

Walgett Shire Council's

**ABORIGINAL COMMUNITY
DEVELOPMENT AND
RECONCILIATION PLAN
2007 - 2010**

Submission from the
**Dharriwaa
Elders
Group¹**

January 2008

¹a charity approved as a deductible gift recipient

ABN: 26 795 240 948

PO Box 174 walgett NSW 2832

www.dharriwaaeldersgroup.org.au

Introduction

The Dharriwaa Elders Group ("DEG") commends the Walgett Shire Council for beginning work on a plan for how it will work for the development of the Aboriginal communities of the Shire and for reconciliation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal residents. Because the existing document needs a complete redraft², we will not comment on all of its parts, but rather suggest how the Shire can move forward in the development process of the Plan.

Plan Development Process

Our community organization has worked hard to establish a secretariat so its members can speak to government, so is in a position to make a written submission commenting on the draft Plan. However the Shire must recognize that there is a low level of literacy in its Aboriginal communities, and so should not assume that it has adequately consulted the Aboriginal communities of the Shire by simply requesting written submissions at a Council meeting (which few Aboriginal residents attend). We believe that the current Aboriginal Liaison Officer is capable of conducting a thorough consultation, if he is supported by supervising and secretarial staff, recording equipment and a vehicle. This consultation should occur taking into account the recommendations of this submission.

- 1. Recommendation: that Council extend the time available to comment on the Draft Plan and consult the Aboriginal communities in the Shire regarding the Draft Plan by a combination of methods including:**
 - a) conducting well-publicized community meetings in each town that are facilitated by respected Aboriginal communicators, and recorded using the most efficient notetaking methods³,**
 - b) Conducting key focus group consultations with different Aboriginal community interest groups in the three towns (i.e. women, youth, elders, men, and Aboriginal community organizations) by respected Aboriginal communicators, which are recorded as above.**
 - c) Consultations be designed to incorporate and improve content proposed by the DEG's recommendations in this submission**

How the Plan must begin

If the Council truly wants to recognize and celebrate the value of its citizens' Aboriginal culture and its rich heritage, then repair work needs to be done. The desire to engage in a more meaningful way than ever before with its large Aboriginal population is new, uncharted and historic territory for the Walgett Shire Council which the DEG welcomes and applauds. The first priority must be to establish a relationship of trust and respect with the communities. The Council will be wasting its time if it blundered on any further without first employing strategies to build trust. And this is not something that will happen overnight. It will take years to build goodwill because the relationship has been so damaged in the past. The building of this goodwill will depend on the personal behaviour of every individual representing the Council.

The Council and its staff must recognize its poor relationship with its Aboriginal citizens

An important part of this trust-building process will be for the Shire to acknowledge its participation in our Aboriginal communities' present dysfunction. We believe that the Shire has actively ignored the needs of its Aboriginal residents until very recently. It is

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only ten years since the Shire first raised the Aboriginal flag – and they had to be dragged kicking and screaming to do it. Our members remember the local ordinance imposing a curfew on Aboriginal people in Walgett – preventing entry into town after 6pm past "Crows Corner"⁴. This curfew was enforced by police and local vigilantes on horseback wielding hobble chains and whips – one of whom is still alive today. The Shire did nothing when local businesses imposed their apartheid regime, (e.g. the cinema with its separate seating areas) – perhaps because the Shire really WAS the local businesses and their cronies. The current draft LEP does little to recognize or protect Aboriginal heritage in the region. In the past many development actions of the Council have negatively affected Aboriginal cultural heritage. Council workers and contractors desecrated many burial grounds while gravel and sand quarrying, an action which some of our members had to battle to stop. Caves were destroyed and recently the sacred spring at Cumborah would have been destroyed by Council if the DEG had not objected to the water license application. In the last five years a bower bird's nest in Walgett was bulldozed by Council. The Shire worked actively against the establishment of Aboriginal health, legal and other community services in the 1970s and 1980s. One of our members clearly remembers the Shire Clerk of the time speaking against their establishment at public meetings. Council never provided housing for Aboriginal people despite the obvious need as most were living in tin humpies on the fringes of town into the 1970s. State and Federal governments responded to local people's needs before this Council ever did. In the early 2000s Councillors visited the Walgett Aboriginal Medical Service in a formal capacity for the first time. The Council still hasn't introduced fluoride in the water supply despite the overwhelming evidence of the impact of this neglect on public health. The community at Gingie Village's drinking water only recently began to be tested for the Australian Standard after the DEG raised an outcry about its contamination. It took the presence of an Administrator to respond to community concerns to make the Youth Centre safe. Only the Administrator has been successful recently in ensuring the Shire provides adequate youth services it has been funded by DoCS to provide for years. DEG members had to battle for the Youth Centre in Walgett to reopen in the recent past. The Administrator was the first to bitumen Keepit St – one of the last streets in the town to be so surfaced. Would this have happened if the DEG hadn't lobbied the Administrator? Why are there no welcoming ceremonies from Aboriginal communities to new citizens at citizenship ceremonies? Why is there so little Aboriginal participation in Australia Day formalities?

The socially active members of the Dharriwaa Elders Group remember their struggles with the Council⁵, and are wary. The Shire must recognize how its actions can and have negatively impacted on its Aboriginal citizens. If it has a conscience it must recognize formally its past attitude towards its Aboriginal citizens before elders will feel able to work with the Shire in an atmosphere of trust, respect and sharing. Heartfelt contrition will enable us to put the past firmly behind, and help us to focus on the work that needs to be done to build a better future.

