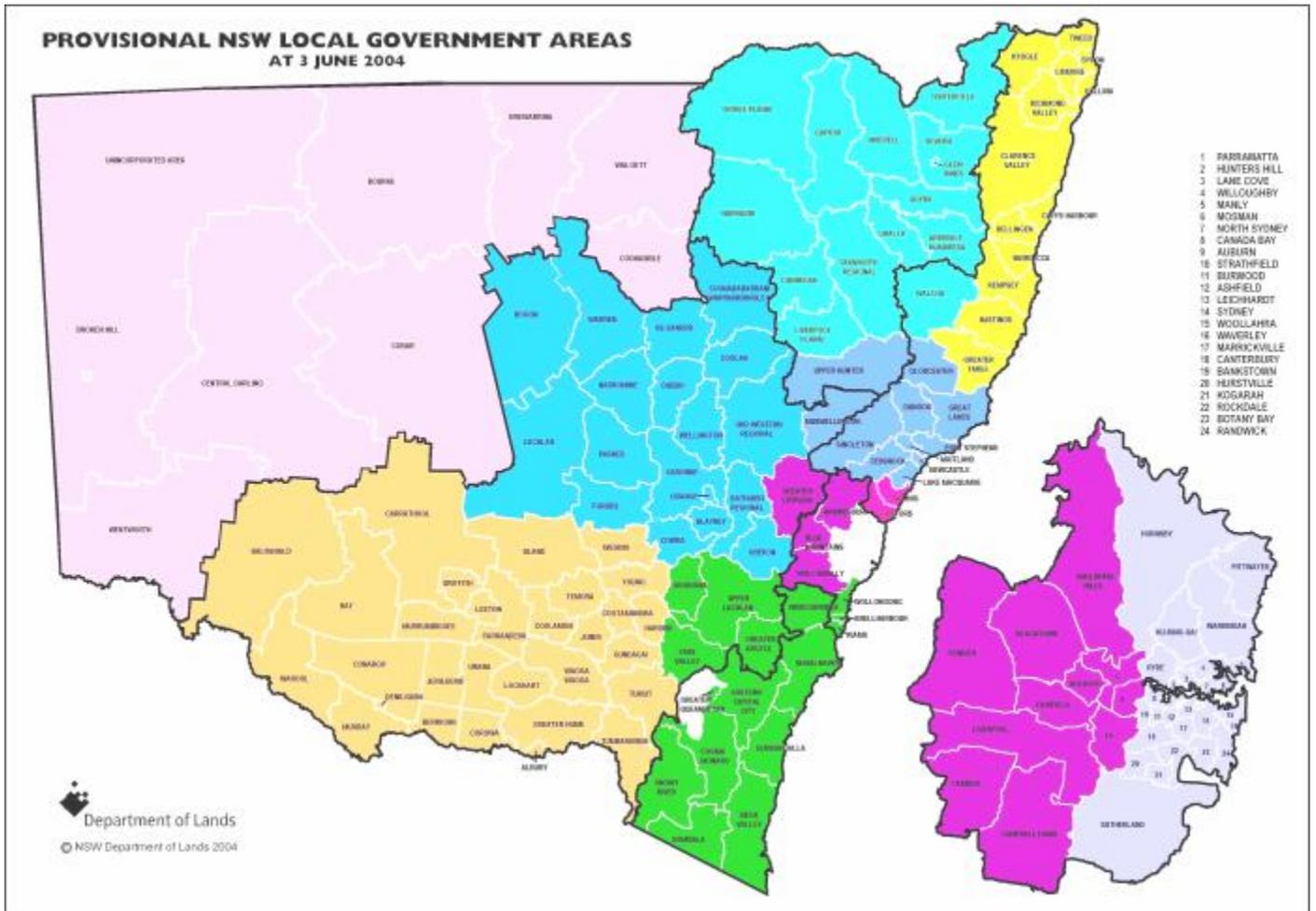


Figure 1: Map of RCMG, ATSC and LGA boundaries

Please note that for the purposes of this report Weddin, Young and Harden have been included in the Riverina Murray region as their statistics are collected with West Wyalong, Temora, Coolamon and Bland. Weddin is situated within the Mid-Western RCMG boundary and Young and Harden are situated within the Illawarra-South East boundary.

Also although the Wentworth LGA is part of the Riverina Murray RCMG boundary, the statistics have been captured with Western NSW as it is expected that the information will be used to assist with the COAG Trial in the Murdi Paaki region, and Wentworth is part of the Trial site.

1.0 CHARACTERISTICS OF THE NORTH COAST REGION

1.1 Geography

The North Coast region is shown on the map at **Figure 2**, and covers the Mid North Coast of New South Wales, from Grafton to Taree, as well as the Far North Coast, from Grafton North to the Queensland border. The western border is the Great Dividing Range. The major river systems include the Clarence, the Hastings, the Manning, the Macleay, the Wilson, the Richmond and the Tweed.



Figure 2: NSW Local Government Areas in the North Coast region

It includes towns such as Casino, Coffs Harbour, Grafton, Kempsey, Lismore and Taree, and 13 Local Government Areas (LGAs) as listed below:

- Ballina
- Bellingen
- Byron
- Clarence Valley
- Coffs Harbour
- Greater Taree
- Hastings
- Kempsey
- Kyogle
- Lismore
- Nambucca
- Richmond Valley
- Tweed

1.2 Local Planning

Shires and councils in New South Wales are required to have social plans that make specific mention of local Aboriginal communities and issues of concern to the communities. In practice, some plans are out-of-date, some are still being drafted and some are under newly created councils.

Social plans vary widely in scope but some include innovative arrangements. The Richmond Valley Social Development Plan, for example, provides statistical information regarding Aboriginal people in the LGA; outlines the consultation process undertaken with Aboriginal people in the development of the Plan; and identifies indicators by which the success of the strategies can be measured.

The Plan identifies the following priorities for Aboriginal people and council action:

- 1. The employment of Aboriginal people at Richmond Valley Council*
Council is pursuing options for an Aboriginal mentoring project and aims to have a participant being mentored in 2006.
- 2. The development of formal consultative processes between Aboriginal people and Council*
Council aims to establish consultative mechanisms with strong participation from the community.

Council staff will become involved in Local Reconciliation Groups (LRGs) and want all members of LRGs to know and be able to contact someone in council.

- 3. Development and delivery of good cross-cultural awareness training across the area*
Although the plan does not specifically provide for Aboriginal cross-cultural awareness training, it does commit Council to developing better relationships with the multicultural community of the Richmond Valley, with training provided to identified staff.
- 4. The public celebration of Aboriginal events such as NAIDOC week.*

1.3 Aboriginal Cultural Groups of the Region

There are 14 discrete Aboriginal communities in the region, located at former missions and reserves:

- Baryulgil
- Bellbrook
- Bellwood
- Bonalbo
- Box Ridge
- Burnt Bridge
- Cabbage Tree Island
- Corindi
- Greenhill
- Malabugilmah
- Muli Muli
- Old Burnt Bridge
- Purfleet
- Tabulam

Culturally significant sites in the region include Wollumbin (Mt Warning) near Murwillumbah which is a powerful women's birthing site for the Bundjalung people. Another important place is Worrell Creek an Aboriginal camp ground containing many sacred sites. A process of negotiation between the NSW Government and Aboriginal owners has begun to hand back management of Worrell Creek to Aboriginal people.

