



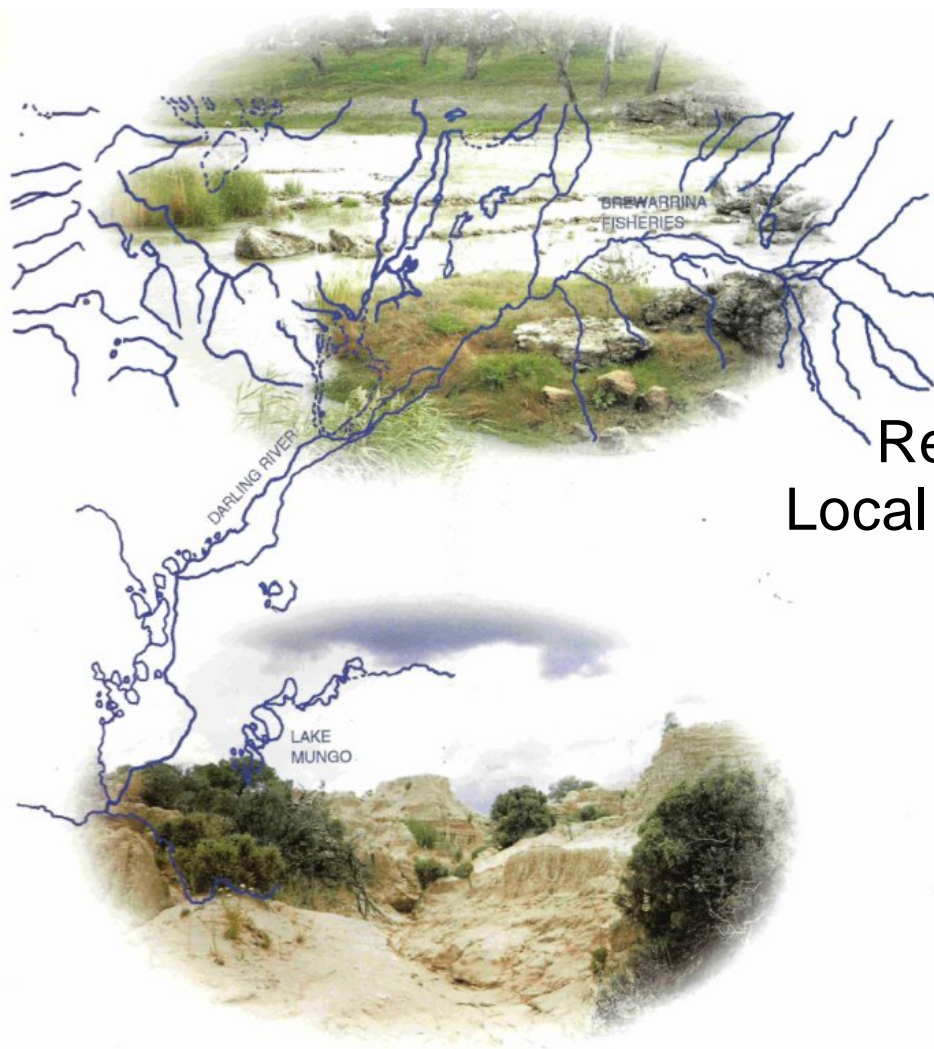
**UNSW**  
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# OCHRE

The Continuing Conversation

Evaluation | Stage 1:  
Implementation and early outcomes



## Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly Local Decision Making

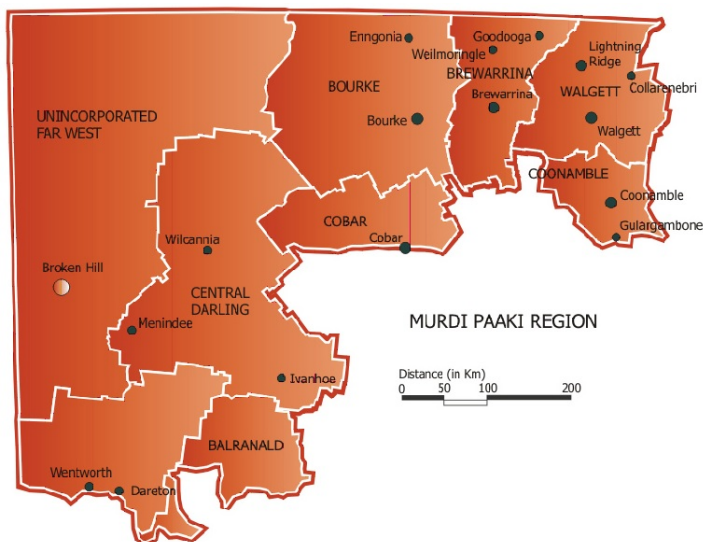
Stage 1 Final Report

June 2018

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This report was prepared for and belongs to the Aboriginal Communities of the Murdi Paaki Region, and members of the Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly.

**SPRC**  
Social Policy Research Centre



*The evaluation team from the Social Policy Research Centre acknowledges Aboriginal peoples as the traditional custodians of the lands we work on and pay our respect to Elders past, present and future and to all Aboriginal peoples of the region.*

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## Glossary

ATSIC	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission
CWP	Community Working Party
LALC	Local Aboriginal Land Council
LDM	Local Decision Making
MPAY&EL	Murdi Paaki Aboriginal Young and Emerging Leaders (Young Leaders)
MPRA	Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly (also referred to as Regional Assembly or Assembly)
NCARA	NSW Coalition of Aboriginal Regional Alliances
<i>OCHRE</i>	Opportunity Choice Healing Responsibility Empowerment
SPRC	Social Policy Research Centre
UNSW	University of New South Wales, Sydney

## Murdi Paaki Local Decision Making: What we have found

<p><b>What is working</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Government services are more likely to be held to account because of Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly, Local Decision Making and the Accord.</li><li>• Local community representatives are able to ask the Regional Assembly to escalate local concerns.</li><li>• The Accord priorities are decided by representatives of Aboriginal communities.</li></ul> <p><b>Important messages to NSW Government</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The LDM model has worked well in the Murdi Paaki area and the regional assembly is well established and functions well.</li><li>• Regional representation of Aboriginal community concerns by the Assembly has seen senior government representatives 'come to the table'.</li></ul>	<p><b>What needs further work</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Information about the Regional Assembly and Local Decision Making priorities and responsibilities under the Accord needs to be circulated more widely to all local communities.</li><li>• Increased resources are needed at the local level to support Community Working Parties (in communities) to improve representation and infrastructure at the Regional Assembly and communication between the regional assembly and local communities.</li><li>• All relevant agencies and service providers should attend CWP meetings and services at the local level, and work together to serve the identified needs of local Aboriginal communities.</li></ul> <p><b>Important messages to NSW Government</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Changes in service delivery should be implemented in communities. The Regional Assembly should be seen to be responsible for these changes.</li><li>• All levels of government and other service providers need to be more responsive to the Regional Assembly and to identified local issues in the region.</li><li>• Financial, transport and communication resource support from government could help local communities address concerns about representation.</li><li>• Services and government need to become more culturally competent.</li><li>• Resourcing and engagement with young people are needed to access, develop, and enhance the Young Leaders program.</li><li>• The name 'Local Decision Making' is misleading. The name should be changed to better represent the model, namely 'Regional Decision Making', 'Devolved Decision Making' or something similar.</li></ul>
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## About the *Continuing Conversation*: *OCHRE* Local Decision Making and MPRA

The *OCHRE* Evaluation adopts the approach of ‘continuing conversations’. Over the past two years SPRC evaluation team have had conversations with 16 Aboriginal communities of the Murdi Paaki Region, members of the Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly (MPRA), and government representatives, to talk about Local Decision Making (LDM) and MPRA. The evaluation team has used culturally acceptable methods as much as possible and facilitated community-control of the evaluation.

The Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly has been in place for nearly two decades and *OCHRE* Local Decision Making is only one aspect of the Assembly’s work.

**Community-controlled research** involves co-design – this is a way of conducting research with, and not on, communities. The evaluation team asked communities how they would like information collected, what they think would be a measure of the program’s success, who the team should talk to, and what is the best approach to contact people to be a part of the evaluation. As part of co-design we also returned a draft report to evaluation participants in communities and asked for their feedback, (validation of findings – see Appendix A) which has been added to this final report.

The evaluation team has addressed any concerns about the draft report to ensure participants are comfortable with what has been written, without compromising the independent findings of the report. The Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly has accepted the report. The report will be provided to Aboriginal Affairs NSW (on 30 June 2018) and will then be presented formally to the Minister on 15 August 2018.

