

# **Mabunji Aboriginal Resource Association Incorporated**

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## **OUTSTATION POLICY Discussion Paper**

### **Question 1 : Eligibility for Support**

#### **Outstations should meet the following criteria to be eligible for support:**

- 100% residency for year round access, 80 – 100% residency to account for wet season inaccessibility on some remote outstations
- 100% commitment by the residents to maintain and improve the outstation
- 100% commitment to ensuring the children are educated (school of the air, boarding in the nearest town with family to go to school during the week etc)
- 100% commitment to maintaining and improving existing infrastructure (phones for communication, power (generator and/or solar), water supply and waste management
- 100% commitment by the residents to work towards total self-sustainability and self-reliance (this could be to create some small business to suit the area and tourism demand – there are thousands of tourists who would pay big dollars for a self-catered indigenous experience – just point them ‘the tourists’ in the right direction)
- Residents must be self-reliant with their own transport to get to and from their outstation, and have the means to keep that vehicle/boat/troopie in excellent operation condition

#### **Should the outstation be the sole of principle residence?**

- Yes. If not the sole place of residence, the outstation would then be considered as the ‘weekender’, a place to have a holiday once a week. There are horrific overcrowding statistics already evidenced in remote towns and communities, there should be no opportunity for outstation people to be eligible for a house in town as well.

#### **What kind of water supply is required?**

- Bore with solar pump – potentially water all year round without relying on generator
- Water Tanks connected to house and shed roofs with solar pump (rain water harvesting) – secondary water supply to bore. Bores can run dry at the end of the dry season.
- All water supplies should be fitted with a filtration system.

#### **What level of access is required?**

- All outstations cry out for all-weather all-year access which would require a huge investment in roads and/or boat ramps. Reality says this won't happen – all levels of government say they are dollar constrained.
- Full communication access is a high priority – phone, broadband as a minimum to enable the ability to gain information regarding weather (in cyclone prone areas), access to emergency medical care ensuring maximum personal safety and just to keep in touch with family and town-based facilities when needed.

### **What level of support is required? (Shire v Outstation Resource Agency)**

- Keep funding existing ORA's who have proven good governance, delivered quality service to outstations in the past (and currently) and set high expectations of outstation residents to participate in mutual obligation to receive (and expect) the service.
- Support required by each outstation varies greatly. Some are very independent, only requiring assistance with specialised equipment (eg solar power gear) and major breakdowns where they cannot afford to repair large items. *Remember most outstation adult residents are recipients of CDEP or Welfare – already doing their best to feed themselves and their family. Most residents on outstations would embrace the opportunity to have a full-time job – RELATING TO IMPROVING THEIR OUTSTATION PROSPECTS (Cattle, Tourism, Rodeo Training, Fencing etc)*
- Shire Councils began on 1 July 2008 and have no proven record in servicing any outstations in their jurisdiction, let alone know and understand the individual needs and hopes of each outstation group.

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

- Some outstations exist because they were established by Aboriginal people with a strong traditional orientation. Many outstations cease to exist for the same reason – the main person may have passed away or moved into town, and sadly the younger ones today lose their traditional and cultural pathway, and move into town also effectively abandoning all the effort gone on before.
- Support outstations that demonstrate 100% commitment. Develop a 'kit' so through consultation and independent review of each outstation, the Government and/or ORA can determine which outstations should be supported and at what level. Some outstations may require high levels of investment/support for 12 months, then after that quarterly servicing for instance. Other outstations may only need six monthly visits to inspect and service infrastructure – eg minor house repairs, replace filters on generators etc.
- Each outstation should be assessed individually – not grouped as 'one size fits all' – and from that cultural needs, social needs and economic needs will be determined and reasons to support (or not support) can be decided.

### **Question 2: Definition of an Outstation**

### **Is a new definition required?**

- **YES.** The 1987 definition, and the alternative definition applied in the Northern Territory, and the John Altman alternative (2006 paper ‘In Search of an Outstations Policy for Indigenous Australians’ and the old ATSIC definition – all need to be looked at, considered, updated and rewritten to ensure a strict framework is in place that outstations must meet to attract funding.

### **Question 3: The Service Model**

#### **What is the preferred service model for outstations?**

- Keep funding existing ORA’s who have proven good governance, delivered quality service to outstations in the past (and currently) and set high expectations of outstation residents to participate in mutual obligation to receive (and expect) the service.
- Those ORA’s who have struggled to provide adequate and fair service to outstations in the past could be offered a further 12 month opportunity to improve the service delivery (Municipal and Essential Services) or hand over to the, as yet unproven, Shire.
- The ‘hub and spoke’ model works in this region – South West Gulf. Since 1982 Mabunji has serviced up to 26 outstations (including 9 island based outstations). Mabunji currently supports and services 19 outstations (including 6 island based outstations) which have passed very strict criteria in order to qualify to receive services.