The North Coast remains culturally strong for Aboriginal people. The Bundjalung and the Gumbayngirr languages are still spoken, although the various dialects of those languages have united to form single spoken languages. Other languages include:

- Arakwal
- Birpai
- Dunghutti
- Gitabul
- Ngamba

The continuity of Aboriginal languages signifies the strong association Aboriginal people in the region attach to culture and heritage. This includes the continuation of traditional practices and the hunting and gathering of traditional foods such as fresh water turtle.

1.4 Land

The Local Aboriginal Land Councils in the North Coast region are:

- Baryulgil
- Birpai
- Birrigan Gargle
- Bogal
- Bowraville
- Bunyah
- Casino
- Coffs Harbour & District
- Dorrigo Plateau
- Grafton-Ngerrie
- Gugin Gudduba
- Jali
- Jana Ngalee
- Jubulam
- Kempsey
- Muli Muli
- Nambucca
- Ngulingah
- Purfleet-Taree
- Thungutti
- Tweed-Byron
- Unkya
- Yaegl

Many Local Aboriginal Land Councils (LALCs) participate in a range of community and government forums in relation to such issues as natural resource management, forestry assessment and the care and protection of cultural property. LALCs also contribute to many local community projects in the areas of cultural development, education and reconciliation, and are points of contact for officers from the police service, juvenile justice agencies, and corrective services.

The Arakwal Aboriginal Land Use Agreement at Byron Bay between the NSW Government and the Arakwal people was signed in 2001. The agreement took seven years to negotiate. It provides for joint management of the National Park with the Arakwal people having access to the park to protect culture; conduct ceremonies under traditional law and custom; gather material for medicines and ceremonies and; fish, hunt and gather food.

The Indigenous Land Corporation owns or has granted four properties in the North Coast region, totalling 0.168 hectares. As of 30 December 2003, there were two registered Aboriginal Land Use Agreements in the region, Arakwal and Powercoal.

In 1997, formal recognition of the Dunghutti as the native title holders of land at Crescent Head was given in the Federal Court in Sydney, following the consent of all parties, including the State of New South Wales, 14 Crescent Head residents and the NSW Aboriginal Land Council.

The native title determination handed down by the Federal Court stood for only six hours at which time the State compulsorily acquired the native title rights (i.e. the land), as agreed by the claimants.

To date the Dunghutti claim has been the only consent determination in New South Wales where native title rights and interests in land were found to exist.

1.5 Regional Economy

The North Coast region had the second highest unemployment rate in New South Wales in 2001, at 27.4%, compared to 10.7% for the non-Aboriginal population.² In Taree, the unemployment rate for Aboriginal people was even higher, with 37.2% of people unemployed. The unemployment rate for non-Aboriginal people was consistent with the region's rate overall, at 11.7%.

The region is experiencing rapid growth in retail, building, construction, tourism, aged care and hospitality. New primary industry jobs are emerging, particularly in high value-added horticulture, timber processing, wood products and aquaculture. Because of its lifestyle advantages, access to Brisbane and Sydney, and information technology and telecommunications infrastructure, the area is becoming a popular base for home-based industries, including multimedia, design, cultural industries and journalism.³

Industries of employment for the non-Aboriginal population reflect the changing economy in regional New South Wales and the population shift into the region. The regional economy now has as its central focus the burgeoning service and construction industries.

1.5.1 Aboriginal People in the Economy

According to the *2001 Census*, the highest numbers of unemployed Aboriginal people by LGA are found in Coffs Harbour (144), Lismore (137), Kempsey (122), Greater Taree (121), Tweed (117), Nambucca (73), Grafton (72), Casino (62), Ballina (55), Bellingen (51), Richmond Valley (46), Hastings (43), and Byron Bay (31).

Table 1: Unemployment rate by Aboriginal status (%), NSW and ATSI regions 2001

	NSW	Sydney	Many Rivers	Kamilaroi	Binaal Billa	Murdi Paaki
Aboriginal	23.1	16.7	27.4	30	25.2	23.9
Non Aboriginal	7.2	6.1	10.7	8.6	6.9	9.8

According to the *2001 Census*, approximately 3,000 Aboriginal people were employed in the following industries in the North Coast region:

² *Many Rivers Strategic Plan 2005-2010*

³ Invest Northern Rivers: <http://www.investnorthernrivers.com.au/>

The top five industry employers **men** in the region in 2001 were:

<i>Aboriginal Men</i>	<i>Non-Aboriginal Men</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Construction • Manufacturing • Retail • Government Administration & Defence • Health & Community Services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manufacturing • Retail • Construction • Property & Business Services • Wholesale Trade

Table 2: Industry employers (male)

Relative to non-Aboriginal men, Aboriginal men were under-represented as managers and administrators (5% compared to 14%), and associate professionals (7% compared to 13%).

Compared to non-Aboriginal men, Aboriginal men were under represented in retail trade (10% compared to 16%) and agriculture, forestry and fishing (6% compared to 9%). Further, compared to non-Aboriginal men, Aboriginal men had higher rates of representation in government administration and defence (11% compared to 5%) and also higher rates of representation in education (9% compared to 5%) and community services (4% compared to 1%).

The top five industry employers of **women** in 2001 were:

<i>Aboriginal Women</i>	<i>Non-Aboriginal Women</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health &Community Services • Retail Trade • Education • Government Administration & Defence • Property & Business Services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Retail Trade • Health &Community Services • Education • Property & Business services • Government Administration & Defence • Accommodation, Cafes & Restaurants

Table 3: Industry employers (female)

The data suggests that a significant percentage of Aboriginal women working in government, health and community services consider themselves as professionals.

Relative to non-Aboriginal women, Aboriginal women were under-represented as managers and administrators (3% compared to 6%) and advanced clerical and service workers (3% compared to 7%). Relative to non-Aboriginal women, Aboriginal women were severely under-represented in education (1% compared to 12%). In contrast, Aboriginal women had much higher rates of representation in both government administration and defence (13 % compared to 3%), and in community services (11% compared to 5%).

1.5.2 Where Are the Job Vacancies?

In March 2006, the DEWR website collation for job vacancies in the North Coast region listed 989 vacancies:

- 17% were available in the Food, Hospitality and Tourism industries
- 12% or 122 vacancies were for Sales Assistants and Store Persons
- 11% or 106 vacancies were for Marketing and Sales Representatives; and
- 10% or 102 vacancies were for Labourers, Factory and Machine Workers.

1.5.3 CDEP Employment

There were approximately 5,000 CDEP participants in New South Wales in January 2000 according to ATSI data of which 1,176 or 23% were in the North Coast region. This is a statistically high participation rate compared to other Aboriginal regions. However, the high unemployment rate in the North Coast region indicates that participation in CDEP does not appear to translate to employment for Aboriginal people.

Coraki (Richmond River Shire)	185	Kempsey	213
Lismore	141	Macksville	109
Wardell (Ballina Shire)	162	Macleay	114
Corindi (Pristine Waters Council)	97	Purfleet	104
		Grafton	51
		Total CDEP workers	1176

2.0 STATISTICAL PROFILE OF THE REGION

2.1 *Demographics*

According to statistics drawn from the *2001 Census*, this region has an Aboriginal population of approximately 16,402⁴ people, and a total population of approximately 468,289. The Aboriginal population represents 3.5% of the total regional population and 12.2% of the total New South Wales Aboriginal population.