We have drawn lessons from *OCHRE* sites being evaluated and presented a Synthesis report to the NSW Coalition of *Aboriginal* Regional Alliances (NCARA).

**Local Decision Making** aims to:

...fundamentally and positively change the relationship between Aboriginal communities and government and enable Aboriginal communities to participate fully in decision making concerning service design and delivery.

[This approach recognises] ...sovereignty and self-determination are a fundamental factor in generating sustained socio-economic development and wellbeing in Aboriginal communities (Aboriginal Affairs NSW, 2017: 4).

It also acknowledges that governments also need to reform and develop capacity to enable this to happen. The purpose of Local Decision Making is to

...give Aboriginal community-based regional decision-making groups (regional alliances) an increased say in government service delivery...placing Aboriginal people at the centre of service design, planning and delivery. (Aboriginal Affairs, 2017: 5)


The Alliance enters into an agreement called the Accord that defines the relationship, identifies priorities for the region, as well as 'key actions to achieve desired outcomes, timeframes, resources, responsibilities and define what success will look like'. The Alliance's decision-making powers will increase over time but will exclude statutory regulation functions such as policing, justice, child protection and environmental regulation.

'The principles of self-determination are embedded in LDM, by the following:

- Aboriginal people have the right to determine their own governance and decision-making structures in accordance with their customs, traditions and in the best interests of their community.
- Aboriginal people have the right to develop and maintain their own tradition, procedures and practices.
- Aboriginal people have the right to recognition and enforcement of any agreements they enter into with the government.' (Aboriginal Affairs NSW, 2017: 6).

# Summary of the *Continuing Conversation*: OCHRE Local Decision Making and Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly

This is a summary of what we heard about the OCHRE Local Decision Making and the Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly. We had conversations with community members and Community Working Party Chairs in Bourke, Enngonia, Brewarrina, Lightning Ridge, Collarenebri, Coonamble Wilcannia, Broken Hill, Ivanhoe, Dareton and Menindee. We also had conversations with community representatives including the Young Leaders attending the Assembly meetings, as well as conversations with the Chair of the Assembly.

 Direct quotes are highlighted.

## What people told us about Local Decision Making

### What is working well?

- The Accord priorities were decided by Aboriginal community representatives.
- Regional representation of Aboriginal community concerns by the Assembly has seen senior government representatives 'come to the table' and NSW Government services communicate with the Aboriginal representative body in the region.
- NSW Government services are more likely to be held to account because of Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly, Local Decision Making and the Accord.
- Local community representatives ask the Regional Assembly to escalate local concerns. The Assembly can escalate local and regional issues to government.
- The Local Decision Making process is being implemented by a well-established Aboriginal Regional Assembly. The Assembly has out-last-ed different governments and initiatives.
- The Assembly has strong relationships with member communities.
- MPRA is co-designing a social housing management model in the region with the NSW Government and in consultation with social housing providers, Local Aboriginal Land Councils and the Commonwealth Government.

### What needs further work?

- All levels of government and other service providers need to be more responsive to the Regional Assembly and to identified local issues in the region.
- Services and government need to become more culturally competent.

- There is limited knowledge of the *OCHRE* Local Decision Making model at the local level. Information about the Regional Assembly and Local Decision Making priorities and responsibilities under the Accord needs to be circulated more widely to all local communities.
- Increased resources are needed at the local level to support Community Working Parties (in communities) and to improve representation and infrastructure at the Regional Assembly.
- Financial, transport and communication resource support from government could help local communities address concerns about representation.
- Volunteer members of the Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly need resources to improve communication between the Regional Assembly and their local communities. Community representatives are in voluntary roles and are under-resourced.
- Communication channels (including face to face) from regional to local communities are under-resourced, making it difficult to provide feedback and information.
- A history of multiple short-lived initiatives makes it difficult for communities to trust new initiatives and to plan for longer term outcomes.
- All levels of government and other service providers need to be more responsive to the Regional Assembly and to identified local issues in the region.
- Services and government need to become more culturally competent.
- All relevant agencies and service providers should attend CWP meetings and services at the local level, and work together to serve the identified needs of local Aboriginal communities.
- Structural resourcing and engagement with young people are needed to access, develop, and enhance the Young Leaders program.
- The name 'Local Decision Making' is misleading. The name should be changed to better represent the model, namely 'Regional Decision Making', 'Devolved Decision Making or something similar'.

## Context of these findings

The context of these findings is important. We do not have anything to compare the Assembly and Local Decision Making with in terms of how people relate to other representative bodies, and in some communities in Australia, community members can have little awareness of the workings of their representative bodies. In addition, there has been a long history of mistrust and betrayal of Aboriginal communities by governments in Australia. *OCHRE* and LDM will take time to build relationships of accountability and respect with Aboriginal communities.

## Specific findings

Overall, the evaluation has found that the Regional Assembly is working very well at the regional level, but that communication with local communities is under-developed. Representation and decision making at the local level need to be strengthened.

### Knowledge of Local Decision Making

We heard:

- Local Decision Making was recognised by some participants but not everyone. Local Decision Making and the role of Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly needed to be better explained to local communities.
- Some participants said the Local Decision Making, Accord and structure of decision making has led to an improvement in relations with government.
- The name Local Decision Making is confusing as many participants felt decisions are being made at a regional level and not a local level. This is particularly relevant given the vast geographic area of the region.

### Community representation at the Regional Assembly

We heard:

- Working together at a regional level provides opportunities for local communities to share and support each other.
- Local representation at the Assembly depends on local community capacity and agreement.
- Representation relies on an operational Community Working Party, which is difficult in some communities.
- Community representatives must volunteer to attend the Regional Assembly and there are high expectations of them.
- A collective voice of local communities through the Regional Assembly makes government take notice.
- NSW Local Aboriginal Land Councils need to be better represented; the existing Local Aboriginal Land Council structure could support Local Decision Making.
- Decisions about local representation at the MPRA were not transparent across all 16 member communities.

## Communication with local communities and organisations

We heard:

- Clear communication between local member communities and the Regional Assembly is critical.
- Aboriginal Communities need support and resources to be part of the Regional Assembly, including a co-ordinator or project officers to support their work.
- Lack of resources presents challenges for communication between the Regional Assembly and local communities and organisations.

## Developing leadership

We heard:

- Developing Aboriginal leadership in local communities is a priority of the MPRA. Older community members are keen to support younger people to become culturally confident and represent their communities.
- Young people who have participated in the Murdi Paaki Aboriginal Young and Emerging Leaders (Young Leaders) were positive about their experiences.
- The Young Leaders coordinator position is under resourced (one day a week).
- The program is difficult to keep running due to a lack of funds for the project officer.
- Young people often have other priorities, work commitments and family responsibilities.

## Local issues and the Regional Assembly

We heard:

- The Regional Assembly needs to cover a wide range of issues from 16 different communities across the large geographical footprint of the Barwon Darling river system – some have common issues and some locally specific issues.
- Local Decision Making is not an avenue for *actual* local community level issues.
- There is sometimes a tension between regional decision making and local issues.

## Regional Assembly, local communities and Government

We heard a range of views about relationships with government and how local community views were represented, including:

- Local Decision Making is perceived as a government driven process but does provide opportunities to form regional relationships with government.

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- The Assembly can engage service providers by putting the question back on service providers about their roles and responsibility in the community.
- Local communities continue to work with governments at a local level and feel that government services are not employing or training local Aboriginal people.
- Government services are perceived as not always culturally competent and can be racist.
- The relationship between LDM and NSW Local Aboriginal Land Councils is not straightforward and varies between different communities and levels.

## Local community experiences with service provision

- Despite operating well at a regional level, there is much less satisfaction at the local level about service delivery, and most participants in local communities reported that relationships with different levels of government had yet to improve.
- Local community members explained that they have consistently represented their communities to highlight local issues and develop community action plans.
- We heard from some communities that local issues of racism in housing and relationships with police remain, and that service delivery does not accommodate local contexts. In some places services are still *'fly-in fly-out, drive-in drive-out'*.
- There is considerable community frustration about the time it takes to create change and to address racism and cultural insensitivity.

## Community views of success for Local Decision Making

We asked the Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly how we will know if Local Decision Making is going well. Community members suggested we consider:

- Whether the priorities in local Community Action Plans are actually being addressed and what outcomes (short and longer term) are being achieved.
- Whether communities feel heard by government. Aboriginal communities will know that the government has listened to them when services are implemented in a way that the communities want and need, and when Aboriginal communities are involved in the planning, implementation and evaluation of services.
- What isn't working, because this will assist in learning what has been successful and why.

