

WHY IS IT ALL SO HARD?

Implementing and Sustaining Reforms in Indigenous Communities

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ANZSOG Protecting Reforms That Work August 2010

Overview of Presentation

- COAG trials 2003-2007 and Murdi Paaki
- How was it implemented?
 - Aiming for simplicity amidst complexity
 - Using complexity
- Obstacles
 - Government
 - Community
- What was achieved? What was sustained?
- Ongoing Research

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MURDI PAAKI - AN EXAMPLE

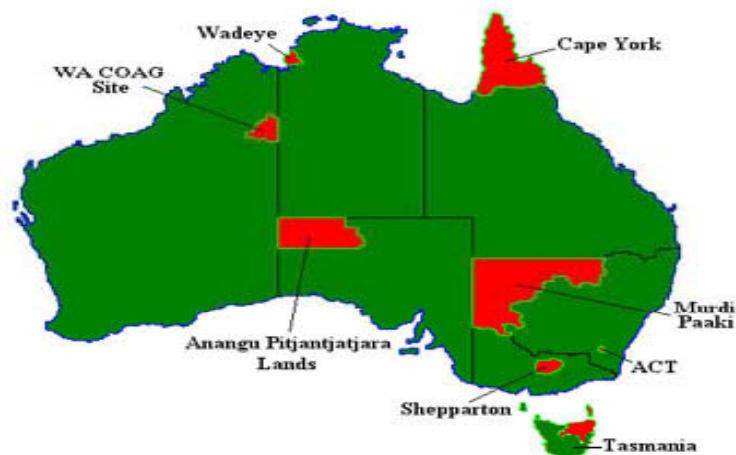
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- Working with complexity
- Innovation in government
- Local autonomy
- Collaborative leadership
- Success in Indigenous development
 - BUT limited sustainability, flowing more from government action than from community dysfunction.

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The COAG Trials 2003-2007

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Working Differently

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- Communities and governments as partners
- Communities identified their priorities
- Governments negotiated action with communities.

Simple and straightforward . .

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The Murdi Paaki Region

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The Murdi Paaki Region - the players

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- 16 communities, 16 community working parties, chairs, secretariats . . .
- Lead govt agencies: DEST and DET
- Governments and agencies. Australian govt: FACHSIA, DOHA, AGs. NSW: DAA, DOCs, Health, Police, etc. Local Government: 8 councils
- Other bodies: Aboriginal Land Councils, Barwon Darling Alliance, Chambers of Commerce, Aboriginal organisations: medical services, CDEPs, Murdi Paaki Regional Enterprise Corporation.

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The Murdi Paaki Region - the issues

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- **Regional issues:** culture and heritage, education, employment, health, crime, youth, governance, community capacity and leadership. AIR CONDITIONING!
- **Community specific issues**
 - Bourke: Yamma festival, early childhood education
 - Enngonia: Oval
 - Collarenebri: Cemetery
 - Brewarrina: Aboriginal controlled organisations, aged care

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COMPLEXITY

- Players
- Issues
- Policy frameworks
 - NSW – Two Ways Together
 - Commonwealth - flux

Reduce Complexity

Simplify

- Community interface with government
- Decision-making processes within government

Increase

- Capacity of communities to engage with and understand government.

MAKE THE CENTRAL FOCUS

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THE ABORIGINAL
COMMUNITIES

and

THE GOVERNMENT
ACTION TEAM in
Dubbo

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Central Focus: Aboriginal Communities

Each community

- Community Working Party – a single community interface with government
- Community Action Plan
- Secretariat and IT support
- Facilitator – who were employed by the community to help them set priorities and deal with government
- Mentoring, governance training

Murdi Parki Regional Assembly

- Support for Assembly to operate
- Governance workshops every 6 months (8 in total)
- Young Leaders Project
- Evaluation design

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Process Focus: the Government Action Team

- Action team - “on the ground” in Dubbo.
- Action team reports were the starting point of all steering committee meetings, DEST meetings
- Shorten communication lines: no centre-delivery divide
 - DEST National office and Dubbo office were a virtual team
 - Action team leader was a member of all key government coordination groups
 - One stop decision-making in DEST

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Focus: Partnership

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Sam Jeffries, chair of Murdi Paaki Regional Council (later MPRA) was a co chair of the Murdi Paaki Steering Committee alongside DEST and DET Deputy Secretaries.