The region's Aboriginal population is evenly dispersed with major Aboriginal population centres (greater than 4% of the local population) that include Kempsey, Kyogle, Fingal/Kingscliff, Casino, Copmanhurst, Grafton, Nambucca Heads, Taree, Bellwood, Bowraville, Box Ridge, Cabbage Tree Island, Crescent Head, Malbulgilmah, Mirriwinni Gardens, Muli Muli, Tabulam and Yamba.

Richmond Valley has the highest percentage of Aboriginal people of all of the Local Government Areas in Northern New South Wales. Most Aboriginal people in the Richmond Valley are in the Coraki or Casino localities. There are far more young people than aged Aboriginal people in Richmond Valley and more male youth than female youth. Even in comparison to other Aboriginal populations, the Aboriginal population in Richmond Valley is young.⁵

A comparison of the age structure of the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal populations identifies the youthfulness of the Aboriginal population. The percentage of Aboriginal children aged 14 years and younger represent 42% of the Aboriginal population of the region. This is in contrast to 21% of children aged 14 years or less for the non-Aboriginal population. This trend of the Aboriginal population being younger relative to the non-Aboriginal population is consistent throughout New South Wales and Australia and, in part, reflects the Aboriginal baby boom of the late 1980s and early 1990s.

By way of contrast, only 3% of the Aboriginal population is aged 64 years and over compared to 19% of the non-Aboriginal population. These statistics are again consistent throughout Australia, and illustrate the comparatively low life expectancy of Aboriginal people. They may also reflect the popularity of the region for non-Aboriginal retirees.

An interesting feature of the North Coast region demographics reveals the migration from the region of Aboriginal people aged between 14 years and 29 years.

The following table illustrates the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal population age spread.

⁴ Australian Bureau of Statistics advises that there was an under-reporting of Aboriginality in the 2001 census. Estimates for the population at a regional level are not currently available.

⁵ Richmond Valley Social Plan

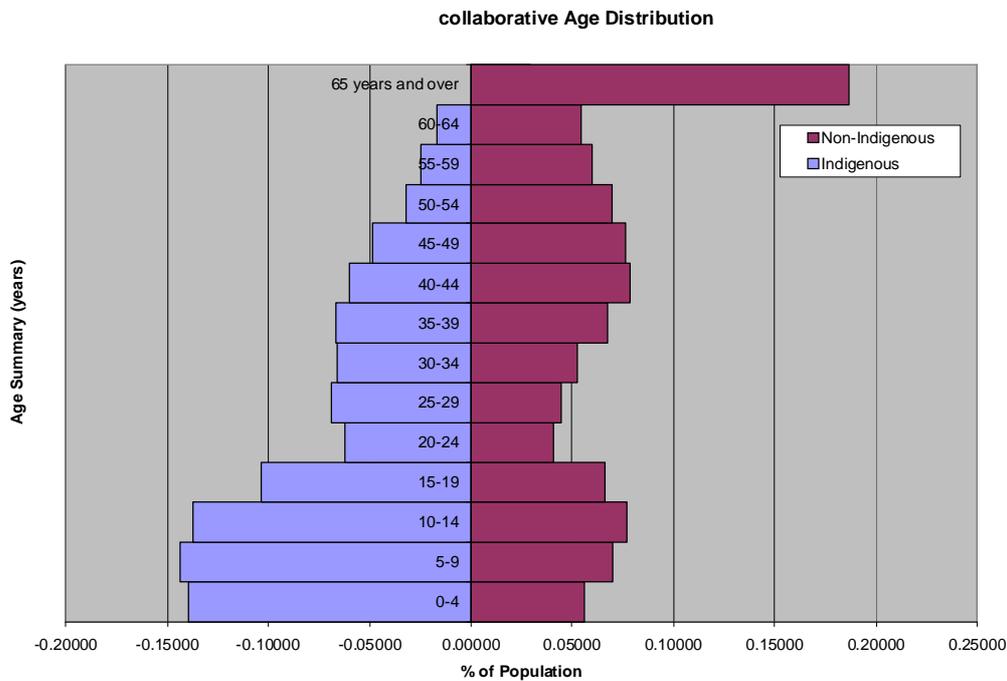


Figure 3: Age Distribution of North Coast Region

2.2 Population Projections

As the following map illustrates, between 1996 and 2001, there was a major increase in the Aboriginal population in the region. An increase of approximately 5,000 people represents a percentage increase of 44%. This increase in population reflects both a movement to the coast of inland Aboriginal people as a general population trend, the Aboriginal baby boom of the late 1980s, and a continuing trend for Aboriginal women in the region to have higher than average numbers of children.

The movement by Aboriginal people into the North Coast region from other parts of New South Wales is highly significant. Housing affordability may be a significant factor in the movement from Sydney, while the movement from regional New South Wales might simply be part of a larger population trend toward living on the coast.

In the *1991 Census*, the declared proportion of Aboriginal people in the North Coast region was 2.0%, while in 1996 it was 2.6%, and in 2001 it was 3.1%. These represent increases in Aboriginal self-identification and population growth of 44% and 26% between successive Censuses, while the whole North Coast population increased by 11.5% and 4.8% respectively.⁶

By 2004, the Aboriginal population of New South Wales was projected to have reached at least 141,533 according to ABS low series projections.⁷ This figure represents 29.2 % of the total Australian Aboriginal population, but only around 2.1 % of the population of New South Wales.

⁶ Hunter Valley Research Foundation 2003, *Northern Rivers Regional Profile*, p. 18.

