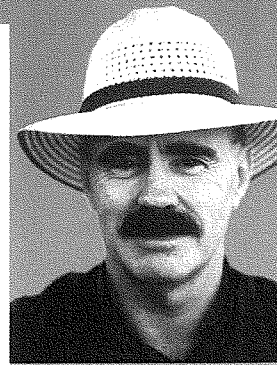




The Hon Warren Snowdon MP

Federal Member for Lingiari
Minister for Defence Science and Personnel



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Please find enclosed copy of my comment on the Northern Territory Government Outstations Policy Discussion Policy paper.

From:

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December 1, 2008**

Homelands:

Places of Health, Wellbeing and Cultural Responsibility

The Homelands movement started as a calculated and deliberate strategy to

- **Improve health;**
- **Safeguard families;**
- **Provide opportunities for Aboriginal people to exercise their cultural responsibilities.**

For the newcomers in the towns, camps, and suburbs of the urban centres, there is overcrowding, conflict, marginalisation, social and cultural breakdown.

Homelands provide the opportunity for economic and social outcomes for their residents largely denied in the centralised communities.

HOMELANDS – PLACES OF HEALTH, WELL BEING AND CULTURAL RESPONSIBILITY

Outstations or homelands as they are more generally known have been an integral part of the Northern Territory community for decades. They were developed by Indigenous people as a deliberate strategy to improve their own health and wellbeing.

The history of the homelands movement is well documented in works like Rev. Jim Downing's 'Spirit of My Country' and the still relevant Australian Government publication of the 1980's "Return to Country".

What is apparent from the research is that it is the motivation behind the movement which is the most important part of the history – the homelands movement started despite governments not because of them, as a calculated and deliberate strategy to improve health, safe guard families and provide opportunities for Indigenous people to exercise their cultural responsibilities. It is one of the very few initiatives in Indigenous affairs which has actually worked and it continues to work to this day.

In recent times there has grown a view that homelands are not viable, are beyond the reach of law enforcement, represent some sort of failed Utopian experiment, should not be encouraged and must not be supported. However contrary to such a view there is very strong evidence that homelands provide positive and constructive lifestyle choices for Indigenous people.

The outstanding study is the 2008 Utopia study, largely because it has been carried out over a long period (ten years), the data measurement techniques are high quality, and the results are so dramatic. It establishes that Utopia homelands residents have:

- A mortality rate from all causes which is 40-50% lower than the NT average for Indigenous adults
- A mortality rate from cardiovascular disease which is 40-50% lower than the NT average for Indigenous adults – Indigenous death from rating higher than any other factor. There are obvious implications for *Closing the Gap* in life expectancies.
- Much lower rates of the risk factors for cardiovascular disease, including diabetes, blood pressure, cholesterol and smoking
- Much lower rates of hospitalisation for cardiovascular disease – this means large savings for governments in terms of the costs of hospitalisation

(Rowley KG, O'Dea K, et al, 'Lower than expected morbidity and mortality for an Australian Aboriginal population: 10 year follow-up in a decentralized community', *Medical Journal of Australia*, 188(5), 3 March 2008; 283-287)

An earlier study in the same communities compared health outcomes and risk factors in Utopia homelands with those in surrounding centralised communities. The study found homelands residents had

- Significantly lower prevalence levels of type 2 diabetes, hypertension and obesity
- Significantly lower mortality rates than those living in the centralised communities

- Were significantly less likely to be hospitalised for any infection or injury (particularly injury involving alcohol)
- Homelands residents lived on average 10 years longer than residents of the centralised communities, evidence for the *Closing the Gap* implication of reduced death rate from cardio-vascular disease

The positive association with health was more marked among younger adults.