- 2. Recommendation: The Shire must recognize how its actions can and have negatively impacted on its Aboriginal citizens. This will happen as a result of an internal staff education process and should include examination of Council records and maps.**

- 3. Recommendation: The Council must develop a formal, locally meaningful apology to its Aboriginal citizens. This could occur in Reconciliation Week**

⁴ At Jonsun's Store

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and must be recorded for historical purposes and promoted widely in the media.

Further Plan Development Processes

Another part of the trust-building process will be for the Shire to truly understand and recognize its Aboriginal constituency. We estimate that Aboriginal people provide more than 60% of the population of Walgett, a greater percentage of Collarenebri and a smaller percentage of the Lightning Ridge population. We believe that a census should be undertaken to gain a more accurate picture of this anecdotal estimate, and have already suggested a method for doing this.⁶

- 4. Recommendation: that Council develops a plan with the DEG and other Aboriginal community organizations to form an accurate statistical picture of the Aboriginal communities of the Shire. This plan will include undertaking a census of Aboriginal people in Walgett which may be used as a model by other Aboriginal communities in the Shire.**

Still Further Plan Development Processes

Further to the establishment of trust process is to truly recognize that Aboriginal residents make up a large percentage of the Shire’s population and deserve the same services as other residents of the Shire.

They deserve services for their youth, clean streets and public spaces, clean drinking water, working sewerage and drainage, environmental health, education, adequate housing, access to health services, community transport, childcare etc. The Dharriwaa Elders Group believes the Shire is a little cheeky including items in the Draft Plan which would more appropriately be located in other plans. It’s really another example of the Shire’s willful disregard of its Aboriginal citizens and/or poor supervision of its staff that matters to do with general Shire services have been included in this document. Council’s plans for youth development and seniors weeks, as those for roads, parks and gardens, health and other service areas should include and take into account the needs of the Shire’s Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal residents. Plans for combating graffiti should be part of the town beautification plans. Does the Shire think that graffiti is produced because of the perpetrator’s Aboriginality? Plans for Council Open Days should be for the whole community.

- 5. Recommendation: A statement should be made in the beginning of the Plan that recognises the large proportion of the Shire’s population is Aboriginal, and that they deserve the same level of service as other Shire residents.**
- 6. Recommendation: Delete “Seniors Week” “Anti Graffiti Program” “Youth Development Programs” “Walgett Shire Council Open Day”, “Street Signage” “Harmony Day”, “School to Work Traineeships” from this Plan and after further advice, insert them into other Council Plans as they are not Aboriginal-specific, but activities and measures that should be carried out as part of Council’s obligations to its residents.**

Aboriginal “Community Needs Audit”

Currently Council does not understand the needs that may be specific to the Aboriginal communities of the Shire. A needs audit must be undertaken to guide the

⁶ See 3.3 of “Points for Discussion between the Dharriwaa Elders Group and the Walgett Shire Council” (Attachment A)

Council's future planning. This needs audit should include modelling future scenarios (including climate change, decreasing rates income, growing Aboriginal youth demographic etc) to inform effective future planning of Council services.

- 7. Recommendation: As part of the process of understanding the needs of Aboriginal residents, the Shire must undertake a needs audit of its Aboriginal communities, so that it can better plan its services. This process will include future scenarios modeling to aid the realism and usefulness of future plans and services.**

Current Council Plans invalid

Once a process of understanding the nature and needs of the Aboriginal communities of the Shire has been undertaken, other Council instruments will be found lacking. We maintain all the other Council Plans have been developed without the participation or input of the larger Aboriginal communities and residents of the Shire, and so are invalid. These include the *Community Safety Plan*, the *Walgett Shire Community Social Plan 2007 – 2010*, and the draft local environment plan, etc. While Walgett Shire Council persists with the charade of community consultation via written submission, how can Aboriginal residents feel the Shire has any relevance or understanding of their needs?

- 8. Recommendation: That Council add a statement to the Plan acknowledging that all other current Council plans have been written without the participation of Aboriginal communities of the Shire, and so must be treated with caution. The statement will also include an undertaking to remedy this as soon as is practical.**

Promote Aboriginal participation in local government

The Dharriwaa Elders Group has witnessed the low participation of the Walgett Shire's Aboriginal communities in local government, and for that matter, any government. We often have to assist our members to vote, and witness much informal and donkey voting.

Because Aboriginal citizens are not currently represented by elected Councillors, other strategies must be employed to hear their voices. Council should create two designated Aboriginal positions on Council, which are appointed using a fair system that ensures that large family groups don't dominate representation.

- 9. Recommendation: That Council research the extent of informal and donkey voting in local elections**
- 10. Recommendation: That Council develop a plan to promote civic education and participation in government and informed voting, targeted to its Aboriginal communities**
- 11. Recommendation: That Council develops a process in consultation with representative Aboriginal organizations, which will ensure two Aboriginal representatives are appointed to the elected Walgett Shire Council, after elections resume.**

Future Council planning processes

A statement should be added to the Plan that ensures participation in the development of all Council policies and procedures by the Aboriginal communities of the Shire, so that all Council Plans effectively take the issues and concerns of

Aboriginal residents into account. This would include introducing more effective, targeted community media and education campaigns (which may use different media and methods to those used when targeting the non-Aboriginal communities). It would also include outlining the methods and processes staff should use when consulting with the Aboriginal community as outlined above.

12. Recommendation: that Council add to the Plan a clause that ensures that Aboriginal residents are effectively involved in the development of all Council plans that affect Aboriginal residents

13. Recommendation: that Council add to the Plan a clause that ensures that Council policies and plans are effectively promoted to the Aboriginal communities of the Shire

Community Development

Once a respectful relationship is established between the Council, its staff and its Aboriginal citizens, then we can work together fruitfully, creating the extra attention and services needed for the development of Aboriginal communities of the Walgett Shire to the same level as the other Shire Residents. This needs to be done understanding community development processes and recognizing hard-won successes when they occur. Council support for grassroots community development achievements would also not go astray! This support should be reflected in meaningful support of non-profit Aboriginal community development organizations, for example by granting exemption from rates, water and sewerage charges (as provided for in the Local Government Act).