⁷ ABS 2004: 53

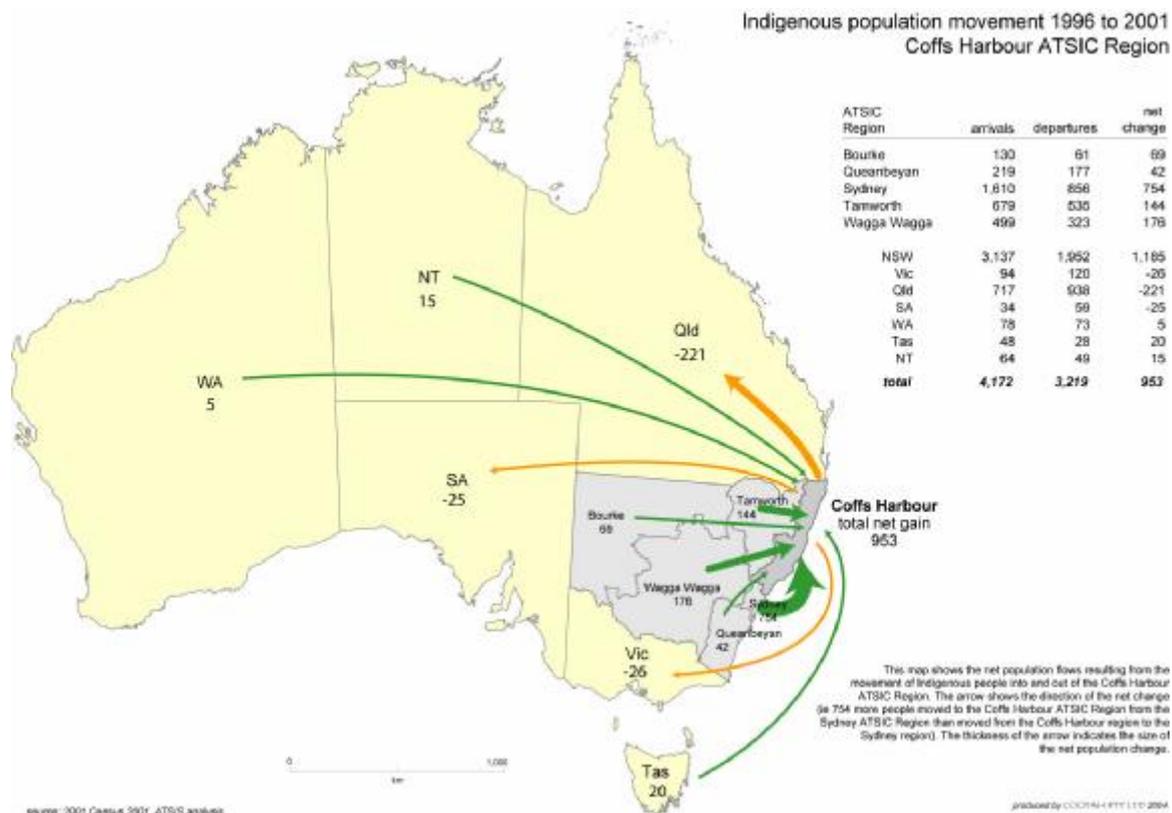


Figure 4: Migration of Aboriginal people into the North Coast region

The projections by ATSC region are striking, and illustrate the movement to the coast for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. The North Coast region is anticipated to increase in the low series by 20.9% for the 2001-2009 period. This is the fastest increase of any of the former ATSC regions.⁸

The data for population projections in the North Coast of New South Wales fail to account for the most recent Australian property boom, which has once again caused a population spike in the region over recent years. Certainly property prices have increased and the buying power for Aboriginal residents in the North Coast region is becoming harder. This will present problems as people already disadvantaged on nearly every socio-economic indicator are forced into more expensive rental properties. It is likely that these people will continue to remain on the outskirts of country towns, with inadequate transport to the general services available in the bigger centres.⁹ Given the evidence above it is likely that this trend will continue through to the 2006 Census.

⁸ ABS statistics

⁹ J. Taylor, *Tracking change in the Relative Economic Status of Aboriginal people in New South Wales*, Discussion Paper No. 277/2005, Australian National University, 2005.

3.0 SOCIO-ECONOMIC INDICATORS

The socio-economic indicators collated below show that Aboriginal people in the North Coast region are disadvantaged when compared to non-Aboriginal people with respect to a number of key socio-economic indicators. This trend of Aboriginal disadvantage is apparent across all the indicators for health, economic development, education, housing, justice and family and community well being. A comparison between the regions of New South Wales shows that the trend of Aboriginal disadvantage occurs across the state. Compared to other ATSI and RCMG regions, the North Coast performs slightly better than Kamilaroi and Murdi Paaki.

3.1 Health

The health profile of Aboriginal people in the North Coast region is generally poorer than average when compared to other areas of the State.

For example, rates of cardiovascular disease, infectious diseases and hospital separations¹⁰ for alcohol in the Aboriginal population are considerably higher than the average for the rest of the State. The region also has a relatively high rate of low birth weight babies, and relatively low rate of Aboriginal mothers visiting antenatal clinics in the first 20 weeks of pregnancy. Hospital separation rates for pertussis, measles and Haemophilus influenza meningitis are also much worse than the NSW average for Aboriginal people.

All of the material in the Health section of this report was sourced from the *Report of the New South Wales Chief Health Officer*, accessed on 31 March 2006.¹¹

The data below provide clear evidence that more needs to be done to address poor health outcomes for Aboriginal people in the North Coast region.

There is no specific data for life expectancy in the North Coast region, but given the relatively low numbers of Aboriginal people over the age of 65 years, life expectancy for the Aboriginal population is likely to reflect national statistics. For the whole of Australia, Aboriginal life expectancy is 56 years for males and 63 years for females, compared with 76 years for males and 82 years for females for the total Australian population.

3.1.1 Maternal and Child Health

A birth weight of less than 2,500 grams for babies is considered to be low and may be indicative of poor health of the mother, her environment or the lack of available antenatal care. The proportion of Aboriginal babies in the North Coast that were born with a low birth weight increased significantly between 1993 and 2004. The period between 1993 and 2004 saw an almost 50% increase in the number of Aboriginal babies born with a low birth weight in the region, although the number of

¹⁰ Hospital separation: A formal separation is a discharge, transfer or death of a patient. It refers to the process by which a same day patient or inpatient completes an episode of care. A type of change separation occurs when an episode of care ends because the type of care provided to the patient changes.

¹¹ Population Health Division, *The health of the people of New South Wales – Report of the Chief Health Officer*, Sydney, NSW Department of Health at: http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/public-health/chorep/atsi/atsi_anteprocatsi_rcmg.htm.

babies born during the period remained fairly constant.

Between 1993 and 1995, 9.4% of Aboriginal babies in the North Coast were born with low birth weight, which was around 70% higher than the rate for the non-Aboriginal population during the same period (5.6%).

Between 2002 and 2004, 14% of Aboriginal babies in the region were born with low birth weight, compared to 12.7% of all Aboriginal babies in New South Wales. This is the second highest figure for RCMG regions in the State after New England/North-West, it is 125% higher than for non-Aboriginal babies throughout the State, only 6.2% of which were born with low birth weight in the period 2002-04.

The higher rates of Aboriginal babies born with low birth weights is generally related to a high incidence of Aboriginal mothers smoking in the second half of pregnancy (58% in 2000, compared with 15.3% of non-Aboriginal mothers), and the younger overall age of Aboriginal mothers (smoking rates among younger women are higher than among older women). In 2004, 56.6 % of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mothers reported smoking at some time during pregnancy. This compares with 13.6% of non-Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander mothers who reported smoking at some time during pregnancy in 2004.¹²

It is also possible that the birth-weight data collected by NSW Health is under-reporting data on Aboriginal babies. For example, the Midwives Data Collection (MDC) only collects information on the Aboriginal status of the mother and not the father. Maternal Aboriginality is also under-reported on the MDC. In 2002, it was estimated that of all babies born to Aboriginal mothers, only 69% were reported as having an Aboriginal mother.

Linked to low birth weight is the time of the first antenatal visit by pregnant women. Ideally, this should occur before 20 weeks of pregnancy. Between 2002 and 2004, the North Coast had average figures for visits by Aboriginal mothers to antenatal clinics, with 69.7% of pregnant Aboriginal women having their first antenatal visit before 20 weeks. This figure is slightly higher than the average for Aboriginal mothers throughout the State (69.3%), but is 30% lower than that of non-Aboriginal mothers throughout the State, 87.3% of which have their first antenatal visit before 20 weeks of pregnancy. It is also significantly lower than the average for non-Aboriginal mothers in the North Coast, which is 90.8%. These data suggest that there is a relatively low awareness of the need for antenatal visits amongst mothers in the North Coast.