(McDermott R, O’Dea K, Rowley K, Knight S and Burgess P, ‘Beneficial impact of the homelands movement on health outcomes in Central Australian Aborigines’, *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health*, 22(6);653-58)

There has been quite a lot of work done in the Top End on this topic from the 1980’s onwards:

In 1984 Kerin O’Dea demonstrated that where Aboriginal people have returned to their traditional land and adopted a semi-traditional hunter/gatherer lifestyle, there is a marked reduction in the major risk factors for coronary heart disease, and that these changes can occur in a very short time. This indicates that even for people who do not live at homelands all the time, short-term visits will improve health outcomes.

(O’Dea K (1984), ‘Marked improvement in the carbohydrate and lipid metabolism in Australian Aborigines following temporary reversion to traditional lifestyle’, *Diabetes*; 33; 596-603

The health of Doyndji homeland centre (NE Arnhem Land) has been studied in detail throughout the 1980’s and beyond using a variety of precise biomedical markers. Some of the conclusions were:

- The general health of Doyndji residents was very good with low BMI’s, little anemia, no biochemical evidence of dietary deficiency, red cell folate levels were normal to high, and fasting cholesterols generally low.
- This contrasts with the high BMI’s, higher anemia levels etc among the residents of the centralised community of Yirrkala.

(O’Dea K, White NG, Sinclair A (1988). ‘An investigation of nutrition-related risk factors in an isolated Aboriginal community: advantages of traditionally-oriented lifestyle’, *Medical Journal of Australia*, 148, 177-180)

A recent study by the Menzies School of Health Research in collaboration with traditional owners of Western and Central Arnhem Land, the Northern land Council and Charles Darwin University, reported in 2007, draws quantitative links with the health of those Aboriginal people engaged in natural and cultural resource management, particularly those living in homelands.

- Those who engaged in natural and cultural resource management are significantly healthier overall.
- This includes significantly lower rates of type 2 diabetes and cardiovascular disease.
- Participants in natural and cultural resource management report a more nutritious diet and a greater degree of physical activity

(Burgess CP, Johnston FH, Indigenous Natural and Cultural Resource Management and Health’, *Stakeholder debriefing paper*, May 8 2007, Menzies School of Health Research, Darwin NT)

In regard to the nexus between culture and health, a literature survey has emphasised the point that “the failure of health promotion and the bio-medical paradigm reflects a

non-engagement with the social/cultural drivers of health.”¹ The homelands movement, on the other hand, has “re-invigorated Aboriginal culture by being closer to sacred sites and enabling intergenerational transmission of traditional law, healthier lifestyles through reduced reliance on store-bought food stuffs, caring for country and fulfilling cultural obligations, lowered rates of substance abuse and domestic violence and greater autonomy from often destructive outside forces.”

(Burgess CP, Johnsto0n FH, Bowman DMJS, Whitehead PJ, [2005], ‘Healthy Country Healthy People? Exploring the health benefits of Indigenous natural resource management’, *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health*, 29[2], 117-122)

Field research carried out at Yirrkala in the 1970’s emphasised the development of the homelands movement as the preferred Indigenous solution to the increased sickness encountered at Yirrkala mission. This is the most detailed analysis of a Yolngu view of health.

(Reid J, *Sorcerers and Healing Spirits*, ANU Press, 1989)

The mental health of homelands residents, at least anecdotally, appears to be sounder than people resident in larger centralised communities. Communities like Galiwinku, Gunyangara, Yirrkala and many others have been rife with youth suicide for years. Sometimes there are a dozen or more attempts per month at each of these centralised settlements, yet no one ever kills themselves at homeland centres. It would appear therefore that homelands not only lengthen people’s lives they actually save them.

John Taylor from CAEPR, drawing on census data, notes that in terms of location, in comparison with its wider population, Indigenous Australians are still far more likely to reside away from cities, especially in remote areas. Indigenous people represent almost half (45%) of residents in remote areas. In areas located away from main service centres and mining towns, they are by far the majority.

There are approximately 10, 000 people living on homelands in the most remote parts of the Northern Territory. Homelands communities therefore matter in terms of indigenous policy but also in regard to broader policies concerning remote areas of the nation.