Opportunities like Reconciliation Week and NAIDOC Week and other occasions could be used in a meaningful way to celebrate actual local community achievements rather than the current obligatory activities which are carried out with little significance or local relevance.

Once Council demonstrates it is educated about community development processes, and can recognize and support real grass-roots community development activities in its communities, it can begin to act itself to develop enterprise across the region to complement, support and accelerate the activities of the local community organizations. The Shire has the potential strength to oversee projects throughout the Shire which incubate enterprise, and support other projects that do.

14. Recommendation: That Council employs advice and services from leading community development academics to assist it to develop the Aboriginal communities of the Walgett Shire.

15. Recommendation: That Council learns how to recognize successes in Aboriginal community development, and assist the community to recognize and celebrate them.

16. Recommendation: That Council supports the work of successful Aboriginal non-profit community organizations through exemption from rates, water and sewerage costs, and by favourably examining other measures that would provide great benefits for small cost.

17. Recommendation: That Council assists the Aboriginal communities together with the wider community, to celebrate Reconciliation Week, Sorry Day and NAIDOC week in locally meaningful ways.

18. Recommendation: That Council, after performing a “Community Needs Audit” and undergoing a community development training project as proposed above, researches and develops projects for the LGA which nurture new enterprise and industry development.

19. Recommendation: That all future Council plans be shaped to accommodate Aboriginal community Development initiatives and future new industry growth in the region.

Respect Aboriginal people as the first people of this land

Once a respectful relationship is established between the Council and its Aboriginal communities, this respect must be reflected in all official Council ceremonies. If new citizens are welcomed to the Shire on Australia Day, there should be a ceremony provided and designed by local Aboriginal communities to be an integral part of this welcome. Appropriate languages and cultural practices could be incorporated, as could dance groups and musicians, art and design (in signs and certificates, etc).

In Walgett the members of the Dharriwaa Elders Group have offered to assist Council to develop a protocol for Council ceremonies including “Weclomes to Country”⁷. The proposed protocols would include how Council would receive advice from Aboriginal organizations in each of the communities regarding appropriate ceremonial leaders according to each particular event. A protocol should be developed for how non-Aboriginal people make acknowledgements of country at official functions as well.

Currently the Dharriwaa Elders Group rings the Council to notify them of the death of an Aboriginal community member. For a long time when we rang Council to make this request, we had to go all the way to the top, and argue the case, before a worker would be instructed to lower the flag. Now after much angst, Council seems to accept this protocol which has been made easier since the employment of the Aboriginal Liaison Officer who often knows when a Walgett death occurs. This is what happens regarding a Walgett death, but we are not confident that there is a process in place for the Collarenebri, Grawin, Lightning Ridge Aboriginal communities to notify council of a death.

The flag should be raised to full height the day following the funeral. It may be useful further down the track for a written register to be kept of these community death notifications. Such a written register should be placed on the Council intranet⁸ so that all staff are aware of the death and can make necessary arrangements if they are involved in traffic and crowd control at the funeral and other reasons. This information should be made available to members of the Aboriginal community upon request and after receipt of reasonable notice. A death notification should be checked that it is received from a reliable source as there is nothing more distressing than someone announcing a death prematurely.

20. Recommendation: That Council does not use the term “traditional custodians” without thought. Many Aboriginal people living in the Shire are not traditional custodians but should be respected as first people’s sharing most of the needs and concerns of traditional custodians.

⁷ See 3.3 of “Points for Discussion between the Dharriwaa Elders Group and the Walgett Shire Council”

⁸ With the family’s permission

- 21. Recommendation: That all official Council functions and ceremonies including Australia Day and Citizenship ceremonies, include appropriate ceremonies from the local Aboriginal community, and acknowledgement of Country by non-Aboriginal people.**
- 22. Recommendation: That an “Official Ceremonies” clause is developed for the Plan after the proposed consultations, so that the Council recognize the First Peoples and Countries of the Shire and works to ensure that Aboriginal culture is respected by Council and its residents.**
- 23. Recommendation: The Plan develop a protocol for “Flying the Aboriginal Flag” which will include processes agreed with the Aboriginal communities of the Shire re notification of the death of a community member, and the funeral date. Council will keep records of each death notification and who makes it, for further use in quantifying Aboriginal deaths in the Shire, and other further uses.**

Aboriginal Employment Strategy

The Dharriwaa Elders Group applauds the intention of the Council to employ more Aboriginal staff and to develop an Aboriginal Employment Strategy so that this intention can be implemented. The “School to Work traineeship” program (if specifically for Aboriginal trainees) should be included in this policy, as would details about the Aboriginal Liaison Officer position/s.

- 24. Recommendation: The Plan includes a statement about the aims, outcomes and timeframes of the proposed Aboriginal Employment Strategy.**

The Promotion of Aboriginal Culture to Visitors

Maps of places of high Aboriginal cultural heritage significance have not been provided to the Shire due to its poor track record in respecting and protecting places of Aboriginal cultural heritage (as explained above). Aboriginal culture values native vegetation, biodiversity, lands, water and animals as well as places and things associated with past occupancy of the ancestors. The Dharriwaa Elders Group would like the Council to value these places and things because its Aboriginal residents do, and do everything it can to protect these places and the knowledge about them, in the future. It is a small victory that the Council has begun to realize the value to the Shire’s economy that will be derived from Aboriginal cultural tourism in the future, when until very recently the Shire couldn’t publicly acknowledge its Aboriginal population. Until the Dharriwaa Elders Group has a trusting relationship with the Council it will not assist its tourism development strategies in the ways described in this Draft Plan. The Council can contribute towards this trusting relationship by developing strategies for the protection of places by vandals, and by working with its Aboriginal residents and organizations in ways already discussed above.