3.1.2 Cardiovascular Disease

Between 2002 and 2005, rates of hospital separation for cardiovascular disease amongst Aboriginal people in the North Coast were around 24% higher than the NSW average for Aboriginal people: 3,802 per 100,000, compared to 3,071 per 100,000. The rate is 75% higher than the rate for the non-Aboriginal population of New South Wales over the same period (2,164 per 100,000), and 80% higher than the rate for the non-Aboriginal population in the North Coast (2,116 per 100,000). These figures are the fourth worst in the RCMG regions, and suggest the need for a

¹² NSW Department of Health, Midwives Data Collection: HOIST, www.health.nsw.gov.au/public-health/mdc/mdc99_3.pdf.

greater focus on preventive measures in the region.

While the rate of hospital separations for cardiovascular disease in the region has risen by more than 10% between 1993 and 2005 may be related to a higher rate of patients in the region identifying themselves as Aboriginal in recent years, the overall upward trend in these statistics across the Aboriginal population suggests otherwise. Within the non-Aboriginal population, the overall trend has been downward throughout the State over the same period.

3.1.3 Diabetes

Diabetes is a growing problem for Aboriginal people in the North Coast region. All regional Aboriginal communities with the exception of Murdi Paaki are reporting alarming increases in the incidence of diabetes. As in many other parts of New South Wales, the recorded rate of hospital separations for diabetes amongst Aboriginal people in the North Coast rose dramatically between 1993-96 (521 per 100,000) to 2002-05 (1,100 per 100,000).

The rate is now the third worst of RCMG regions in the State, and has more than doubled since the period from 1993 to 1996. It is also almost 50% higher than the average rate of 746 per 100,000 for the total NSW Aboriginal population in the period from 2002-05, and is more than four times higher than the rate for the total NSW non-Aboriginal population (236 per 100,000).

Given the across-the-board increases in the incidence of the disease across both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal populations, the State is facing a public health crisis that requires urgent attention.

3.1.4 Infectious Diseases

Hospital separation rates for pertussis, measles and Haemophilus influenza meningitis throughout the State amongst Aboriginal people have dropped by 80% over the period from 1993 to 2005.

The rate of hospital separations for these infections amongst Aboriginal people in the North Coast during the period from 2002 to 2005 is more than twice the rate for all Aboriginal people in New South Wales, at 9.3 per 100,000, compared to 4.2 per 100,000, and is considerably higher than that of non-Aboriginal people in the region (6 per 100,000). It is also more than three times the rate for non-Aboriginal people throughout the State during the same period (3 per 100,000).

Skin infections are related to the later onset of heart and kidney disease. Hospital separation rates for skin infections throughout the State amongst Aboriginal people have increased by 16% over the period from 1993 to 2005.

The rate of hospital separations for skin infections amongst Aboriginal people in the North Coast during the period from 2002 to 2005 is 170% higher than the rate of non-Aboriginal people in the region, at 777 per 100,000, compared to 288 per 100,000. It is 220% higher than the rate for the total NSW population (242 per 100,000), and more than 30% higher than the rate for all Aboriginal people in New South Wales (583 per 100,000).

However, the rate of hospital separations for skin infections amongst Aboriginal

people in the North Coast between 1993 and 2005 has reduced by around 15%, whereas the statistics amongst the general population and the Aboriginal population across the State over the same period have worsened, suggesting that the cause for this reduction should be investigated more thoroughly.

3.1.5 Alcohol

Hospital separation rates attributed to alcohol throughout the State amongst Aboriginal people have increased by 11% over the period from 1993 to 2005. Excessive consumption of alcohol is a serious problem amongst Aboriginal people on the North Coast.

The rate of hospital separations attributed to alcohol amongst Aboriginal people in the North Coast during the period from 2002 to 2005 is around 20% higher than the rate for all Aboriginal people in New South Wales, at 2,193 per 100,000, compared to 1,790 per 100,000. However, it is almost four times the rate for non-Aboriginal people in the region (576 per 100,000), and throughout the State during the same period (537 per 100,000). The rate is close to the second worst for Aboriginal people in the State.

The rate of hospital separations for trauma attributed to alcohol amongst Aboriginal people in the North Coast during the period from 2002 to 2005 is around 14% higher than the rate for all Aboriginal people in New South Wales, at 565 per 100,000, compared to 497 per 100,000. However, it is 127% higher than the rate for non-Aboriginal people in the region (249 per 100,000), and 164% higher than the rate for non-Aboriginal people throughout the State during the same period (214 per 100,000).

The 20% increase in the rate of hospital separations attributed to alcohol and 10% increase in trauma attributed to alcohol amongst Aboriginal people in the region between 1993 and 2005 may be partially attributed to under-identification of Aboriginal people in the region during the earlier period. However, the worsening of the statistics across the general population for this indicator suggests that there has been a genuine deterioration of the situation for Aboriginal people during this period.

3.1.6 Smoking

According to the *Many Rivers Strategic Plan*, the incidence of smoking in the Aboriginal community is 70% higher than for non-Aboriginal people.¹³ While no statistics for smoking are recorded by LGA region, the 2004-05 *National Aboriginal and Islander Health Survey* is illustrative for New South Wales. This survey reports that 50% of adult Aboriginal people in New South Wales smoke, including 66% of Aboriginal people who are unemployed.¹⁴

3.2 Housing

This section details housing statistics for Aboriginal people in this region. Aboriginal people in the North Coast region are generally disadvantaged in relation to housing, both compared to non-Aboriginal people and to Aboriginal people in other regions.

¹³ *Many Rivers Strategic Plan*.

¹⁴ ABS, *National Aboriginal and Islander Health Survey 2004-05*, Cat No. 47151.55.005.

In 2001, the proportion of Aboriginal households who owned or were buying their own home was higher in the Queanbeyan and Many Rivers ATSI regions than any other region, at just under 40%, compared to just over 70% for the total population.

A substantial number of Aboriginal people in New South Wales are assisted with public housing. In 2004-05, 934 Aboriginal households were newly assisted, while there are currently around 8,700 Aboriginal tenants in public housing. Mainstream community housing also houses an additional 600 Aboriginal households.

Aboriginal families are more than twice as likely to be living in overcrowded dwellings as the total population. In the 2000-01 financial year, 2.4% of households suffered from overcrowding in Aboriginal Housing Office dwellings in the ATSI Many Rivers region (which includes nine of the eleven LGAs in the Hunter RCMG). This was slightly below the average for the whole of New South Wales for that period. In the 2002-3 financial year, the figure had increased slightly to 2.7%, which was the average for the whole of New South Wales for that period.

Between 2000 and 2003, the percentage of new allocations of housing to Aboriginal households as a proportion of all allocations in public housing for the Many Rivers region increased from 6.3% to 7.6%, suggesting that efforts by the NSW Government to improve Aboriginal people’s access to social housing has begun to take an effect. However, as information on Aboriginal people already in mainstream social housing is poor, care should be taken in analysing this data.