As Gregory Marks recently wrote in the Australian Indigenous Law Review ‘Policies in respect of (remote) Indigenous communities in respect of land management, environmental protection, national security and integrity of borders overlap and provide a two-way loop of interaction and effect.’

Recent years have seen significant growth in homelands communities’ involvement with these broader national policy issues. For example various Outstation Resource Agencies run very effective land and sea management programs, most notably but not exclusively Bawinanga (Maningrida homelands), Laynhapuy (N-E Arnhem Land), and Mabunji (Gulf of Carpentaria homelands).

They run successful programs in fisheries protection, feral animal and pest control and eradication, resource protection and bushfire controls. On more than one occasion their Sea Ranger patrols have acted in the interests of national border security and

¹ Farmer’s text entitled *Inequalities and Infections* provides a detailed examination of the relationship between, wellbeing, health and the social context of daily life, as it applies globally

intercepted illegal fishing boat incursions to Australian waters where conventional coast watch methods have failed. There are under- or un-utilised benefits ~~from~~ ^{from} coordination of these programs and activities with the Norforce activities and with NTG programs in such diverse sectors as Corrections, rehabilitation etc? •

The development of Government policy in the area of climate change will inevitably lead to a greater engagement between those industries interested in carbon trading and traditional owners and homeland communities especially across Northern Australia.

The West Arnhem Land Fire Abatement Scheme is an early example of how homelands communities can benefit by virtue of their land holdings and innovative, though traditional, land management practices. The scheme largely headquartered at Kabulwarneyo and under the leadership of the redoubtable Lofty Nadjamerrek AO is a partnership between homelands communities of West Arnhem Land and Conoco Phillips. Fire abatement workers from homelands do 'cool burns' in a traditional 'patchwork' manner thereby limiting the impact of the much more green house gas intensive 'hot burns' later in the 'dry' season.

These are all matters of the highest national priority and cannot be performed as effectively or economically by anyone other than resident remote Territorians.

Homelands provide potential for economic and social outcomes for their residents largely denied in larger centralised communities.

Indigenous art and culture are growth 'industries' for homelands and provide significant economic activity and income. The famous Papunya Tula art movement of Central Australia had its roots in homelands and to this day many of the most prominent Indigenous artists are resident in small de-centralised communities. The lack of basic homeland resources sometimes results in artists being effectively coerced into towns, where they work under sweatshop conditions.

Bawinanga runs a very successful arts and craft business with a retail outlet in Darwin and exports to galleries all over Australia and overseas. Its artists exclusively live in homelands.

For homelands leaders like Djambawa Marawili from Yilpara homeland in N-E Arnhem Land, art and homelands are virtually indistinguishable from each other. As he said recently, 'This is our backbone and our footstool. This is our art. This is our land. This is our story, from the country. The land can't talk but the people who are living there can.'

The legendary Warumpi Band began at a homeland, as did Yothu Yindi and the Narbalek Band. In more recent times hit singer Geoffrey Gurrumul Yunupingu is the product of a Galiwinku homeland. Artists and performers appear to thrive in the more creative environments that homelands allow and centralised communities don't.

Various other enterprises have been developed that are entirely in keeping with the opportunities presented to homelands through residents exercising their cultural responsibilities.

These include wildlife conservation including crocodile management, bush tucker collection and wholesaling, ecological services and cultural tourism. In addition a number of Outstation Resource Agencies run effective general building programs, housing construction and road maintenance enterprises. Much more can be done by business and government to support these nascent industries.