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FOCUS: Working Differently

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Build Trust
Start Small
Be Flexible
Negotiate

Collaborative leadership:
Leave egos and the money outside the door

Allow time to pass

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FLEXIBLE FUNDING

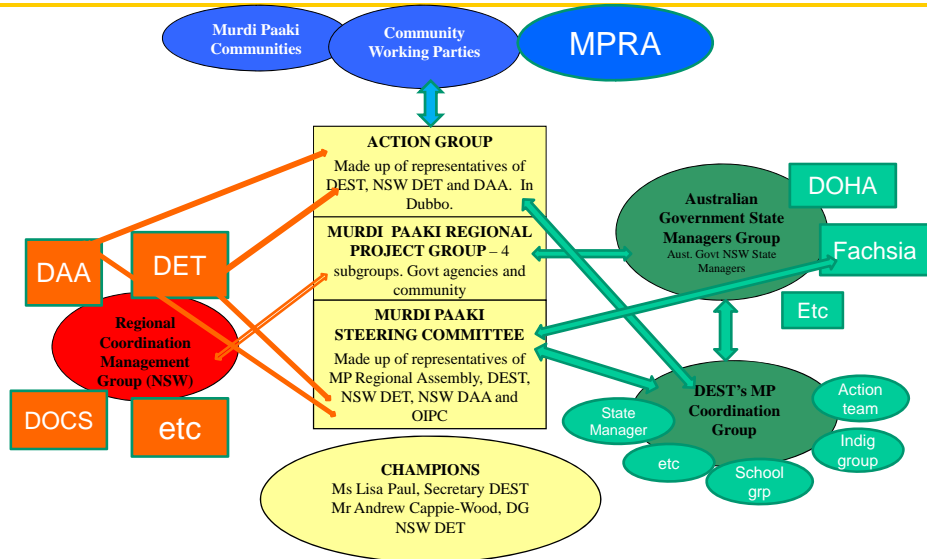
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- Flexible funding was essential
 - Australian govt fund
 - DEST fund

- But still problems
 - accountability
 - slow eg air conditioning. Money obtained in 2004, many units still not rolled out by end 2007

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Bureaucratic complexity: MURDI PAAKI government structures 2006



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OBSTACLES

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- Commonwealth - NSW trust - took time (two years)
- Changed Commonwealth government policies
 - Abolition of ATSIC
 - Mainstreaming of Indigenous service delivery
 - Establishment of Office of Indigenous Policy Coordination → confused responsibilities, turf war
- Bureaucratic complexity
- Personalities
- Community Dysfunction
- FIVE YEARS NOT LONG ENOUGH

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Achievements: Government-Community Partnerships

- 8 Regional Agreements – governance, air conditioning, professional and technical support
- 20 Local Shared Responsibility Agreements
 - Bre Business Centre
 - Night patrol – Bourke
 - Enngonia Oval
 - Air conditioning
 - Youth centre Gulargambone
- School principals taking education plans to the CWP
- Alcohol and drug network
- Circle sentencing
- Later: alcohol plans for some communities

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Achievements: Education, Health, Crime Outcomes

- Education and Health departments “ran with” the opportunity
- Literacy and numeracy improvements greater than for other parts of NSW
- Year 11/12 retention up, Tafe enrolments up
- Hospital separations down – alcohol, cardiovascular
- Crime down – assaults, break-ins, theft

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Some things have been sustained . . .

- Prominence of Aboriginal leaders eg Cobar
- Confidence and capacity of leaders improved
- Health networks (DOHA and NSW Health)
- Action on cultural priorities: Collyer cemetery, Bre Fish traps
- CWPs, MPRA
- Young leaders project
- Some MP regional subgroups
- Local govt, business and police – sustaining their engagement with CWPs in some towns – alcohol accords
- Facilitators – now DAA partnership officers

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Some towns have done well

Bourke and Brewarrina – moving ahead. New businesses, more employment

“things are better than 10 years ago”

Some towns aren't doing so well

Walgett and Wilcannia – now Remote Service Delivery priority communities (!).

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But many things not sustained . .

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- Australian Government changed (no more SRAs)
 - Whole of government emphasis dropped
 - Little flexible funding
- Community Working Parties: weaker.
 - Government agencies not coming to CWP
- Education improvements plateaued
- MPRA struggled – hiatus in funding and recognition by Commonwealth government
- Community views:
 - “we’ve gone backwards in dealing with government”.
 - “starting all over again”
 - “Why is it all so HARD?”

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Why is it all So Hard? – Ongoing research

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- Support from MPRA
- Reports, evaluations, data
- Combined regional and community-based evaluative perspective
- 4 case studies: Bourke, Brewarrina, Walgett and Wilcannia - why such divergent outcomes?
- Multi-case (comparative method)
- Interviews – officials and communities.

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- Reports, evaluations and studies produced by government
- Semi-structured interviews (2 field trips to MP November 2009 and May 2010)
- Case study themes worked up through analytical grids
- Whole-of-language empiricism
- Key factors shaping relative success, and lack of success, identified

- Recognize that you are working with complexity
 - Base bureaucratic structures on deliberative processes of communities
 - Control is not possible and possibly not desirable
 - Variation is right
 - Flexible funding – more important than coordination
 - People on the ground
- Constancy of purpose and philosophy
- Concrete actions to support development of trust

To be continued . . .