Success measures of the Accords will:

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- Show government is listening to community and there is an equal relationship in decision making.
- Be seen in long-term outcomes of service provision of priority areas and engaging Aboriginal people in their local communities.
- Demonstrate improved trust between Aboriginal communities and government at all levels.
- Show Aboriginal organisations and representative bodies are better resourced to participate in decision making.
- Ensure that programs that are working are maintained and resourced (i.e. TAFE).

Some community members suggested:

- The Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly needs to develop some short, medium and long-term objectives which can be measured and described.

To achieve this community members recommended there be more opportunities to come together and discuss how well different plans are being implemented, both during implementation and when evaluating outcomes. This relates to the next phase of the evaluation (see Section 4.2).

## Recommendations

### Recommendations for NSW Government

Theme	Recommendation
<p>Accord Process – Accountability of service providers</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure all service providers work with the Accord process and Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly (MPRA), including engaging with Community Working Parties (CWPs) at the local level.</li> <li>• Put in place Local Accords or other forms of agreement to ensure that all agencies and service providers attend CWP meetings and to commit services to meeting the needs of local Aboriginal communities. Make attendance at CWPs a contractual requirement for all local service providers.</li> </ul>
<p>Communication</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Share Local Decision Making (LDM) process and outcomes more widely with local communities. Clarify the role of MPRA and CWPs in that process.</li> </ul>

Theme	Recommendation
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communicate and promote LDM priorities and responsibilities under the Accord more widely to local communities.</li> <li>• Provide additional resources – for communication and secretariat support of volunteer members of the Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly.</li> <li>• Increase communications between the MPRA and local communities and organisations to provide information and feedback.</li> </ul>
<p>Continuing Professional Development in Cultural competency</p> <p>Aboriginal Cultural competence standards in government services</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• NSW Government to continue to improve cultural competence across all departments and services.</li> <li>• All service providers (government and non-government) to continue to develop cultural competence, particularly at a local level.</li> </ul>
<p>Leadership – Young Leaders Program</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide more structural resources to increase the number of young people accessing the Aboriginal Young Leaders Program.</li> <li>• Provide more resources to expand Young Leaders Coordinators and Project Officer positions to support the Young Leaders Program.</li> <li>• Design and implement a succession plan for Young Leaders – as young leaders age, provide succession planning for the next generation of young leaders.</li> </ul>
<p>Representation and inclusion</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fully engage other Aboriginal representative structures such as NSW AECG Inc., ACCHOs, etc. in the process of LDM.</li> </ul>
<p>Representation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase resources and support for all 16 member communities to ensure local participation at the regional level through the MPRA and to enable members to feed back to CWPs.</li> <li>• Provide greater transparency in processes for representation at MPRA.</li> <li>• LDM is not 'local' but regional decision making. It is therefore important that the LDM label is changed to something more representative of the actual model.</li> </ul>

Theme	Recommendation
Representation and inclusion of NSW Local Aboriginal Land Councils (LALCs)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improve relationships between CWP, MPRA and LALCs.</li> <li>• Better align roles, responsibilities and accountability structures of LDM and LALCs.</li> <li>• Explore options for greater inclusion of LALCs in LDM and MPRA.</li> <li>• Provide mechanisms for communication and representation for LALCs with Aboriginal Affairs NSW at the state level.</li> </ul>
Representation and inclusion of local issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide more time, processes and resources for members to discuss issues with the CWP and local communities prior to making decisions at the Regional Assembly.</li> </ul>
Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide better support (financial and administrative) to ensure MPRA LDM and Accords are discussed with all 16 member communities.</li> <li>• Resource the LDM to match the size and diversity of the Murdi Paaki region and the Accord priorities.</li> </ul>
Service System – capacity building connected services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Link local services with local Aboriginal services; for example, train and employ local Aboriginal people to carry out repairs and maintenance on local housing.</li> <li>• Ensure a commitment by <u>all</u> NSW Government services to work with the Assembly to ensure Aboriginal community priorities are addressed.</li> </ul>
Service System – connected and responsive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All levels of government and other service providers to plan and operate a more connected and responsive service system.</li> <li>• All relevant agencies and service providers to attend and participate in CWP meetings as part of their working towards building a connected service system that is responsive to the self-determined needs of local Aboriginal peoples.</li> </ul>
Service System – evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure thorough monitoring and evaluation of services, including service needs and gaps, using local Aboriginal determined indicators.</li> </ul>

## Direction for next conversations

There are two more stages to the evaluation:

- Stage 2, from July 2018 to June 2021 will identify changes experienced by communities, outcomes and make recommendations for improving the initiatives.
- Stage 3, from July 2021 to June 2024 will assess the contribution the initiative has made in meeting long-term goals and make recommendations for improving the initiative.

Based on the conversations to date (including co-design), we propose the next conversations include and discuss:

- LDM and local community Accord services – regular monitoring to ensure programs are adapted to suit each community and are working well.
- Better feedback about the Evaluation to communities.
- If possible, the co-design process should involve members of the broader community, and not only MPRA members.

It was not possible in this stage (Stage 1) of the continuing conversation to use community researchers to collect information for the evaluation. In the next stage we will work with the MPRA and develop a feasible method for involving community members in data collection.

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## Part A:

### *The Continuing Conversations*

# 1 The Continuing Conversations

University researchers from UNSW's Social Policy Research Centre (SPRC) have been contracted by NSW Government to continue the conversations that commenced with the Ministerial Taskforce on Aboriginal Affairs to see how *OCHRE* – the NSW Government's plan for Aboriginal affairs – is working. **Murdi Paaki Local Decision Making** is part of *OCHRE* and has been selected to be part of the evaluation.

The NSW Government wants to know:

- Is Local Decision Making being implemented as intended? What aspects are working well, and which could be improved?
- Do the Local Decision Making outcomes continue to reflect what the community wants to achieve?
- What improvements to the design of the Local Decision Making could be made to better meet outcomes in the Aboriginal community, and for the future development of the Local Decision Making?

It will also contribute to a question about the overall *OCHRE* plan:

- Do the *OCHRE* policies and practices respond to emerging evidence and practice learnings? Is change to policy and practice timely?

## 1.1 Summary of the evaluation process

The evaluation team have used culturally acceptable methods as much as possible and facilitated community-control of the evaluation.

**Community-controlled research** involves co-design – this is a way of conducting research with, and not on, communities. The evaluation team asked communities how they would like information collected, what they think would be a measure of the program's success, who the team should talk to, and what is the best approach to contact people to be a part of the evaluation. As part of co-design we also returned a draft report to participants in communities and asked for their feedback, (validation of findings see Appendix A) which has been added to this final report.

The evaluation team have addressed any concerns about the draft report to ensure participants are comfortable with what has been written. The final report is presented to Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly. With their approval it will be presented to NSW Government.

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The evaluation included the following steps to support community-control:

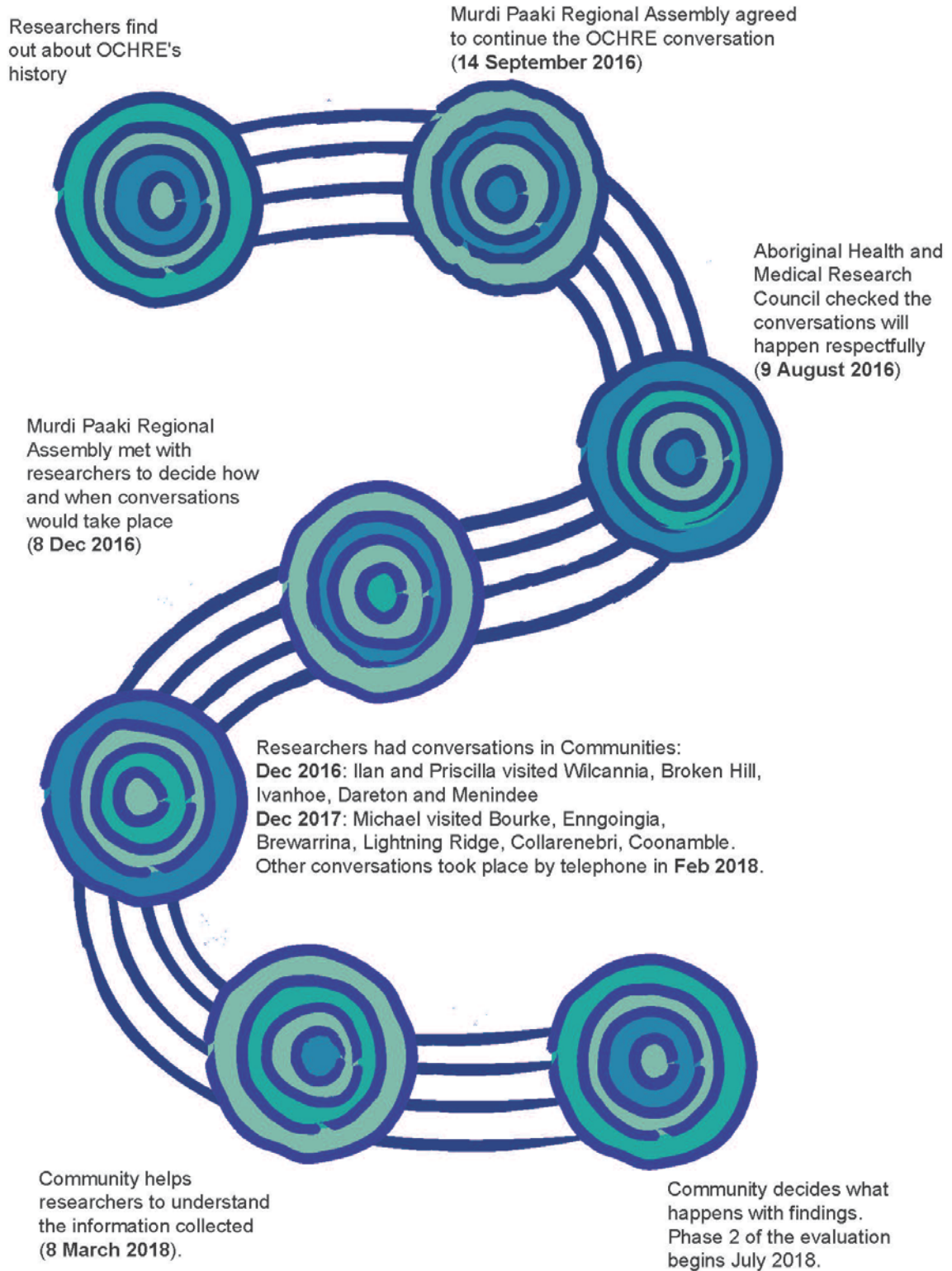
- Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly provided permission to have a continuing conversation on Country.
- The evaluation team worked with the Assembly to co-design what the evaluation would look at and how.
- The evaluation focused on having conversations with members of Aboriginal communities involved in the Local Decision Making. Additional conversations were held with government staff to understand the Local Decision Making process.
- The evaluation team returned to communities and Aboriginal participants to check the findings and recommendations.
- The Aboriginal communities involved with the evaluation have accepted the report for publication.
- The evaluation team have attempted to communicate findings in a clear and accessible way that is acceptable to the participating communities.

Conversations were led by Aboriginal researchers - Priscilla Johnson a Birri Gubbi woman from Cherbourg in Queensland (until January 2017) and Michael Barnes (from January 2017 on), a Ngunnawal man from the Canberra region.

During the evaluation the role of government has been to assist, providing information, resources and support as needed.

See Figure 1 below for a summary of the conversation process.

### Figure 1 Summary of the conversation process



## 1.2 Measures of success

We asked the Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly how we will know if Local Decision Making is going well. Community members suggested we consider:

- Whether the priorities in local Community Action Plans are actually being addressed and what outcomes (short and longer term) are being achieved.
- Whether communities feel heard by government. Aboriginal communities will know that the government has listened to them when services are implemented in a way that the communities want and need, and when Aboriginal communities are involved in the planning, implementation and evaluation of services.
- What isn't working, because this will assist in learning what has been successful and why.

Success measures of the Accords will:

- Show government is listening to community and there is an equal relationship in decision making.
- Be seen in long-term outcomes of service provision of priority areas and engaging Aboriginal people in their local communities.
- Demonstrate improved trust between Aboriginal communities and government at all levels.
- Show Aboriginal organisations and representative bodies are better resourced to participate in decision making.
- Ensure that programs that are working are maintained and resourced (i.e. TAFE).

Some community members suggested:

- The Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly needs to develop some short, medium and long-term objectives which can be measured and described.

To achieve this community members recommended there be more opportunities to come together and discuss how well different plans are being implemented, both during implementation and when evaluating outcomes. This relates to the next phase of the evaluation (see Section 4.2).

## 1.3 Conducting the evaluation

In the co-design workshop, we asked participants how we should do the evaluation.

We were told the evaluation could learn from and include ways to:

- Collect life stories and case studies of MPRA representatives as they have been working on self-determination for many years.

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- Consider and include the complexity of community participation in local governance.
- Understand the context of historical trauma within the communities.

Note, limited resources and time means these methods will be included into the next stages of the evaluation.

Further detail about who we listened to, the information we collected, and how we came up with our findings are in Section 7.1.

## 1.4 Strengths and limitations to the evaluation methods

Communities saw many **strengths** to the evaluation method, including:

- Aboriginal local Community control of the evaluation through co-design.
- Measures of success of Local Decision Making determined by the community.
- Conversations with each community in the Murdi Paaki area.
- Going back to communities to validate our findings.
- Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly having control of final report, including its dissemination.

While there are many strengths to the method used for the evaluation, there are some **limitations**:

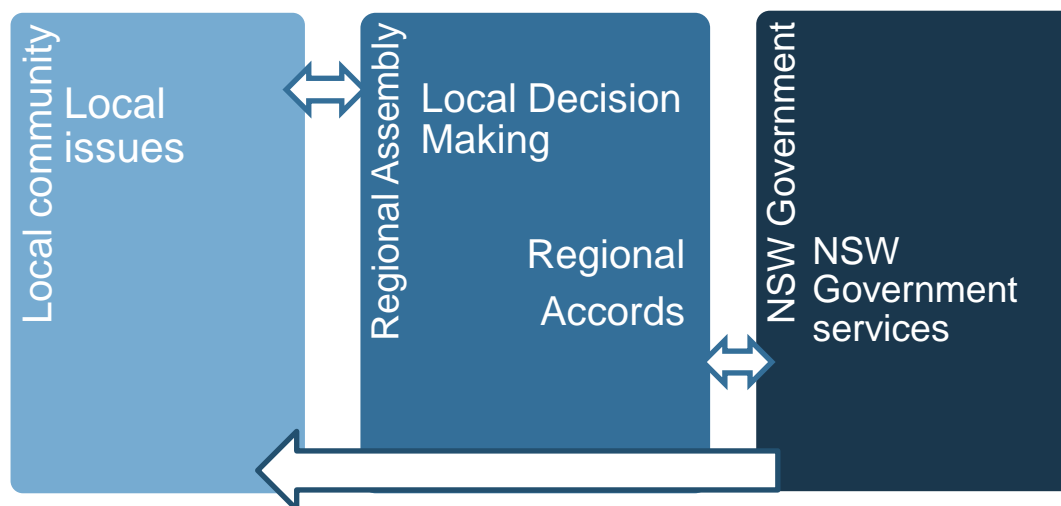
- Community researchers were not used in this phase due to the scale of the area and the difficulty recruiting appropriate participants in the timescales.
- Conversations were limited to people involved in the Local Decision Making process or governance, such as those representing a community through the Community Working Party. From early conversations in community it appeared that there was limited knowledge of Local Decision Making beyond those who were directly involved.
- The resources available for the evaluation were limited. For this reason, we were unable to spend longer in each community listening to more people due to the size of the area.
- The Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly has other funding streams and responsibilities; attribution of findings to the Local Decision Making process alone will be difficult.

## 2 Findings

To be effective, the Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly must work as a channel of communication between local communities and the NSW Government (see Figure 2). It is therefore important that information flows from the Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly back to communities, and that communities have knowledge of what the Assembly is doing on their behalf.

Communities' concerns and issues need to be raised in the Assembly so that the Assembly is aware of the current issues faced by Aboriginal peoples in the area and can act on their behalf. This is a very challenging task, especially because of the geography of the MPRA region, the number of communities represented, and the lack of infrastructure and support for Community Working Parties.