- 25. Recommendation: That Council develop strategies with local Aboriginal organizations, and in particular the Dharriwaa Elders Group in Walgett, for the protection of places of Aboriginal cultural significance.**

MoU

The DEG sent a discussion paper to the Walgett Shire Council about matters it would like to form the basis of a MoU between it and the Council. This document has not been furthered. A second updated draft was submitted to the Council in December 2007. The proposed MoU is intended to help define how business will occur between

the two organizations, and doesn't seek to comment on arrangements the Council may make with other organizations or representative bodies.

26. Recommendation: That Council states in its Plan that it will negotiate MoUs with any organization or representative body it deals with, who requests one.

Council's opportunity to catch up with the 21st Century

The Dharriwaa Elders Group works for the development of Walgett's Aboriginal community. We enclose a brief description of the Group's activities. The reader may recognize many potential synergies between our organization and the Shire's future plans and activities. For example, the Aboriginal arts and crafts shop, the management of our nationally significant collection, the provision of a secretariat for Elders, the provision for a Walgett Aboriginal Elders Centre, our community development and tourism industry development and promotion activities are all functions which could be carried out by a forward-thinking, visionary and capable Walgett Shire Council which had a trusting relationship with its Aboriginal community. Such a situation would certainly improve the credibility of the Walgett Visitor Information Centre, the Walgett Library and the community service provision of the Shire.

Instead, elders themselves developed alternative social infrastructure so that their community could move into the 21st century. They created (with their collaborators and state and federal governments) the Walgett Aboriginal health, legal, community employment and land council infrastructure as well as the DEG – in the absence of the Council and others recognizing the community needs these services address. Now this sector is in a position to offer its expertise to the Council, and welcomes its support in implementing the growing community development tasks urgently needed by our communities.

True reconciliation could bring benefits to the Council far greater than it realizes currently! Now it's time for the Council to make a courageous leap into the present so that we can work together for a better future.

About the Dharriwaa Elders Group

The Dharriwaa Elders Group is a non-profit association of elderly Walgett Aboriginal people. Currently we have 31 living “full members”. Our community is unusual in Aboriginal Australia⁹ for 5.8% of its Aboriginal population is over the age of 65, compared to 3.5% of NSW’s Aboriginal population, 4.1% of Bourke’s Aboriginal population and 3.3% of Australia’s.

We claim that membership of the elders group has extended the life of the Aboriginal elderly in Walgett. We are working to improve the lives of all Walgett age groups.

The Dharriwaa Elders Group¹⁰ (“DEG”) operates a fledgling cultural centre in Walgett which provides:

1. **Support for elders’ leadership activities.** All activities are based on decisions made in monthly members’ and Elders Council meetings. They include working for the development of the community, troubleshooting and problem solving. The DEG encourages and welcomes service providers to the town and works with them to meet community needs. The DEG provides Aboriginal cultural leadership and the only Walgett independently-constituted¹¹ forum for local Aboriginal governance. It provides elders’ advocacy services and a centre for elders to meet and spend time together. An important duty of the Group is to confirm the Aboriginal identity of community members as required by government agencies from time to time.

2. **A nationally significant collection and archive.** The National Library of Australia has funded the DEG to develop with UNE Heritage Centre a Collection Management Plan. Significant parts of the collection include video recordings of local elders’ cultural knowledge; wooden and stone artefacts; a multimedia site register which locates places of cultural significance within a Geographic Interface System and which contextualises elders’ recordings; a photographic archive; research locating items and information about Walgett Aboriginal culture in Australian and international institutions; a small collection of first edition rare books documenting local Aboriginal cultural matters; a policy reading room. The DEG aims to provide informed access to its collection for younger generations with the purpose of keeping Walgett Aboriginal cultural transmissions alive and strong. Exhibitions and guided information sessions for this purpose are planned for the future.

3. **An elder’s school program.** The DEG began its activities in 1999 co-ordinating week-long youth and elders culture camps which offered a program of cultural learning incorporating identity and family links, native natural resources, Yuwaalaraay and Gamilaraay languages, respect and leadership, local Aboriginal history, places and practices of Aboriginal cultural value. The curricula of the camps have been widened to a year-long school program with the Primary School, which varies in its implementation depending on Walgett Community College personnel and

⁹ Australian Bureau of Statistics 2001, ‘Walgett (Indigenous Location) 2006 Census QuickStats’, viewed 21 November 2007,

<<http://www.censusdata.abs.gov.au/ABSNavigation/prenav/LocationSearch?locationLastSearchTerm=Walgett&locationSearchTerm=Walgett&newarea=ILOC0201501&submitbutton=View+QuickStats+%3E&mapdisplay=on&collection=Census&period=2006&areacode=ILOC0201501&geography=&method=&productlabel=&producttype=QuickStats&opic=&navmapdisplayed=true&javascript=true&breadcrumb=PL&topholder=0&leftholder=0¤taction=104&action=401&textversion=false&subaction=1>>

¹⁰ an incorporated association who’s full members are Aboriginal people living in Walgett over the age of 60

¹¹ i.e. the association was formed and incorporated locally, independent of government, land council or ATSIC.

policies. It aims to revitalise local Aboriginal cultural knowledge and practices, improve Aboriginal student's education outcomes and encourage ongoing learning.