#### **How do Shires and ORA’s fit in with Government services like education, health and police?**

- ORA’s assist outstation residents to apply for phone connections so there is the ability to ring up if and when problems occur – anything including house maintenance request, water leaking, medical consultation etc. Phones are often satellite installations, so residents are encouraged to get their own computers so weather can be monitored (especially in the wet season). ORA’s provide advice to ensure the phone bills are paid on time via a Phone LockDown deduction direct from CDEP pays.
- ORA’s encourage residents from very remote outstations to apply for School of the Air education for the kids. The local school provides a daily school bus service to closer land based outstations.
- There is a clinic and a Police Station in Borroloola which are both well set up to service Borroloola and surrounding outstations, cattle stations and larger remote communities.
- Can’t comment on how the SHIRE fits in, new since 1 July 2008.

### **Question 4: Outstation Service Levels**

### **What level of services should be provided to outstations?**

- Housing maintenance
- Infrastructure maintenance – power, water and sewerage disposal
- Dump maintenance
- Environmental maintenance – fencing around houses to protect from feral animals. Dust control (planting grass, trees etc) can be done for next to nothing – resident manpower
- Road upgrade and maintenance

### **What considerations should be used to determine service levels?**

- Does this outstation meet all the criteria for support? If so, full support. If not, no support.
- Support outstations that are serious about living and working on their outstations and do it at the expense of those that are not.
- Should the moveable assets be removed to the ORA (or Shire) for safekeeping (eg generator, solar pump installation etc)? Some outstations have cultural reasons for temporary abandonment – it is imperative to protect the assets for that outstation's future use.
- If an outstation is abandoned, all moveable assets to be removed and redistributed to outstations where and when required.

### **How can outstation populations be estimated?**

- ORA's **know** how many adults and kids are on the outstations
- Estimates for the future can be determined by consulting with outstation residents

### **Should some outstations be considered as a major community?**

- Mabunji not in a position to answer this. The largest outstation population in the South West Gulf (under Mabunji jurisdiction) would be <50.

## **Question 5: Additional Issues for Comment**

## What research is required?

- Factual and unbiased collection of data from each outstation. A full stock take of every government funded asset on every outstation, its condition and expected life, then cost the gap. Stock take to include housing, generator, solar power system, water tanks, water quality etc etc. Most ORA's have this, but an independent assessment would be welcome.

## Should an outstations advisory group be set up?

- YES and incorporate people who know and live remote, people who have experienced the unique problems associated with living and working remote. If this advice is heeded, then there will be a real chance of success of creating a good monitoring and evaluation framework for outstations policy. *If not, don't worry about it.*

## Should housing on outstations be treated purely as private property or as a Territory Housing asset?

- This is a very complicated question requiring a complex answer based on specific circumstances to each specific outstation. Questions to be asked back (to Government) could be:
  - Is the housing up to appropriate liveable standard for handover to residents?
  - Are the residents in a financial position to maintain houses?
  - If not, who will pay ongoing maintenance bills?
  - Is there appropriate methods and dollars in place to ensure maintenance on the infrastructure to run the household – eg power, water and sewerage?

*Answers to these questions, should determine whether or not housing can be treated as purely a private property or as a Territory Housing asset?*

***COMMENT – why is it that Territory Housing is nominated as the sole potential to own all aboriginal housing? Why can't well resourced and well run ORA's be considered? This would help create jobs for local indigenous people in their communities. The current plan creates more jobs for white people in urban environments (main towns and cities) and takes jobs away from the very people we are urged to place in jobs!***

## How should Government develop a monitoring and evaluation framework for outstations policy?

- Use the ‘outstation advisory group’ forum, if it is set up. That would be the most useful mechanism to achieve an appropriate monitoring and evaluation framework for outstations policy. *Otherwise, don’t worry about it. If the Government puts together a bunch of non-remote-wise bureaucrats, interested only in a spot of fishing in our beautiful South-West Gulf area, then successful outcomes will be severely compromised.*

### **What is the relationship between community living areas and outstations policy development?**

- Culture, traditional values and family
- The need to live on homeland, the fathers or mothers country
- The absolute requirement to consult and gain reciprocal actions. Do not give something for nothing – user pays. This for the success and continuation of supporting and maintaining sustainable outstation living.

### **General Comment**

The ability to live well on outstations is heavily dependent on CDEP. CDEP, through careful and fair budgeting, offers choices to outstation residents and real jobs to improve life and living conditions. CDEP also offers income management by choice and many outstation participants join together and contribute to an outstation LOCKDOWN account deduction for specific purposes to keep motor vehicles repaired and registered, outboard motors repaired and serviced, to name a few. What will happen when that is converted to WfD?

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