**Figure 2 Communication and services through Local Decision Making and Accords**



Challenges arise where specific local issues cannot be addressed at a regional level. The Assembly agenda is busy, and it is difficult for local priorities of each of the 16 member Aboriginal communities to be addressed in this forum. Regional issues are prioritised over local issues, which then become the responsibility of local communities. The Assembly can escalate local concerns to government services, but not in all matters.

On the other hand, to be effective, the Assembly has to work closely with NSW Government representatives to co-design relevant policies and programs, and to ensure government agencies are held to account for their work with Aboriginal communities. This requires NSW Government representatives who attend Assembly meetings to be able to make decisions to adapt service provision to meet community needs. This also requires the Assembly to have the relevant infrastructure and

resources, including relevant data, to be able to monitor services and to negotiate changes in services and policies where necessary.

Relationships and communication are key to the success of the Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly. This includes relationships within the 16 local areas, the Community Working Parties, the Assembly and all levels of government. It also includes NSW Local Aboriginal Land Councils and the Murdi Paaki Young and Emerging Leaders (Young Leaders). For communities' views to be heard at the Assembly, communities' representatives need to be able to attend meetings.

Importantly, the Assembly relies on volunteers to represent their communities. The only paid position at the Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly is the chair. Aboriginal Community Working Parties are run and administered by volunteers.

We were told by a **community member** that the work of the Community Working Party depends upon the individual people involved.

💬 If you've got one [community] where all Aboriginal community members are welcomed, and they turn up, that's good, but and if their chairperson then represents that at the Regional Assembly, I guess that's the way it's meant to work. But it just doesn't do that in other communities.

In some communities, participants told us that, due to local circumstances, there is no current functioning Community Working Party and this directly effects their role of local representation at the Regional Assembly. Where the Community Working Party is not functioning well, members of the community feel that the Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly is not representing their local issues.

Local community members also explained that there were few resources (travel costs only) to support regional representatives to participate in the Regional Assembly. In circumstances where the representative was ill, had work or family commitments, a community might not have a representative at the Assembly meeting that quarter. This impacted on local community perceptions of the Assembly.

We heard that in some local communities, representatives from the Community Working Party (CWP) and the Local Aboriginal Land Council (LALC) work easily together and in others there is some tension.

There was a wide range of relationships between CWPs and LALCS in the different Murdi Paaki communities. In some communities these bodies work very closely together, but in others this is not the case. In other communities the CWP or LALC were not functioning. Community members have expressed their concerns that LALCs are left out of the Regional Assembly process in some communities and are not involved adequately in liaison with Aboriginal Affairs NSW at the state level.

There are also concerns that the respective roles of CWPs and LALCs, and their regional and state level equivalents, should be clarified.

## 2.1 Community views of Local Decision Making

We heard from many community members, including members of Community Working Parties, Local Aboriginal Land Councils about their views and knowledge of *OCHRE* Local Decision Making and the Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly.

Participants identified the strengths and challenges of Local Decision Making.

### **Knowledge and understanding of Local Decision Making**

- Local Decision Making was recognised by some people but not everyone. Local Decision Making and the role of Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly needs to be better explained to local communities.
- Some participants said the Local Decision Making, Accord and structure of decision making has led to an improvement in relations with government.
- The name Local Decision Making is confusing as many participants felt decisions are being made at a regional level and not a local level. This is particular relevant given the vast geographic area of the region.

### **Community representation at the Regional Assembly**

- Working together at a regional level provides opportunities for local communities to share and support each other.
- Local representation at the Assembly depends on local community capacity and agreement.
- Representation relies on an operational Community Working Party, which is difficult in some communities.
- Community representatives must volunteer to attend the Regional Assembly and there are high expectations of them.
- A collective voice of local communities through the Regional Assembly makes government take notice.
- NSW Local Aboriginal Land Councils need to be better represented; the existing Local Aboriginal Land Council structure could support Local Decision Making.
- Decisions about local representation at the MPRA were not transparent across all 16 member communities.

### **Communication with local communities and organisations**

- Clear communication between local communities and the Regional Assembly is critical.
- Aboriginal Communities need support and resources to be part of the Regional Assembly, including a co-ordinator or project officers to support their work.
- Lack of resources presents challenges for communication between the Regional Assembly and local communities and organisations. Additional resources could support a communication strategy.

### **Local Issues and the Regional Assembly**


- The Regional Assembly needs to cover a wide range of issues from 16 different member communities across a geographical footprint of the Barwon Darling river system – some have common issues, and some have locally specific issues.
- Local Decision Making is not an avenue for *actual* local community level issues.
- There is sometimes a tension between regional decision making and local issues.

### **Developing Leadership**

- Developing leadership in local communities is a priority of the MPRA. Older Aboriginal community members are keen to support younger people to become culturally confident and represent their communities.
- Young people who have participated in the Murdi Paaki Aboriginal Young and Emerging Leaders (Young Leaders) were positive about their experiences.
- The Young Leaders coordinator position is under resourced (one day a week).
- The program is difficult to keep running due to a lack of funds for the project officer.
- Young Leaders often have other priorities, work commitments and family responsibilities, which impact on their time to voluntarily take part in programs.

## **2.1.1 Knowledge of Local Decision Making and MPRA**

People who had been involved in representing their local communities over a long period, explained to us there was some similarity between the Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly and other governance structures for Aboriginal people. However:

 [One the one hand] it was not much different [and on the other hand] it does give us local people a chance to say what we want when we go up there [to the Assembly].

They felt that the Assembly was an avenue for government agencies to directly engage with Aboriginal communities and respond to their priorities. **Community**

**members** familiar with the Assembly were confident that communication with the NSW Government went 'pretty well'.

One **member of the Assembly** said that government will now 'come and sit at the table', though also noted that some services are 'set in their own ways'. While government representatives are meeting directly with the Assembly, some maintain business as usual. Cultural competency, cultural safety and understanding of local issues are all in need of improvement. This participant said this could be solved by having local Aboriginal people working in all levels of government:

Well, we need Aboriginal people doing those jobs. They have a better understanding to our families within those communities.

Some **community members** told us that they would like a better understanding of the MPRA governance structure, decision-making process and community representation, particularly at the local level. Along with the physical distance, there is a gap in understanding at the local level. One community member felt that:

People don't even connect to them really, not in their head. Assembly is even further removed from the community. I bet three-quarters of this community couldn't tell you what the Regional Assembly is, or who's on it, or how it works, or how it's connected to CWP probably. It's just something that's out there somewhere.

Another community member thought it was important for Local Decision Making to be explained to the broader Aboriginal community. They proposed that one way to do that was for the Regional Assembly to travel to different local areas, so people can understand what it is:

People don't know what LDM is, it can cause issues when people can't articulate it, are we making the decisions? Are we part of that conversation?

## 2.1.2 Community representation at the Regional Assembly

Community representation at the Regional Assembly was key to communities feeling they have a voice in setting priorities for their local area. Local communities decide who attends the Regional Assembly and the issue of representation drew wide ranging views from participants. The smooth running of the Community Working Party in each area determines communities' sense of being represented. Community members said they need strong leaders with community backing to achieve this. In general, the Chair of each Community Working Party attends the MPRA.

Community members supported the workings of the Regional Assembly to represent local communities across a large area. It was a forum for local communities to have a more influential voice with government. One **community member** stated:

There are all these different groups that exist within and I think the great thing about the Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly model is that those Community Working Parties are open to the whole community to attend, to share those issues.

Another commented that:

The only other thing I want to say, I believe the Regional Assembly has a – all the 16 communities now have a voice whereas before they didn't. And you know, we have people from the Federal Government and the State Government turning up to our meetings over there on different issues that affects our communities. And I think if the Regional Assembly wasn't there and the community working parties weren't there, we'd be still at home – everyone else would be still coming in and telling us what we should do. Now we're telling the government what to do.

Each Community Working Party decides on its governance, terms of reference and election process. However, views of adequate local representation at the Regional Assembly are mixed. Some communities believe they are well-represented. Other communities told us there is a lack of transparency about representation at the Regional Assembly. There are some concerns about how people came to be at the Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly. One **Land Council member** explained:

While it is good that communities can tailor things to fit their community, maybe the actual election and representative process should be more, what do you call it, I don't know. That's what I hear people say. They kind of feel like sometimes it's almost hand-picked or they don't have a say, or they don't quite know how they can get involved or how they vote. Then again, it's the same, like, even with Land Councils it's the same.