4. An Aboriginal language program. This program aims to increase local knowledge of Yuwaalaraay and Gamilaraay languages. It incorporates work with the schools, correctional institutions, resource production and supporting the fragile network of Aboriginal language teachers in Walgett.

5. A monthly community magazine. Yundiboo magazine is a 16-page A4 colour publication which has been distributed monthly since January 2001. It is used to promote the aims and work of the DEG's programs and is distributed to schools, community members on request, corrections facilities, state and national libraries.

6. An environmental and cultural heritage management program. This program involves regular elder's trips to monitor and identify sites of significance, and conducts a program of authentication regarding places and practices of Aboriginal cultural significance. It produces explanatory audio visual resources to share Walgett's Aboriginal cultural heritage with the community and visitors, and advises all tiers of government, miners and landholders regarding protection of areas of high Aboriginal cultural significance. The program works with scientists to map areas of high conservation value in the area of the internationally significant wetland Narran Lakes and is developing a Plan for the management of Aboriginal cultural heritage including biodiversity. A valuable tool used by this program is the DEG's multimedia site register, which links video clips and html pages to sites mapped on GIS data.

7. The only Aboriginal arts and crafts shop in Walgett. This project was developed in 2006/07 in recognition of the needs identified by the DEG, by Walgett Shire Council¹² and the Biaime Dreaming Network Aboriginal cultural tourism development project¹³ for:

- a. public awareness of local Aboriginal culture;
- b. to create an economic opportunity for the Walgett Aboriginal community;
- c. to provide the fora for Walgett Aboriginal elders to inform younger generations about art styles and forms they learnt from previous generations;
- d. to support new forms of Aboriginal cultural expression.

This project has developed with legal advisers Gilbert + Tobin a local Aboriginal arts and crafts authentication policy and process, to improve the quality of cultural product in Walgett. It assists elders to assert local art styles and practices and work to develop quality and communication with artists who previously worked in isolation, selling their work in ad hoc ways to travellers and other retail outlets. The project also works to inform awareness of Aboriginal cultural intellectual property issues to elders, artists and customers, and provides a ready exhibition space to promote local Aboriginal culture and the outcomes of the DEG's other projects, and, in the future, its substantial cultural collection, to visitors and the community.

8. Weekly health sessions for the elderly. The DEG offers a weekly health program for elders by bringing together the NSW Outback Division of GPs, the Walgett Health Service, the Walgett Aboriginal Medical Service and a local masseuse.

¹² Walgett Shire Council has identified the need "to develop a diverse tourism product and promote local Aboriginal culture" and is "developing an Indigenous Tourism Product Action and Implementation Plan to preserve and promote Aboriginal Culture and provide it to interested parties in a respectful and accurate way." (Alana Douglas, Walgett Shire Tourism Destination Strategy, 2007 - 2010).

¹³ led by Roxanne Smith NSW Dept of State and Regional Development

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and must be recorded for historical purposes and promoted widely in the media.

Further Plan Development Processes

Another part of the trust-building process will be for the Shire to truly understand and recognize its Aboriginal constituency. We estimate that Aboriginal people provide more than 60% of the population of Walgett, a greater percentage of Collarenebri and a smaller percentage of the Lightning Ridge population. We believe that a census should be undertaken to gain a more accurate picture of this anecdotal estimate, and have already suggested a method for doing this.⁶

- 4. Recommendation: that Council develops a plan with the DEG and other Aboriginal community organizations to form an accurate statistical picture of the Aboriginal communities of the Shire. This plan will include undertaking a census of Aboriginal people in Walgett which may be used as a model by other Aboriginal communities in the Shire.**

Still Further Plan Development Processes

Further to the establishment of trust process is to truly recognize that Aboriginal residents make up a large percentage of the Shire’s population and deserve the same services as other residents of the Shire.

They deserve services for their youth, clean streets and public spaces, clean drinking water, working sewerage and drainage, environmental health, education, adequate housing, access to health services, community transport, childcare etc. The Dharriwaa Elders Group believes the Shire is a little cheeky including items in the Draft Plan which would more appropriately be located in other plans. It’s really another example of the Shire’s willful disregard of its Aboriginal citizens and/or poor supervision of its staff that matters to do with general Shire services have been included in this document. Council’s plans for youth development and seniors weeks, as those for roads, parks and gardens, health and other service areas should include and take into account the needs of the Shire’s Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal residents. Plans for combating graffiti should be part of the town beautification plans. Does the Shire think that graffiti is produced because of the perpetrator’s Aboriginality? Plans for Council Open Days should be for the whole community.

- 5. Recommendation: A statement should be made in the beginning of the Plan that recognises the large proportion of the Shire’s population is Aboriginal, and that they deserve the same level of service as other Shire residents.**
- 6. Recommendation: Delete “Seniors Week” “Anti Graffiti Program” “Youth Development Programs” “Walgett Shire Council Open Day”, “Street Signage” “Harmony Day”, “School to Work Traineeships” from this Plan and after further advice, insert them into other Council Plans as they are not Aboriginal-specific, but activities and measures that should be carried out as part of Council’s obligations to its residents.**

Aboriginal “Community Needs Audit”

Currently Council does not understand the needs that may be specific to the Aboriginal communities of the Shire. A needs audit must be undertaken to guide the

⁶ See 3.3 of “Points for Discussion between the Dharriwaa Elders Group and the Walgett Shire Council” (Attachment A)

Council's future planning. This needs audit should include modelling future scenarios (including climate change, decreasing rates income, growing Aboriginal youth demographic etc) to inform effective future planning of Council services.