Despite the best efforts of many homelands communities and their resource agencies to safeguard the future of homelands the recent facts are that policies intended to discourage remote settlements by limiting the provision of housing and other services, has meant homelands have become increasingly unable to cope because of overcrowding and lack of adequate funding for maintenance and infrastructure. As a result there has been a drift of population to the major Indigenous communities and to the fringe of the regional service towns of Alice Springs, Katherine, Tennant Creek and Darwin. The end result for these newcomers in the towns, fringe camps and suburbs of the urban centres is marginalisation, overcrowding, conflict, continued social and cultural breakdown, and deep personal distress. There is increasing pressure placed on resources and infrastructure and there are also increasing social tensions in the towns and regional centres that people move to.

Homelands certainly have the potential to play a positive role as 'communities of recovery' in situations like this. The recently applied alcohol management plan implemented in N-E Arnhem Land has seen long term alcohol and kava drinkers return to homelands in droves to 'dry out' at little or no expense to government agencies charged with their rehabilitation.

Yolngu women have been trying for years to set up a traditional healing centre at Gulkula homeland south of Nhulunbuy where they would practice the ancient medical arts of their culture.

In recent times homelands schools have come under close scrutiny with suggestions that they have been abject failures and that students need to be re-located to larger centralised communities so as to take advantage of the educational services offered there.

I am informed by teachers and others involved in Indigenous education that in fact homelands schools particularly in East Arnhem Land have superior attendance rates and despite being poorly resourced can out perform major community schools.

I attach an NT government record of school attendance rates in Galiwinku and surrounding homeland schools. This document corroborates anecdotal evidence provided to me by former teachers that up to 2005 there were rarely more than 90 students attending Galiwinku from an attendance of 350. Homeland schools in the region have consistently had a minimum attendance of more than 80%.

An important figure that is not often recognised is the participation rate, the number of students enrolled at the school divided by the number of students present in the community. I am informed that that there could possibly be as many as 700 students that could have been going to that school and yet the enrolment was only about 350- a participation rate of 50%.

Contrarily homeland schools typically have 100% participation rates.

As far as academic performance goes in 2008 Laynha homeland schools have approximately 250 students, averaged over T-12 this is about twenty students per year level. This year 7 students completed and are expected to attain their NT Year 12 Certificate, a 35% pass rate. No large centralised indigenous schools anywhere in the Territory could rival those outcomes.

Technological breakthroughs in distance education allow us to consider a brighter future for homelands schools.

In 2001 the Australian Government provided satellite technology and computers to provide a distance education service to 65 cattle stations and 66 remote schools. Unfortunately at several large centralised schools this service was provided only to the children of the non-Indigenous staff of the community. Homelands appear to have been excluded from this program. In 2008 I am informed that the provision of up-to-date technology and distance education software to over 250 remote sites, of these less than five are for homelands.

What is missing from the educational service equation for homeland schools?

1. Access to equivalent distance education technology for homeland schools.
2. Access to quality English literacy and numeracy internet sites developed specifically for Indigenous students.
3. Make the technology and software available in the first instance to schools that have operated successfully and consistently for five years or more, with proven average enrolments of twenty years or more, and at sites where the technology is safe and secure.

Charles Darwin University has developed an English literacy program for remote and very remote communities. This software does not require a teacher to be present and does teach basic English literacy. It is called REOW (Read English on the Web) and is currently being trialled at numerous sites around Australia ~~any~~ Batchelor Institute for Indigenous Tertiary Education.
by

If successful this internet link can be extended to adult training including for health workers, administration staff, small business, and land management.

Homelands generally have been the victims of arbitrary bureaucratic abuse of power for a long time. Despite this homelands have continued to respond in a variety of innovative and creative ways to their situation. As a result we see a spectrum of types of small de-centralised communities, with a variety of needs and challenges before them, but all with a continuing commitment to the health, well being and cultural responsibilities of their people. These core commitments have allowed Indigenous people on homelands to engage with wider society and the ways of the modern world for the benefit of all. Any government policy setting that reflects the strong attachment of Indigenous people to their traditional lands and their rights to live on those lands are likely to have benefits not only for Indigenous Australians but the wider Australian community as well. All homeland communities have needs and all deserve the respect of being considered for government support of one sort or another.