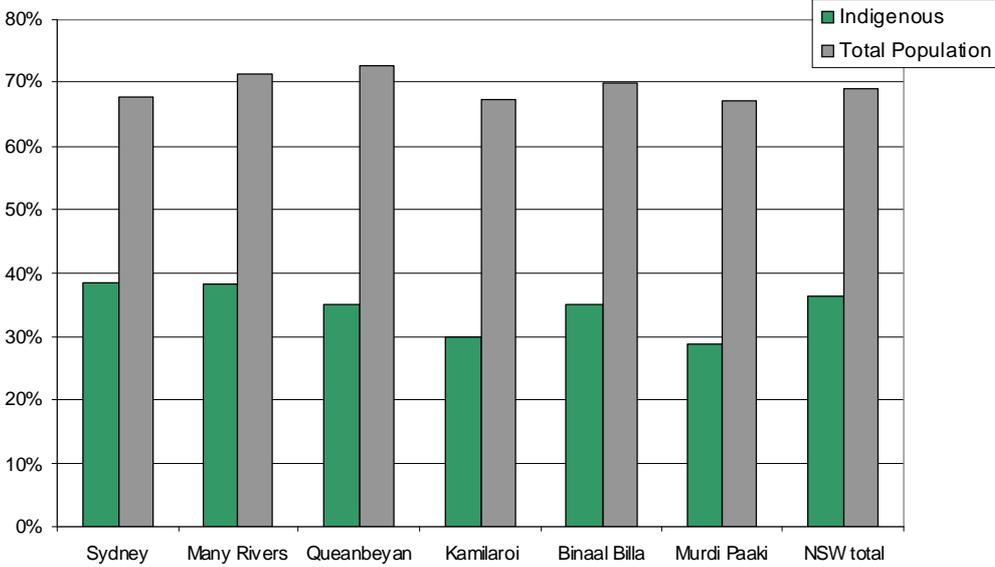


Figure 5: Proportion of Aboriginal households who own or are buying a home, NSW and ATSI regions 2001

Source: ABS 2001 Census of Population and Housing

3.2.1 Environmental Health

Hospital separations for acute respiratory infection, gastrointestinal infection, rheumatic heart disease, skin infections and tuberculosis are conditions related to environmental health. In particular, they may be related to poor housing factors, such as over-crowding and lack of access to adequate means of sanitation.

The worsening North Coast statistics for both acute respiratory infections and gastrointestinal infections may be partially attributable to increased self-identification of Aboriginal people in the region, but may also reflect a genuine increase in the incidence of these diseases in the Aboriginal population.

Hospital separations for acute respiratory infection amongst Aboriginal people during the period from 1993 to 1996 were 1,643 per 100,000, but had risen to 1,931 per 100,000 for the period from 2002 to 2005: a 15% increase over twelve years. The North Coast figures for the period 2002-05 are 28% higher than the NSW average for Aboriginal people (1,504 per 100,000), and 156% higher than the rate for non-Aboriginal people in the region over the same period (755 per 100,000).

Hospital separations for gastrointestinal infection amongst Aboriginal people in the North Coast region during the period from 1993 to 1996 were 168 per 100,000, but had risen to 360 per 100,000 for the period from 2002 to 2005: more than doubling over twelve years. The North Coast figures for the period 2002-05 are 26% higher than the NSW average for Aboriginal people (285 per 100,000), and 145% higher than the rate for non-Aboriginal people in the region over the same period (147 per 100,000).

All of these figures suggest that urgent attention needs to be paid to environmental health in Aboriginal households in the region.

3.3 Justice

The data below were sourced from the *Two Ways Together Report on Indicators*, June 2005, and refer to the Many Rivers ATSI region as a whole, which also covers most of the Hunter and the Central Coast RCMG regions.

3.3.1 Victim Rates

The rate of hospitalisations for assault by Aboriginal status was the third highest in the Many Rivers ATSI region after the Murdi Paaki and Kamilaroi regions in 1999/2000. The rate of hospitalisations for assault was almost 500 per 100,000 Aboriginal population.

The North Coast region had the second lowest rate of assault victimisation by Aboriginal status in New South Wales in 2002.

3.3.2 Adults

The rate of imprisonment for Aboriginal adults was similar for the Many Rivers, Kamilaroi and Binaal Billa ATSI regions in 2002. The Murdi Paaki and Sydney regions had higher rates, while Queanbeyan had lower rates. The rate of imprisonment by Aboriginal status in the North Coast was almost 800 per 100,000.

The North Coast region had the second lowest rate of Aboriginal adults on remand in New South Wales by ATSI region in 2002.

Aboriginal people continue to be grossly over-represented in criminal proceedings for offensive language and offensive conduct charges. On average, Aboriginal people are 15 times more likely to be prosecuted for offensive language or conduct. However, the Richmond River LGA recorded a rate over 80 times the state average

per 1,000 people.¹⁵ This level of discrepancy suggests that where Aboriginal people are more visible – such as in rural areas – they are more likely to be prosecuted for offensive language or conduct. It also suggests that police discrimination may be a factor in the Richmond River LGA.

3.3.3 Juveniles

Aboriginal young people face the court system at a much higher rate than non-Aboriginal people.

The North Coast region had the third lowest rate of juveniles diverted¹⁶ from court in New South Wales in 2002. The gap between the proportion of juveniles diverted from court by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal status was greater in the Sydney and Queanbeyan ATSI regions, and lower in the Kamilaroi, Binaal Billa and Murdi Paaki regions.

The rate of Aboriginal juveniles diverted from court by Aboriginal status was less than for the total population in all regions of New South Wales in 2002. The Many Rivers region had the third lowest proportion of Aboriginal juveniles diverted from court in New South Wales. The gap between the proportion of juveniles diverted from court by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal status was greater in the Sydney, Queanbeyan and Many Rivers regions, and lower in the Kamilaroi, Binaal Billa and Murdi Paaki regions.

3.4 Economic Development

3.4.1 Employment

The unemployment rate for the Aboriginal population was higher than the unemployment rate for the non-Aboriginal population across all regions in 2001. At 27%, the North Coast region had one of the highest Aboriginal unemployment rates in New South Wales, compared to 8.6% for the non-Aboriginal population of this region. These data compare to unemployment rates of 23% for Aboriginal people in New South Wales as a whole, and 7% for non-Aboriginal people.

Table 4: Unemployment rate by Aboriginal status (%) NSW and ATSI regions 2001

	NSW	Sydney	Many Rivers	Kamilaroi	Binaal Billa	Murdi Paaki
Aboriginal	23.1	16.7	27.4	30	25.2	23.9
Non Aboriginal	7.2	6.1	10.7	8.6	6.9	9.8

3.4.2 Income

The median Aboriginal family income for the North Coast region was \$199 - \$399. The lower incomes are the result of lower employment rates, employment in lower

¹⁵ AJAC, *Policing Public Order: Offensive Language and Behaviour: The Impact on Aboriginal People*.

¹⁶ Diversion: This is where juvenile persons of interest (POI) have their charges proceeded against by legal processes other than referral to court. Not all crimes have an associated POI and not all POIs have legal proceedings taken against them. The legal processes available to police include referral to court, referral to a youth justice conference, the issue of a caution or warning, or the issue of an infringement notice. There are many factors that can affect the likelihood of POIs being diverted from court by police, including the nature of the offence or the offending history of the individual.

paying jobs and the younger age of the Aboriginal population.

A high number of Aboriginal households in the region have incomes below the poverty line, meaning a significant number of Aboriginal children in the region are living in poverty.