- 7. Recommendation: As part of the process of understanding the needs of Aboriginal residents, the Shire must undertake a needs audit of its Aboriginal communities, so that it can better plan its services. This process will include future scenarios modeling to aid the realism and usefulness of future plans and services.**

Current Council Plans invalid

Once a process of understanding the nature and needs of the Aboriginal communities of the Shire has been undertaken, other Council instruments will be found lacking. We maintain all the other Council Plans have been developed without the participation or input of the larger Aboriginal communities and residents of the Shire, and so are invalid. These include the *Community Safety Plan*, the *Walgett Shire Community Social Plan 2007 – 2010*, and the draft local environment plan, etc. While Walgett Shire Council persists with the charade of community consultation via written submission, how can Aboriginal residents feel the Shire has any relevance or understanding of their needs?

- 8. Recommendation: That Council add a statement to the Plan acknowledging that all other current Council plans have been written without the participation of Aboriginal communities of the Shire, and so must be treated with caution. The statement will also include an undertaking to remedy this as soon as is practical.**

Promote Aboriginal participation in local government

The Dharriwaa Elders Group has witnessed the low participation of the Walgett Shire's Aboriginal communities in local government, and for that matter, any government. We often have to assist our members to vote, and witness much informal and donkey voting.

Because Aboriginal citizens are not currently represented by elected Councillors, other strategies must be employed to hear their voices. Council should create two designated Aboriginal positions on Council, which are appointed using a fair system that ensures that large family groups don't dominate representation.

- 9. Recommendation: That Council research the extent of informal and donkey voting in local elections**
- 10. Recommendation: That Council develop a plan to promote civic education and participation in government and informed voting, targeted to its Aboriginal communities**
- 11. Recommendation: That Council develops a process in consultation with representative Aboriginal organizations, which will ensure two Aboriginal representatives are appointed to the elected Walgett Shire Council, after elections resume.**

Future Council planning processes

A statement should be added to the Plan that ensures participation in the development of all Council policies and procedures by the Aboriginal communities of the Shire, so that all Council Plans effectively take the issues and concerns of

Aboriginal residents into account. This would include introducing more effective, targeted community media and education campaigns (which may use different media and methods to those used when targeting the non-Aboriginal communities). It would also include outlining the methods and processes staff should use when consulting with the Aboriginal community as outlined above.

12. Recommendation: that Council add to the Plan a clause that ensures that Aboriginal residents are effectively involved in the development of all Council plans that affect Aboriginal residents

13. Recommendation: that Council add to the Plan a clause that ensures that Council policies and plans are effectively promoted to the Aboriginal communities of the Shire

Community Development

Once a respectful relationship is established between the Council, its staff and its Aboriginal citizens, then we can work together fruitfully, creating the extra attention and services needed for the development of Aboriginal communities of the Walgett Shire to the same level as the other Shire Residents. This needs to be done understanding community development processes and recognizing hard-won successes when they occur. Council support for grassroots community development achievements would also not go astray! This support should be reflected in meaningful support of non-profit Aboriginal community development organizations, for example by granting exemption from rates, water and sewerage charges (as provided for in the Local Government Act).

Opportunities like Reconciliation Week and NAIDOC Week and other occasions could be used in a meaningful way to celebrate actual local community achievements rather than the current obligatory activities which are carried out with little significance or local relevance.

Once Council demonstrates it is educated about community development processes, and can recognize and support real grass-roots community development activities in its communities, it can begin to act itself to develop enterprise across the region to complement, support and accelerate the activities of the local community organizations. The Shire has the potential strength to oversee projects throughout the Shire which incubate enterprise, and support other projects that do.

14. Recommendation: That Council employs advice and services from leading community development academics to assist it to develop the Aboriginal communities of the Walgett Shire.

15. Recommendation: That Council learns how to recognize successes in Aboriginal community development, and assist the community to recognize and celebrate them.

16. Recommendation: That Council supports the work of successful Aboriginal non-profit community organizations through exemption from rates, water and sewerage costs, and by favourably examining other measures that would provide great benefits for small cost.

17. Recommendation: That Council assists the Aboriginal communities together with the wider community, to celebrate Reconciliation Week, Sorry Day and NAIDOC week in locally meaningful ways.

18. Recommendation: That Council, after performing a “Community Needs Audit” and undergoing a community development training project as proposed above, researches and develops projects for the LGA which nurture new enterprise and industry development.

19. Recommendation: That all future Council plans be shaped to accommodate Aboriginal community Development initiatives and future new industry growth in the region.

Respect Aboriginal people as the first people of this land

Once a respectful relationship is established between the Council and its Aboriginal communities, this respect must be reflected in all official Council ceremonies. If new citizens are welcomed to the Shire on Australia Day, there should be a ceremony provided and designed by local Aboriginal communities to be an integral part of this welcome. Appropriate languages and cultural practices could be incorporated, as could dance groups and musicians, art and design (in signs and certificates, etc).

In Walgett the members of the Dharriwaa Elders Group have offered to assist Council to develop a protocol for Council ceremonies including “Weclomes to Country”⁷. The proposed protocols would include how Council would receive advice from Aboriginal organizations in each of the communities regarding appropriate ceremonial leaders according to each particular event. A protocol should be developed for how non-Aboriginal people make acknowledgements of country at official functions as well.

Currently the Dharriwaa Elders Group rings the Council to notify them of the death of an Aboriginal community member. For a long time when we rang Council to make this request, we had to go all the way to the top, and argue the case, before a worker would be instructed to lower the flag. Now after much angst, Council seems to accept this protocol which has been made easier since the employment of the Aboriginal Liaison Officer who often knows when a Walgett death occurs. This is what happens regarding a Walgett death, but we are not confident that there is a process in place for the Collarenebri, Grawin, Lightning Ridge Aboriginal communities to notify council of a death.