Community participation and consensus at local levels affects the area's representation. We were told that the effectiveness of Community Working Parties has a direct impact on how communities are represented at the Regional Assembly. For people without representation, due to local factors including conflict or a lack of community volunteers, they may need a better solution for taking their concerns to the Regional Assembly.

We heard that the Assembly was considered to be a single voice for Aboriginal people in the Murdi Paaki Region. However, this was challenged when some communities felt they were not adequately represented. Outlining the concerns, **community members** said:

One of my concerns has always been that there's really no across the board pattern for [Community] Working Parties.

And:

So, you know the thought that the Regional Assembly has become a voice that's made up of an assortment of different groups and you know is now being looked at as a voice from both Federal and State Governments, really concerns me. Because it's not representative ... there's no standards to set [representation] by. And there's really no electoral base. ... And so, you've got a body that is speaking for all of these communities and the communities think hang on.

Competing priorities for voluntary members and local tensions can make it difficult for communities to have representation at the Regional Assembly. One **Young Leader** said:

You know, these are all things that are really hard to do when you're in a voluntary capacity, do you know what I mean? And we're all here to help our communities but so is mainstream and mainstream has a government system that's set up. They have a council chambers, they have a bunch of workers, you know what I mean. We're expected to do the same thing for our communities under-resourced and in a voluntary capacity.

This is a common view from participants that resources available to community representatives are limited, and that it is extremely challenging for members of the Regional Assembly, Community Working Parties and Young Leaders group to carry out their functions without resources and infrastructure. However, some participants were reluctant for these groups to become dependent on NSW Government resources.

### 2.1.3 Communication with local communities and organisations

We were told that local communities needed to know what is happening to feel included and that their concerns are being addressed. We heard that communication with local communities is important to the success of Local Decision Making and the Regional Assembly. One **community member** was supportive of Local Decision Making, and felt it was important for communities to hear about the Regional Assembly.

... the framework of LDM is great, it looks great on paper, but how it will actually roll out on the ground from a community level is I think where the main concern is, because there's no communication coming back from the Regional Assembly back into the communities and there's a lot of disrespect with that.

**Community representatives** at the Regional Assembly are volunteers and do not have the resources to communicate fully with their communities. One member suggested that the Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly administration fee contribute to communicating with local communities.

Yeah, and I guess at the end of the day – I’m going to be a bit blunt, but the Regional Assembly has money at the moment, they have the ability to put on staff and Maari Ma collect a very nice administration fee from that money. There should be no excuses to why documentation can’t be given back to community working parties, with the amount of money that’s being thrown around there should be no excuses to why Maari Ma can’t put together five-page documents with the key snippets from the meeting and attach any PowerPoint presentations, any key information really.

One **Community Working Party** representative discussed the process of decision making at the Regional Assembly. It is suggested Community Working Party representatives have time to discuss issues with their local communities before making decisions at the regional level.

#### 2.1.4 Local issues and the Regional Assembly

We heard that the large geographic area of the Murdi Paaki region presents many challenges for the Assembly. Despite being called Local Decision Making, the Regional Assembly is not the way for some local issues to be addressed. The challenge for the Regional Assembly is to address regional and common issues across the 16 communities. Local issues need to be addressed locally by representative groups. Community representatives expressed some frustration that local issues were not taken seriously by government when raised at the local level, while the Regional Assembly had the authority to make government services accountable.

**Members of the Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly** noted the challenges for a Regional Assembly to cover specific local issues.

How can the LDM cover all communities in a day? How can the conversations or focus cover everywhere? Every community is different.

One participant explained:

And at the end of the day, the Regional Assembly is an advocacy body, so how is an advocacy body going to determine funding agreements without having some form of interest.

Some members were concerned at the tension caused when regional decisions are made about local issues:

If under LDM the capacity is given to the Regional Assembly to nominate or have a say in where the funding is allocated in regional towns, that’s a major concern for [some] Land Councils. It pretty much means that with ... community fractures [that local area] will not get any state or federal funding for any projects.

The role of Local Aboriginal Land Councils was discussed by many participants in the evaluation. One member suggested that Land Councils have the capacity and membership to know local issues:

- ☐ Yeah, and we don't get any feedback on what happens at a regional level with Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly, back to the local. And especially Land Council. Land Council hold the biggest membership within the region, within all of New South Wales you might say, and those feedbacks are not given back to those communities, right?
- ☐ So, you've got a board at the Regional Assembly and we used to have a chair that goes up there. He didn't know what our issues were out here. We've got issues like with our street lighting, foot pathing, roads, some of the infrastructure that's on the reserve alone. Nope, didn't even know how to take it up, you know what I mean?

Importantly, we do not have a benchmark to compare community members' views of Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly with views of other representative organisations, either Aboriginal, or others such as shire councils. It is quite likely that not all local Aboriginal communities are fully engaged in these other bodies, either in the Murdi Paaki region or in Australia generally, and therefore that the Assembly is not all that different from other regional representative organisations generally in terms of communication with local communities.

### 2.1.5 Developing leadership

Community members are positive about developing young leaders to become part of the Regional Assembly. Some discussed the value of passing on responsibilities. **One community member** said:

- ☐ So, I think that's, you know, that's really important that I'd like to be thinking not only over the next 10 years but the, you know, next 20 years that people like [name] and others, particularly from the Young and Emerging Leaders, they're going to be a lot more savvy then - than just us people sitting at the table, you know....

We were told that the Young Leaders forums are financially supported by the Regional Assembly and are held twice a year. Additionally:

- ☐ Four delegates are elected from the forum to then attend the Regional Assembly and those delegates were to represent the Young Leaders.

Some Young Leaders have taken up opportunities to participate and develop their understanding of the Assembly's governance. **One Young Leader** explained:

- ☞ Sure, yeah, yeah. And I've got to give like the assembly credit as well. They've been – in the short time that I've been with the Young Leaders, the Assembly have been very active in their support of the Young Leaders. Not just talking about it, but actually, you know, valuing our opinions you know talking about you know – and its I suppose, it's a big privilege for us and culturally as well that we maintain that respect but also, it's a great privilege and its very great to see that the established leaders are actually serious in what they talk about.
- ☞ So, they've been actually supporting the Young Leaders and giving us a lot of opportunities and that as well, so it's been really good.

Young Leaders forums have been held across the region. Participants found the experience positive. One **Young Leader** shared:

- ☞ So being involved with the Young Leaders, like hearing all the other issues in the communities are pretty much the same, like, everywhere. It's good to catch up and meet new people from like all the region. And I'm slowly building up my confidence to speak in all the meetings.

The forums are also developing a succession plan to support younger leaders at the local level. Engaging young Aboriginal people takes time and they need support to develop confidence to participate. Different events have been held to support participation in the community, including working with school students.

- ☞ So, honouring everyone. I think that's really empowerment in a sense as well. Honouring the people in the community. Being able to talk to them and validating their opinion, whether we agree with it or not, and I think that's I suppose the key to this kind of projects.

While there is overall support for the Young Leaders program, there are challenges. Currently the program needs a project officer and there is a lack of funds to support that role. The program needs support and infrastructure to help Young Leaders make decisions about what they want to do. Additionally, many have other time commitments, including work and family. There are also succession planning challenges, with some Young Leaders, as they age, needing to be replaced by the next generation of young leaders.

## 2.2 Relationships to and with government and services

### Regional Assembly, local communities and government

- Local Decision Making is perceived as a government driven process but does provide opportunities to form regional relationships with government.

- The Assembly can engage service providers by putting the question back on service providers about their roles and responsibility in the community (making them accountable).

#### **Local communities' experiences with government and service provision**

- Local communities continue to work with governments at a local level.
- Local communities feel that government services are not employing or training local Aboriginal people.
- Government services are perceived as not always culturally competent and can be racist.
- The relationship between NSW Government and NSW Local Aboriginal Land Councils is not straightforward and varies between different communities and levels.

### 2.2.1 Regional Assembly, local communities and government

Following the development of the Accords, the Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly believes it now has the capacity to bring service providers to the table and demand they are accountable and responsible to local Aboriginal communities for the services they are funded to provide in the region. One **member of the Assembly**, associated with providing services to local communities, says the Assembly can communicate directly with government in ways that Community Working Parties cannot. The Assembly and the Accords are an opportunity to trigger responses to serious local issues.

Yeah. All those. It's a massive impact within communities. I mean, and this is where we can voice our opinion. You can get the support through the Working Party in communities, but it goes to another level and those other providers sitting at the table. And with the change I think that may come from the assembly making all those other services accountable and responsible for what we – because being frontline, we see it all and the only other ones [services] we see there is the ambulance and police.