OUTSTATIONS POLICY

Questions and Answers

- **Which outstations should be supported and why?**

Access to housing is a critical factor in determining which outstations should be supported. Any outstation with a history of fast deteriorating stock and declining levels of service, due to the low level of maintenance funding and no construction funds from the Australian or the Northern Territory Governments may in fact be viable. The current status of housing should not necessarily be a determining factor in viability of the homeland.

A process of ongoing record keeping and annual audit is required. It has never been resourced. The parameters of any audit would be based on the definition(s) of homeland types, the structural and operational features of homeland service models and the nature and outcomes of services and homeland based activities.

It is necessary to acknowledge the contribution that can be made by the landowners to any audit of outstations and to outstation policy generally. There is ready acknowledgement of the value of landowners/lease holders in determining policy in, say, the pastoral, farming, mining, tourism and other sectors of the population. Outstation Resource agencies, whose members consist of homeland residents responsible for the homeland areas are thus well placed to conduct such audits.

- **What level of support should be provided to outstations?**

The first decision that must be made is the overall level of new support to be provided to homelands. Currently Shires and ORA's are struggling to cope with the demand for services and all are likely to seek additional investment.

The indicative level of support can be proposed based on:

- in principle policy decisions on the benefits of homelands
- assessment of costs of homelands
- properly conducted audits of homelands
- Attachment B to the NTG discussion paper notes that 'weighting may be given to factors' that are properly accounted for in the policy decisions that underlie decisions on level of support
- however, Attachment B does not account for the diversity of homelands by region, history, social factors, cultural obligations etc. Specific purpose

outstations are a separate item for recognition under the diversity of outstations

Question 1: **Eligibility for Support**

- What are the principles that should be applied to decide whether an outstation is eligible to receive support?

Informed decision making by those representatives responsible for identified tracts of country in which homeland communities exist or are planned should be combined with the audits and decisions by government. There are some outstations that have not been functional that can be identified by this process.

The options for how primary services (education, health, housing, essential services, communication, etc) can be delivered and their triple line (social, ecological and economic) benefit and cost

It is necessary to account for the phase of development of homelands. Several functional larger populations began life as homelands. In the current thinking of some, such homelands would have be regarded, during their establishment phase, as non-viable, on demographic, service delivery cost or other factors eg. Wallace Rockhole began as an outstation of Ntaria.

Size is less of an issue than viability.

The viability factors include:

Structural and service model - the 'hub and spoke' model in particular is indicated in a majority of homeland areas but not exclusively.

Access to homeland-based and/or hub community-based labour market/income producing opportunities.

The revenue basis and grants formulae exclude Shires from being considered as a resource agency for homelands. The 'Eligibility for Support' extends to appropriate models and functional ORAs being resourced to coordinate delivery of a whole-of-government service framework.

Reliable transport can be assessed within the overall benefit–cost analysis underlying homelands policy. The 'bush taxi' is one transport component that initiatives and issues emerging during the intervention have supported as being an increasingly valuable contribution to the social, cultural, and service delivery benefits of people living on country.

The overall homeland policy takes account of legal requirements including those emanating from international conventions.

- Should the outstation be the sole or principal residence?

The capacity for sole/principal residence is evaluated on:
- phase of development, particularly infrastructural.

- reasons for permanent occupation by some and non-permanent by others,
- its relationship to other outstations in the hub-and-spoke,
- education, training and employment circumstances of members of the group

Acknowledging the above factors, outstations are required to have a permanent occupancy,

- Should there be secure land tenure over the outstation?

Yes. Statutory land tenure is desirable. If residents are not eligible for government support it would be appropriate that their land tenure allow access to commercial loans and finance.

- What kind of water supply is required?

Regularly tested, clean, safe and potable
Transporting water presents financial viability problems

- What level of access is required?