The flag should be raised to full height the day following the funeral. It may be useful further down the track for a written register to be kept of these community death notifications. Such a written register should be placed on the Council intranet⁸ so that all staff are aware of the death and can make necessary arrangements if they are involved in traffic and crowd control at the funeral and other reasons. This information should be made available to members of the Aboriginal community upon request and after receipt of reasonable notice. A death notification should be checked that it is received from a reliable source as there is nothing more distressing than someone announcing a death prematurely.

20. Recommendation: That Council does not use the term “traditional custodians” without thought. Many Aboriginal people living in the Shire are not traditional custodians but should be respected as first people’s sharing most of the needs and concerns of traditional custodians.

⁷ See 3.3 of “Points for Discussion between the Dharriwaa Elders Group and the Walgett Shire Council”

⁸ With the family’s permission

- 21. Recommendation: That all official Council functions and ceremonies including Australia Day and Citizenship ceremonies, include appropriate ceremonies from the local Aboriginal community, and acknowledgement of Country by non-Aboriginal people.**
- 22. Recommendation: That an “Official Ceremonies” clause is developed for the Plan after the proposed consultations, so that the Council recognize the First Peoples and Countries of the Shire and works to ensure that Aboriginal culture is respected by Council and its residents.**
- 23. Recommendation: The Plan develop a protocol for “Flying the Aboriginal Flag” which will include processes agreed with the Aboriginal communities of the Shire re notification of the death of a community member, and the funeral date. Council will keep records of each death notification and who makes it, for further use in quantifying Aboriginal deaths in the Shire, and other further uses.**

Aboriginal Employment Strategy

The Dharriwaa Elders Group applauds the intention of the Council to employ more Aboriginal staff and to develop an Aboriginal Employment Strategy so that this intention can be implemented. The “School to Work traineeship” program (if specifically for Aboriginal trainees) should be included in this policy, as would details about the Aboriginal Liaison Officer position/s.

- 24. Recommendation: The Plan includes a statement about the aims, outcomes and timeframes of the proposed Aboriginal Employment Strategy.**

The Promotion of Aboriginal Culture to Visitors

Maps of places of high Aboriginal cultural heritage significance have not been provided to the Shire due to its poor track record in respecting and protecting places of Aboriginal cultural heritage (as explained above). Aboriginal culture values native vegetation, biodiversity, lands, water and animals as well as places and things associated with past occupancy of the ancestors. The Dharriwaa Elders Group would like the Council to value these places and things because its Aboriginal residents do, and do everything it can to protect these places and the knowledge about them, in the future. It is a small victory that the Council has begun to realize the value to the Shire’s economy that will be derived from Aboriginal cultural tourism in the future, when until very recently the Shire couldn’t publicly acknowledge its Aboriginal population. Until the Dharriwaa Elders Group has a trusting relationship with the Council it will not assist its tourism development strategies in the ways described in this Draft Plan. The Council can contribute towards this trusting relationship by developing strategies for the protection of places by vandals, and by working with its Aboriginal residents and organizations in ways already discussed above.

- 25. Recommendation: That Council develop strategies with local Aboriginal organizations, and in particular the Dharriwaa Elders Group in Walgett, for the protection of places of Aboriginal cultural significance.**

MoU

The DEG sent a discussion paper to the Walgett Shire Council about matters it would like to form the basis of a MoU between it and the Council. This document has not been furthered. A second updated draft was submitted to the Council in December 2007. The proposed MoU is intended to help define how business will occur between

the two organizations, and doesn't seek to comment on arrangements the Council may make with other organizations or representative bodies.

26. Recommendation: That Council states in its Plan that it will negotiate MoUs with any organization or representative body it deals with, who requests one.

Council's opportunity to catch up with the 21st Century

The Dharriwaa Elders Group works for the development of Walgett's Aboriginal community. We enclose a brief description of the Group's activities. The reader may recognize many potential synergies between our organization and the Shire's future plans and activities. For example, the Aboriginal arts and crafts shop, the management of our nationally significant collection, the provision of a secretariat for Elders, the provision for a Walgett Aboriginal Elders Centre, our community development and tourism industry development and promotion activities are all functions which could be carried out by a forward-thinking, visionary and capable Walgett Shire Council which had a trusting relationship with its Aboriginal community. Such a situation would certainly improve the credibility of the Walgett Visitor Information Centre, the Walgett Library and the community service provision of the Shire.

Instead, elders themselves developed alternative social infrastructure so that their community could move into the 21st century. They created (with their collaborators and state and federal governments) the Walgett Aboriginal health, legal, community employment and land council infrastructure as well as the DEG – in the absence of the Council and others recognizing the community needs these services address. Now this sector is in a position to offer its expertise to the Council, and welcomes its support in implementing the growing community development tasks urgently needed by our communities.

True reconciliation could bring benefits to the Council far greater than it realizes currently! Now it's time for the Council to make a courageous leap into the present so that we can work together for a better future.

About the Dharriwaa Elders Group

The Dharriwaa Elders Group is a non-profit association of elderly Walgett Aboriginal people. Currently we have 31 living "full members". Our community is unusual in Aboriginal Australia⁹ for 5.8% of its Aboriginal population is over the age of 65, compared to 3.5% of NSW's Aboriginal population, 4.1% of Bourke's Aboriginal population and 3.3% of Australia's.

We claim that membership of the elders group has extended the life of the Aboriginal elderly in Walgett. We are working to improve the lives of all Walgett age groups.