Some **members of the Assembly** were optimistic that the changes set up by the Accords would eventually occur and cultural change in government departments was possible.

It's kind of the practise or the implementation of any strategy; takes time and there's a lot of learning in the process. And we know in the 10 years of the chronic disease strategy of how challenging that was, (at Maari Ma) not only to re-orientate the workforce, but to re-orientate that community's interface with the health service provider. And essentially that was part of this LDM Accord that the Regional Assembly have with the state as well. So, it stipulates that state service providers are to sit at the table with the Regional Assembly

and to bring more accountability if you like to the services they're providing.

- ☞ In saying that, sometimes some of the services are a bit slow on the offtake [sic] if you like. They might have a directive from their department but doesn't necessarily mean that they're proactive to jump implementing that in a proactive way if you like.
- ☞ So, the Accord though does start to change that culture in the way those state service providers act and build that dialogue with the Aboriginal leadership of the region.

We heard that not all service providers have taken up opportunities to work with the Regional Assembly:

- ☞ So, some communities are okay, some services are okay in terms of their engagement with service providers. And I guess there's some kind of work to be done around ensuring that those state funded programs or service providers are more proactive in getting to the table.
- ☞ Certainly, there are members around the Regional Assembly that continually invite services that continually [do] not attend.

One **community member** explained both the frustration at the local community level with working with government and the importance of the Regional Assembly to formalise concerns at a higher level, by stating:

- ☞ The Chair needs to act on these things at an executive level and hold stakeholders accountable. At my level as just a community member, it is just hear-say – it needs to be dealt with by all the executives. Community level falls on deaf ears. It has to be formal at high levels.

Negotiations are currently underway to develop an Aboriginal social housing management model for the Murdi Paaki region (Far West NSW). These negotiations between the Assembly and NSW Government are being progressed as a part of Local Decision Making and will include consultations with social housing providers, Local Aboriginal Land Councils and the Commonwealth Government.

The model which was developed by the Assembly and is currently being negotiated, seeks to:

- Improve the quality of services to tenants
- Increase the supply of housing
- Restore condition of existing housing
- Support Aboriginal housing organisations to build their capacity.

This report belongs to the Aboriginal Communities of the Murdi Paaki region.

The negotiations include representatives from the Assembly, as well as senior representatives from key NSW Government Departments, including the Department of Premier and Cabinet, Aboriginal Affairs NSW, the Department of Family and Community Services, the Aboriginal Housing Office, Land and Housing Corporation, and NSW Treasury.

This negotiation is the first real attempt under Local Decision Making to co-design and manage an area of policy in NSW.<sup>1</sup>

## 2.2.2 Local community experiences with government and service provision

There is much less satisfaction at the local level about service delivery than at a regional level. Regional level services appear to be operating well. However, most participants in local communities reported that relationships with different levels of government had yet to improve.

**Local community members** explained that they have consistently represented their communities to highlight local issues and develop community action plans.

One participant said:

As someone said, I could wallpaper my house with the number of those things that I've got, and nothing ever happens.

We heard from some communities that local issues of racism in housing and relationships with police remains, and that service delivery does not accommodate local contexts. In some places services are still:

Fly-in fly-out, drive-in drive-out.

**Community members** voiced frustration about the time it takes to create change, adequately resource Aboriginal services, and address racism:

It's a real problem that for a lot of years - I've been in the league for over 25 years and it seems that 25 years later we're still saying the exact same things [which] are not being listened to. We're never sort of really valued as being able to bring solutions to change the dynamics of what's happening in our community. We've had service, Aboriginal services, that have been closed down and never supported to be brought back into the arena to be able to deliver the services to our people. It's always outside services coming into our community.

I think one of the things in relation to service delivery, which is what was one of the priorities, and I think it still is in a sense, the priority of being able to have proper monitoring and evaluation processes of

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<sup>1</sup> Source: Correspondence with Aboriginal Affairs NSW

services that are being delivered; to be able to evaluate that services and things to see where the gaps and why things seem to be still failing and the majority of funding that comes to our communities is mainly provided to mainstream services that provide that delivery to our communities.

☞ The high racism that exists in local communities and the cultural incompetence of a lot of workers that work there makes it very difficult for our people to be able to get equitable services from the service delivery that's delivered.

Housing is a critical issue. One **community member** highlighted an example where services did not talk to, or involve a local community:

☞ [Government] gave AHO money and they bought some houses for Aboriginal people. They allowed – that was done without any talk to us – they allowed to bring people from another community and put in the house here or wherever.

Another member felt the MPRA could be instrumental in bringing about much needed housing reforms, saying that local Aboriginal people can benefit from training and employment through housing maintenance. This point also links to an emergent theme of Aboriginal employment strategies.

**Community members** also expressed ongoing frustration when negotiating with government to bring appropriate and well-resourced services to local areas. In one example, we heard that opportunities for work were available in the cotton industry. However, local Aboriginal people:

☞ ...won't support cotton and anywhere, where cotton is because they've gone out there and they've killed some of that traditional ground where ceremonies were held and they're just – yeah. Those people around cotton, Aboriginal people won't support them. It's an industry of employment but they won't support it.

One participant explained a lack of cultural competency, cultural safety and sensitivity by governments and lack of equitable relationships when working in local communities. Service providers come from outside; employment and training opportunities for local Aboriginal people are overlooked. The participant further argued:

☞ What I say is, you know, partnerships are great. But if there's inequity in a partnership it doesn't work. Also, I think another thing - a thing that's sort of emerging is governments are quite clever at the divide and rule tactics that they use within communities by bringing other Aboriginal services and things into our communities to - to manage our services without the involvement of the local community.

## Relationships between government and Local Aboriginal Land Councils

Although there are some NSW Local Aboriginal Land Council representatives at the Assembly, some Land Council representatives told us of their concerns about Local Decision Making. As one participant explained:

- ☞ Of course, from Land Council we do have a councillor that sits on the Regional Assembly who doesn't always attend, but from an operational perspective I don't get any feedback in regard to the Regional Assembly. I don't know what's going on, we don't know what new initiatives are out there or what's coming out.
- ☞ We don't get engaged, it's actually starting to come to the point where we do have service providers just going straight to the Regional Assembly and not engaging with Land Councils, and then before we know it projects are starting to roll out and then they're just coming to Land Councils and going we're on the ground, we realise we need to use some of your assets, or we need to use this, or we want help with this, and it's like well you guys haven't engaged with us, you've completely bypassed us, we've known you've been around for a good six to twelve months.

Importantly, we were told, that there was a need for Aboriginal Affairs NSW to have an ongoing working relationship with NSW Local Aboriginal Land Councils as both bodies are accountable to the same Minister. In some cases, NSW Government, Land Councils and other Aboriginal services were co-located in the same geographical community. This makes it easier to maintain and support relationships between organisations.

We heard that the organisational structure of NSW Local Aboriginal Land Councils could support Local Decision Making but was not being used. Some community members felt NSW Government was imposing structure onto Aboriginal communities and stepping over existing structures.

- ☞ But the Local Decision Making needs to be – you know what I mean, when I look at it even now you've got Land Council, Land Council should have been under that document, what do they call it? *OCHRE*. *OCHRE* sits here, and you've got Land Rights here. At the end of the day, *OCHRE* should have been flown into that there around the decision making for Land Council to become more empowered on the ground. That's my opinion.

So, the decision making should be left to the Land Council, so then you wouldn't have all this other Community Working Party stuff and so forth. Because the Community Working Party is no different to any Land Council board of directors or anything making a decision.

- ☞ So, the model should be that local Land Council – they've been around for 30 years, compared to Community Working Parties or

the Regional Assembly. Those fellas, those Land Council could be made up of the Regional Assembly because then they know all the issues that need to be dealt with up here like your infrastructure stuff, roads and so forth. Now it can like work with the local government, you know what I mean?

At the moment there's too many divisions here. But if *OCHRE* flows in alongside the *Land Rights Act* to make it work with Land Council, I reckon we'll get somewhere.

## 2.3 Implementation of Accords in Murdi Paaki

Implementing Local Decision Making, through the Accord process, is only one of the roles of the Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly.

The Assembly is at Stage 1 of the Local Decision Making process (Section 6.3.4). At this stage, the Assembly is not implementing services directly, but has identified priorities to address with government (see MPRA 2016a). Table 1 below is a summary progress against the priorities identified in the Accord and the deliverables under each priority area.