Access is an issue related to the outstation model. For example, access from a spoke outstation to the hub outstation is a separate matter to the hub-central community/regional town access.

- What level of support is required (e.g. from a Shire or an Outstation Resource Agency (ORA)?

Access to an efficient, competent well resourced agency to provide road, housing and essential services is essential. See comment above re ORAs and Shires

- Are there cultural, social or economic reasons to support some outstations?

Yes, outlined above. In addition homelands residents are those that receive the lowest level of support so moving people to towns or regional centres will require greater NTG support. A properly conducted triple-line accounting of benefit and cost is a requirement for recognition of these reasons for support or otherwise

Question 2: **Definition of an Outstation**

- **Is new definition required?**

Yes. The multi-dimensional aspects of outstation definition, made with reference to the paper by Jon Altman (CAEPR), can account for the diversity of outstations, assessment of their necessity and viability and the overall benefit to the local people and to the community broadly

- **If yes, what should be included in a new definition?**

The paper by John Altman has been generally well accepted by Outstation Resource Agencies. A resourced consultation process enabling a series of meetings of outstation groups in the different regions is necessary to ensuring this and other aspects of homelands policy are optimally determined.

Question 3: **The Service Model**

- What is the preferred service model or models for outstations?

Well resourced and supported Outstation Resource Agencies, incorporating the whole-of-government approach entrenched in existing policy.

- Does a 'hub and spoke' model work?

It works well in places and is a well researched and preferred model. It has not been considered in some areas where it may be appropriate. Adequate levels of support are required before it can be evaluated. It may be a flawed model in some instances. There does not appear to be a better alternative in others. ORA's themselves tend to use 'hub and spoke' to some degree.

- How do Shires and ORA's fit in with Government services like education, health and police?

At present they take what they are given. There are existing ORAs that provide models for how services can be coordinated to service outcome, including cost, benefit. In most cases, there is resistance to such coordination within the departments and/or their local agencies, ~~to such coordination.~~

Question 4: **Outstation Service Levels**

- What level of services should be provided to outstations?

Services are provided in any setting according to needs and what funds are available. A graduated scale of service delivery according to the factors outlined above for inclusion in ongoing evaluation and audit (existing viability, population, access, cultural benefit and others)

- What considerations should be used to determine service levels?

Structural and operational effectiveness of the model in place or as it comes established.

Population estimates and demographic modelling of likely growth.

Current status of essential service infrastructure.

Current status of housing and outstanding housing needs.

Some understanding of homelands residents aspirations in regard to shelter, income, education, employment and access to a range of services.

The social benefit
the cultural obligations and benefit
Audits and evaluations by government in conjunction with ORAs

- How can outstation populations be estimated?

Census, health data and ORA data

- Should some outstations be considered as major communities?

Any homeland with more than a given number of permanent residents or with a given service population (E.g. 100) can be considered a major community. Again, the hub-and-spoke model may provide for the hub outstation being the place to have some level of service agencies present.

Additional issues

- What research is required to inform the development and implementation of an outstations policy?

A review of existing research should help to guide policy development. In addition a skills audit would be helpful to determine the current capacity of homelands to manage infrastructure themselves and to determine future development and priorities.

- What content and by what process should the government develop a monitoring and evaluation framework for outstations policy?

Content

The content of such a framework should include recognition of all factors social, ecological and economic that are likely to impact on the sustainability of a particular homeland.

Process

A Working Group constituted of Commonwealth, NTG and ORAs, with input from others, in particular Land Councils

A series of meetings in outstations areas with representatives from homelands and ORAs

Formulate a draft policy paper and new **Memorandum Of Understanding** based on the responses to the discussion paper, the consultation process and the considerations of the Working Group. The paper is to propose options for:

- Eligibility
- Definitions
- Models
- Service levels, how they are determined and evaluated on an ongoing basis

Is a formal advisory group on outstations appropriate?

Yes as outlined above.