The Dharriwaa Elders Group¹⁰ ("DEG") operates a fledgling cultural centre in Walgett which provides:

1. **Support for elders' leadership activities.** All activities are based on decisions made in monthly members' and Elders Council meetings. They include working for the development of the community, troubleshooting and problem solving. The DEG encourages and welcomes service providers to the town and works with them to meet community needs. The DEG provides Aboriginal cultural leadership and the only Walgett independently-constituted¹¹ forum for local Aboriginal governance. It provides elders' advocacy services and a centre for elders to meet and spend time together. An important duty of the Group is to confirm the Aboriginal identity of community members as required by government agencies from time to time.

2. **A nationally significant collection and archive.** The National Library of Australia has funded the DEG to develop with UNE Heritage Centre a Collection Management Plan. Significant parts of the collection include video recordings of local elders' cultural knowledge; wooden and stone artefacts; a multimedia site register which locates places of cultural significance within a Geographic Interface System and which contextualises elders' recordings; a photographic archive; research locating items and information about Walgett Aboriginal culture in Australian and international institutions; a small collection of first edition rare books documenting local Aboriginal cultural matters; a policy reading room. The DEG aims to provide informed access to its collection for younger generations with the purpose of keeping Walgett Aboriginal cultural transmissions alive and strong. Exhibitions and guided information sessions for this purpose are planned for the future.

3. **An elder's school program.** The DEG began its activities in 1999 co-ordinating week-long youth and elders culture camps which offered a program of cultural learning incorporating identity and family links, native natural resources, Yuwaalaraay and Gamilaraay languages, respect and leadership, local Aboriginal history, places and practices of Aboriginal cultural value. The curricula of the camps have been widened to a year-long school program with the Primary School, which varies in its implementation depending on Walgett Community College personnel and

⁹ Australian Bureau of Statistics 2001, 'Walgett (Indigenous Location) 2006 Census QuickStats', viewed 21 November 2007,

<<http://www.censusdata.abs.gov.au/ABSNavigation/prenav/LocationSearch?locationLastSearchTerm=Walgett&locationSearchTerm=Walgett&newarea=ILOC0201501&submitbutton=View+QuickStats+%3E&mapdisplay=on&collection=Census&period=2006&areacode=ILOC0201501&geography=&method=&productlabel=&producttype=QuickStats&opic=&navmapdisplayed=true&javascript=true&breadcrumb=PL&topholder=0&leftholder=0¤taction=104&action=401&textversion=false&subaction=1>>

¹⁰ an incorporated association who's full members are Aboriginal people living in Walgett over the age of 60

¹¹ i.e. the association was formed and incorporated locally, independent of government, land council or ATSIC.

policies. It aims to revitalise local Aboriginal cultural knowledge and practices, improve Aboriginal student's education outcomes and encourage ongoing learning.

4. An Aboriginal language program. This program aims to increase local knowledge of Yuwaalaraay and Gamilaraay languages. It incorporates work with the schools, correctional institutions, resource production and supporting the fragile network of Aboriginal language teachers in Walgett.

5. A monthly community magazine. Yundiboo magazine is a 16-page A4 colour publication which has been distributed monthly since January 2001. It is used to promote the aims and work of the DEG's programs and is distributed to schools, community members on request, corrections facilities, state and national libraries.

6. An environmental and cultural heritage management program. This program involves regular elder's trips to monitor and identify sites of significance, and conducts a program of authentication regarding places and practices of Aboriginal cultural significance. It produces explanatory audio visual resources to share Walgett's Aboriginal cultural heritage with the community and visitors, and advises all tiers of government, miners and landholders regarding protection of areas of high Aboriginal cultural significance. The program works with scientists to map areas of high conservation value in the area of the internationally significant wetland Narran Lakes and is developing a Plan for the management of Aboriginal cultural heritage including biodiversity. A valuable tool used by this program is the DEG's multimedia site register, which links video clips and html pages to sites mapped on GIS data.

7. The only Aboriginal arts and crafts shop in Walgett. This project was developed in 2006/07 in recognition of the needs identified by the DEG, by Walgett Shire Council¹² and the Biaime Dreaming Network Aboriginal cultural tourism development project¹³ for:

- a. public awareness of local Aboriginal culture;
- b. to create an economic opportunity for the Walgett Aboriginal community;
- c. to provide the fora for Walgett Aboriginal elders to inform younger generations about art styles and forms they learnt from previous generations;
- d. to support new forms of Aboriginal cultural expression.

This project has developed with legal advisers Gilbert + Tobin a local Aboriginal arts and crafts authentication policy and process, to improve the quality of cultural product in Walgett. It assists elders to assert local art styles and practices and work to develop quality and communication with artists who previously worked in isolation, selling their work in ad hoc ways to travellers and other retail outlets. The project also works to inform awareness of Aboriginal cultural intellectual property issues to elders, artists and customers, and provides a ready exhibition space to promote local Aboriginal culture and the outcomes of the DEG's other projects, and, in the future, its substantial cultural collection, to visitors and the community.

8. Weekly health sessions for the elderly. The DEG offers a weekly health program for elders by bringing together the NSW Outback Division of GPs, the Walgett Health Service, the Walgett Aboriginal Medical Service and a local masseuse.

¹² Walgett Shire Council has identified the need "to develop a diverse tourism product and promote local Aboriginal culture" and is "developing an Indigenous Tourism Product Action and Implementation Plan to preserve and promote Aboriginal Culture and provide it to interested parties in a respectful and accurate way." (Alana Douglas, Walgett Shire Tourism Destination Strategy, 2007 - 2010).

¹³ led by Roxanne Smith NSW Dept of State and Regional Development