<i>Aboriginal</i>		<i>Non-Aboriginal</i>	
negative/nil income	7.9%	negative income	5%
\$1-119	7.8%	1-119	6%
\$120-199	29%	120-199	20%
\$200-399	27%	200-399	29%
\$400-599	12%	400-599	16%
\$600-799	4.7%	600-799	7.6%
\$800-999	2%	800-999	3.8%
\$1000+	2%	1000+	5%
unstated	8%	not stated	6.8%

Table 5: Median weekly family income, 2001

3.5 Education

Because of the younger age profile of Aboriginal people in the North Coast region, a higher proportion of school participants are Aboriginal. The increasing numbers of Aboriginal youth not completing their secondary education is reflected in tertiary enrolments and employment levels. As 42% of the North Coast Aboriginal population were 14 years of age or younger at the *2001 Census*, the problem of unqualified Aboriginal people in the region is expected to increase. There is an urgent need to lift school attendance and literacy and numeracy rates.

The data below were sourced from either the *2001 Census*, or from the Department of Education and Training's Planning and Innovation Directorate *Mid-Year Census 2003-2005*.

Levels of literacy and numeracy in Year 3 for Aboriginal students in the North Coast region in 2005 are slightly lower than the state average for Aboriginal students, but are ten to eighteen percentage points lower than the state average for all students (Band 2 and above). Levels of literacy and numeracy in Year 5 for Aboriginal students in the North Coast in 2005 are slightly lower or around the state average for Aboriginal students, but are still sixteen percentage points lower than the state average for all students (Band 3 and above).

With respect to overall literacy results for Year 3 students in the region, 15.9% of Aboriginal students were placed in the two highest skill bands, while 23.4% were placed in the two highest skill bands for numeracy. These compare with 16.5% of all Aboriginal students in the State for Year 3 literacy, and 21.1% of all Aboriginal students in the State for Year 3 numeracy. On the other hand, 36% of all students in the region were placed in the two highest skill bands for literacy, 40.3% in the two highest skill bands for numeracy, and 42.2% and 46.2% respectively, for all students across the State.

With respect to overall literacy results for Year 5 students in the region, 21.2% of Aboriginal students were placed in the two highest skill bands, while 21.4% were placed in the two highest skill bands for numeracy. These compare with 18.4% of

all Aboriginal students in the State for Year 5 literacy, and 21.5% of all Aboriginal students in the State for Year 5 numeracy. On the other hand, 41.6% of all students in the region were placed in the two highest skill bands for literacy, 45.8% in the two highest skill bands for numeracy, and 47.4% and 50.7% respectively, for all students across the State.

3.5.1 Retention Rates

The Many Rivers ATSI region had the second highest percentage in New South Wales of Year 10 students who met the requirements to attain a Year 10 certificate by Aboriginal status. Many Rivers and the Queanbeyan region had the second highest proportion of Year 12 students who met the requirements for a Year 12 certificate, after the Sydney region. The gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal was the smallest in the Many Rivers region in New South Wales.

However, this picture does not look as favourable when examined across the RCMG region. The region ranked sixth overall of RCMG regions for retention rates for Years 10 to 12 Aboriginal students.

In 2005, the full-time equivalent retention rate for Hunter Aboriginal students in all schools for Years 10 to 12 was 35.6%, compared to 65.8% for all students in the region. The NSW average for all Aboriginal students was 39.3%, and for all students was 74.2%, indicating that Aboriginal students in the region are remaining in school at about half the state average for all students, and performing worse than the state average for Aboriginal students.

These data indicate that North Coast schools need to considerably improve their efforts at assisting Aboriginal students in the transition to senior high school. However, these statistics do not fully capture all of the students who may be enrolled in Year 11 and 12 coursework, such as part-time students, mature-aged students, and repeating students.

3.5.2 Tertiary Education

In comparison to the total population, Aboriginal people were under-represented in all education levels across all regions in 2001. In the North Coast region, 0.3% of Aboriginal people compared to 0.9% of the total population had a postgraduate degree in 2001, 0.4% compared to 1% had a graduate degree and 2.5% compared to 6.2% had a bachelor degree. The North Coast region was ranked third after Sydney and Queanbeyan regions for percentage of people with postgraduate and graduate diploma degrees, equal second for bachelor degrees and second for advanced diploma degrees.

However, there has been an increase in Aboriginal undergraduate and postgraduate enrolments. This suggests that a higher level of mature age entry is occurring.

3.6 Culture and Heritage

An Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Advisory Committee was recently established under the *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974*. The Committee will advise the Minister for the Environment and the Director General of the Department of Environment and Conservation about any matter relating to Aboriginal Cultural Heritage in New South Wales. The Committee will not replace existing local, regional and state-

wide consultative processes of the Department of Environment and Conservation or other NSW government agencies. The Committee will provide strategic advice about the development and administration of Aboriginal culture and heritage programs, policies and projects.

3.6.1 Environmental and Natural Resource Management

The broad environmental and natural resource management themes are land (land quality, land use and management), atmosphere (air quality, climate), biodiversity conservation, water (water quality and ecology, water use and allocation) and human settlement (waste, noise, Aboriginal heritage and non-Aboriginal heritage).

According to the Department of Environment and Conservation, there are 2,893 known and recorded sites of Aboriginal cultural and heritage significance listed on the Aboriginal Heritage Information Management System (AHIMS) for the 13 LGAs in the region.

There are ten Aboriginal Places declared within the region:

- 1) Nymboida Aboriginal Place
- 2) Long Gully Aboriginal Place
- 3) Casino Bora Ground Aboriginal Place
- 4) Saltwater Aboriginal Place
- 5) Burrell Bulai Aboriginal Place
- 6) Ti Tree (Taylors) Lake Aboriginal Place
- 7) Parrots Nest (Goorumbil) Aboriginal Place
- 8) Mimiga Gaungan (St Marys Waterhole) Aboriginal Place
- 9) The Three (Biripi) Brothers Mountains Aboriginal Place
- 10) Farquhar Park Aboriginal Place.

There are three Aboriginal Areas declared within the region:

- 1) Lennox Head Aboriginal Area
- 2) Nunguu Mirral Aboriginal Area
- 3) Nambucca Aboriginal Area.

There are two Historic Sites declared within the region:

- 1) Clybucca Historic Site
- 2) Tweed Heads Historic Site.

3.6.2 Coastal Development

Increased migration to coastal areas — a national trend — is creating new demands for land and therefore new demands on Aboriginal communities. There are pressures on the regional LALCs to sell land for development purposes, but as in other parts of the State, coastal developments on non-Aboriginal land are happening so quickly that traditional owners are struggling to protect heritage sites or make land claims over areas of significance to them.

3.6.3 Aboriginal Land Claims

Ownership, control of and access to land increases opportunities for Aboriginal people to practice, promote and protect their culture and heritage and participate in natural resource management, which has both cultural and economic benefits. In addition to an individual's private purchases, there are several mechanisms through which Aboriginal people can own or control land in New South Wales. These are: the *Native Title Act 1993*; *NSW Aboriginal Land Rights Act 1983*; the Indigenous Land Corporation; management agreements; non-statutory co-management agreements and Aboriginal Land Use Agreements.

There has been one native title determination and four Aboriginal land use agreements registered in New South Wales. The native title determination in New South Wales is at Crescent Head and there are also two Aboriginal land use agreements in the region. On the current indicators for culture and heritage, the region is doing comparatively well.

3.7 Families and Young People

Aboriginal households in the North Coast region consist predominantly of couples with children and single parent families. Over 80% of Aboriginal households are families with dependent or non-dependent children. Breaking this down further, approximately 57% of Aboriginal households are couples with children and approximately 28% are single parent family households.

For non-Aboriginal households, approximately 50% are households with dependent or non-dependent children, and 13% are single parent families.

Some 14% of Aboriginal households are couples with no children, compared to 26% of non-Aboriginal households.

3.7.1 Substantiated Child Protection Reports

In the North Coast region, the rate of Aboriginal children and young people involved in reports where assessment determined abuse/neglect issues was 20 per 100,000 in 2001/2002. This was the second lowest rate in New South Wales. The gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal was smaller than for any region except for the Queanbeyan region.

3.7.2 Violence, Abuse and Neglect

The rate of assault victimisation involving Aboriginal people in the Many Rivers ATSI Region, which includes the North Coast region, was more than double that of the total population in 2002, at around 3.4 per 1,000, compared to 1.4 per 1,000. Nevertheless, the Many Rivers region had the second lowest victimisation rate for domestic violence for Aboriginal people in New South Wales.¹⁷

No data were available for the purposes of this report with respect to rates of sexual assault involving Aboriginal people, or for the victimisation rates associated with domestic violence in the North Coast region. However, on the basis of data available for the whole State for the period from 1998 to 2002, it is apparent that Aboriginal women are seven to eight times more likely than non-Aboriginal women

¹⁷ ATSI Many Rivers Regional Council, *Many Rivers Strategic Regional Plan: 2005-2010*, 2005, p. 60.

to be the victims of domestic-violence related assault, and two to three times more likely to be victims of sexual assault as non-Aboriginal women.

It is not clear from the available information whether there are sufficient family refuges and crisis housing in the North Coast region, or whether there is any emergency housing for young people.

It should be noted also that the Many Rivers Regional Council and the Coffs Harbour office of the former ATSIC prepared a *Many Rivers Regional Aboriginal Family Violence Workshops Final Report* in 2004. The Report summarised the findings of a series of community workshops in nine locations throughout the region, including Newcastle, and the development of the Many Rivers Family Violence Action Plan.

4.0 THE CURRENT ENVIRONMENT

4.1 Community Priorities

Prior to the abolition of ATSIC by the Australian Government, the Many Rivers Regional Council, in partnership with the Coffs Harbour Aboriginal Coordination Centre and the NSW Department of Aboriginal Affairs, completed ten community consultations throughout the region in 2003 and 2004 to produce a strategic plan.

The Priority Areas for the Many Rivers Regional Council Aboriginal communities were identified as:

1. Youth Leadership Development – education and training, crime prevention, employment
2. Elders – culture, traditional knowledge
3. Family – family breakdown, violence, neglect, substance abuse, gambling, welfare dependency; and
4. Capacity Building – Aboriginal representation, partnership, advocacy.

The Many Rivers Regional Aboriginal Family Violence action plan detailed the findings of community workshops held in Tweed Heads, Casino, Grafton, Coffs Harbour, Macksville, Kempsey, Taree, Newcastle, and Wyong. However, it is unclear what has been done by the Australian Government to progress the action plan since it was completed.

4.2 Analysis of Need

The statistical information presented reveals considerable Aboriginal disadvantage compared to non-Aboriginal people, a trend apparent across social and economic indicators. Comparisons between the regions of New South Wales show this trend of Aboriginal disadvantage occurs across the State.

The *2001 Census* identified 32,529 Aboriginal people living in the North Coast region, 16,845 of whom were 19 years or less. Of those young people, almost 50% were under eight years of age. With a high proportion of the Aboriginal population aged 25 years or younger, funding should be directed at early childhood initiatives, pre-school education, sport and recreation, school education and youth programs, vocational training, unemployment programs, housing and disease prevention programs.

In 2001, the North Coast region had the second highest Aboriginal unemployment rate in New South Wales, despite having a high CDEP participation rate. Overcrowding is a significant issue in the region although home ownership rates for Aboriginal people are higher than other regions. The North Coast region also shows low rates of attainment of the Year 10 Certificate compared to New South Wales as a whole.

The socio-economic indicators identify the North Coast region's Aboriginal population as being more disadvantaged or less disadvantaged (relative to Aboriginal people in other regions) in the following areas:

Less disadvantaged	More disadvantaged
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Owning or purchasing a home • Rates of child abuse and neglect • Culture and heritage issues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maternal health • Cardiovascular disease • Diabetes • Infectious diseases • Alcohol use • Environmental health • Median income • Rates of assault • Juvenile diversions from court • Years 3 & 5 literacy & numeracy • Years 10 to 12 retention rates • Levels of tertiary education

The areas of greater disadvantage are generally also community priorities, according to the information in the previous section. In addition to education, leadership and community organisation governance, drug and alcohol counselling, and services for families, the community has given high priority to transport and employment opportunities.

4.3 Issues for Consideration

On the basis of the information set out in the report it is recommended that the North Coast Regional Engagement Group undertake further investigation of the following issues:

1. Poor health outcomes for Aboriginal people across all of the key indicators suggests that much more effort is required to improve the health of Aboriginal people on the North Coast.
2. High unemployment rates despite high CDEP participation, suggesting CDEP training is not leading to stable employment.
3. Overcrowding of public housing is relatively high, and the data are likely to involve significant underreporting.
4. In the light of low school retention rates from Years 10 to 12, Years 7 to 9 students are in need of better support.
5. An increased focus on Years 3 and 5 literacy and numeracy is required, given the below average performance of Aboriginal children in the region.
6. High rates of adult victimisation, domestic violence involving young people and sustained child protection reports all suggest the need for more specialised programs and shelters, as well as consideration of safe houses.
7. There is a high proportion of refused applications for bail, indicating the need for greater focus, perhaps for an increase in bail hostels or training for magistrates.
8. More programs to sustain and build community capacity, including advocacy

and leadership, are sorely needed. This would include governance, financial management, mentorship, leadership training and support for community governance structures.

9. Explicit programs to deal with family violence, as recommended in the Many Rivers Family Violence Action Plan, are urgently required.

In developing appropriate responses to these issues, consideration should be given to advice consistently given by Aboriginal people in various forums in relation to service delivery.

Transport and cost are regularly identified as significant barriers to accessing government services. In particular, Aboriginal people often express a lack of confidence in utilising community buses that are not operated by Aboriginal organisations such as Aboriginal Medical Services. This may be due to lack of familiarity with drivers, a lack of knowledge about what services are on offer, or a perceived lack of flexibility and adaptability with respect to timetables.

This reflects a broader concern that services are delivered in a culturally appropriate manner including:

- the lack of Aboriginal staff, particularly as the first point of contact;
- the inability of service providers to communicate effectively with Aboriginal people; and
- overt racism expressed by service providers.

“Cultural understanding” is listed as one of the goals under the *Two Ways Together*. The Department of Education and Training has developed a cultural competence course called the Aboriginal Cultural Education Program. It is suggested that the relevant CEOs prioritise cultural awareness training for public sector employees in key agencies with high levels of contact with Aboriginal people, including NSW Police, and the Departments of Community Services, Corrective Services, Education and Training, Environment and Conservation, Health, Juvenile Justice and Primary Industries.

Agencies are recommended to give careful consideration to these concerns when developing a response to the issues identified in this report.

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