There are 60 actions linked to the five priorities. The report from 2016 (MPRA 2016a) illustrates that a majority of these have commenced with three having been achieved.

**Table 1 Overview of progress against Accord priorities**

Priority	Total deliverables	Not commenced	Planning	Commenced	Closed	Achieved
Housing & Property	32	2	5	22	3	
Economic Development	14	7	3	4		
Education & Training	15	8	1	6		
Early Childhood	3			2		1
Governance & Capacity	6			4		2
Total	60	17	9	38	3	3

## 3 Discussion and recommendations

### 3.1.1 Is Local Decision Making being implemented as intended? What is working well? What could be improved?

Evaluation of the implementation of the Accords is an ongoing process. Murdi Paaki Local Decision Making is still at Phase 1 of the implementation process (see Section 6.3.4). Questions of successful implementation of the Accords in local communities cannot be addressed at this stage of the evaluation. The focus of this stage of the evaluation is therefore how Local Decision Making is being implemented. Note that MPRA is establishing a service arm to provide direct services to communities.

### 3.1.2 What is working well?

Local Decision Making through the Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly is overall a positive process for most communities in the region.

MPRA has been meeting for over two decades and has become an established body within the Aboriginal community of Western NSW. The Assembly's governance model has worked well for the region and is now entering a new phase in which Murdi Paaki Regional Services will be able to take increasing responsibility for service delivery to Aboriginal communities in the region. The Assembly has also had success in bringing key decision makers in government and service providers to the table and getting commitments from them for improvements in service delivery, including in housing, health, employment, environment and policing. This is still a work in progress, and the perception of many of the stakeholders is that services are patchy and inadequate and, in many cases, culturally insensitive; however, there is an overall belief that this is improving, despite the perception that the region overall is in economic decline.

### 3.1.3 What could be improved?

While there have been some improvements in relationships between the Assembly and government, there are still areas for improvement at the local and state level.

For Murdi Paaki Local Decision Making to improve, there needs commitment from all government services to work with the Assembly to ensure Aboriginal community priorities are addressed. For example, state and local government could insist on service providers working with the Assembly. Government service providers and representatives could further develop and build cultural capability.

The Young Leaders program needs project officer support and financial resources to develop and increase opportunities for young people to participate. Further, there needs to be some change to the name as Local Decision Making is about regional decision-making, not local and is misleading.

## 3.2 Do outcomes continue to reflect what Aboriginal communities wants to achieve?

Overall, the view of most participants we listened to indicated that Local Decision Making, through the Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly, was an effective mechanism for Aboriginal representation and governance in the Murdi Paaki region. This is despite the significant challenges for the Assembly and for the communities represented by it. The Assembly has made significant progress in engaging with government and service providers, and holding them to account; however, there is consensus that more could be done to strengthen this accountability.

On the other hand, most participants believed that governance at the local level, and local representation on the Regional Assembly, was under resourced and that this is the priority for future investment in the model. Murdi Paaki divides the funds for Local Decision Making between 16 member communities. This has resulted in **little more than tea and coffee money** being available for each community.

### 3.2.1 Are the priorities in local Community Action Plans being addressed and outcomes achieved?

At this stage of the evaluation it is unclear what outcomes have been achieved in terms of each of the Accord priorities at local community levels. The implementation of the Accords can be monitored through the *Continuing Conversations* within the OCHRE Evaluation. Aboriginal Affairs NSW are also developing a Minimum Dataset which will measure progress of NSW Government and Regional Assemblies, but this is not yet in place.

### 3.2.2 Do local Aboriginal communities feel heard by government?

We heard from some Aboriginal communities that they will know government has listened to them when services are implemented in a way that the communities want and need. This is something that the ongoing evaluation will continue to monitor.

On the one hand, the Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly has the capacity to bring state (and Commonwealth) government decision makers to the table to talk with Aboriginal community representatives. This is perceived to be one of the significant successes of MPRA and the Regional Assembly model. However, participants indicated that service providers' responses have not been thoroughly evaluated. To report on this area there needs to be more follow up to indicate how policies/services have changed (or not) because of discussions with MPRA. There are concerns that some issues have not been addressed despite discussion at a regional level. Local Aboriginal communities still report being over-looked and local concerns not being addressed.

### 3.2.3 What has been unsuccessful, because this will assist in learning what has been successful and why?

Community told us resources did not match the goals of the Local Decision Making model, particularly for the size and diversity of the Murdi Paaki region.

The issue of adequate representation was a key one for many community members, who felt that local communities are not all adequately and equally represented at the Regional Assembly.

Additionally, there is some tension identified by Local Aboriginal Land Councils who felt they were not integrated into the Regional Assembly model.

### 3.3 What improvements could be made?

Community members explained there is areas for improvements to ensure the success of Local Decision Making in the Murdi Paaki region. Many of these improvements are connected to issues of NSW Government representatives responding to the Regional Assembly priorities, and representation of diverse communities across the region.

Increased resources are needed at the local level to support Community Working Parties (in communities) and to improve representation and infrastructure at the Regional Assembly. There also needs improved structural support for Young Leaders programs and solve communication with communities.

NSW Government services need to become more culturally competent in working with NSW Aboriginal peoples, demonstrating culturally safe and culturally acceptable policies and practices. Information about the Regional Assembly and Local Decision Making priorities and responsibilities under the Accord needs to be circulated more widely to all local communities.

### 3.4 Are OCHRE policies and practices responding to evidence?

MPRA was the first Regional Assembly to be set up, and was, until early 2018, the only one which has signed its accords with the NSW Government (IWAAC Accords have now been signed). The evidence produced by Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly in the process of signing the Accord, and also in its governance structures and processes, has been taken on board by other emerging Assemblies and Alliances, as well as the NSW Government in supporting and resourcing this process. Although no other Local Decision Making organisation has directly copied the Murdi Paaki model, they have all drawn on Murdi Paaki's experience to develop representative bodies which fit their local needs. NSW Government has also used the experience of MPRA and its Accord process to refine and streamline the accords signing process for other regional assemblies and alliances.

## 3.5 Recommendations

### Recommendations for NSW Government

Theme	Recommendation
<p>Accord Process – Accountability of service providers</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure all service providers work with the Accord process and Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly (MPRA), including engaging with Community Working Parties (CWPs) at the local level.</li> <li>• Put in place Local Accords or other forms of agreement to ensure that all agencies and service providers attend CWP meetings and to commit services to meeting the needs of local Aboriginal communities. Make attendance at CWPs a contractual requirement for all local service providers.</li> </ul>
<p>Communication</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Share Local Decision Making (LDM) process and outcomes more widely with local communities. Clarify the role of MPRA and CWPs in that process.</li> <li>• Communicate and promote LDM priorities and responsibilities under the Accord more widely to local communities.</li> <li>• Provide additional resources – for communication and secretariat support of volunteer members of the Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly.</li> <li>• Increase communications between the MPRA and local communities and organisations to provide information and feedback.</li> </ul>
<p>Continuing Professional Development in Cultural competency  Aboriginal Cultural competence standards in government services</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• NSW Government to continue to improve cultural competence across all departments and services.</li> <li>• All service providers (government and non-government) to continue to develop cultural competence, particularly at a local level.</li> </ul>
<p>Leadership – Young Leaders Program</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide more structural resources to increase the number of young people accessing the Aboriginal Young Leaders Program.</li> <li>• Provide more resources to expand Young Leaders Coordinators and Project Officer positions to support the Young Leaders Program.</li> </ul>

Theme	Recommendation
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Design and implement a succession plan for Young Leaders – as young leaders age, provide succession planning for the next generation of young leaders.</li> </ul>
Representation and inclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fully engage other Aboriginal representative structures such as NSW AECG Inc., ACCHOs, etc. in the process of LDM.</li> </ul>
Representation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase resources and support for all 16 member communities to ensure local participation at the regional level through the MPRA and to enable members to feed back to CWPs.</li> <li>• Provide greater transparency in processes for representation at MPRA.</li> <li>• LDM is not 'local' but regional decision making. It is therefore important that the LDM label is changed to something more representative of the actual model.</li> </ul>
Representation and inclusion of NSW Local Aboriginal Land Councils (LALCs)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improve relationships between CWPs, MPRA and LALCs.</li> <li>• Better align roles, responsibilities and accountability structures of LDM and LALCs.</li> <li>• Explore options for greater inclusion of LALCs in LDM and MPRA.</li> <li>• Provide mechanisms for communication and representation for LALCs with Aboriginal Affairs NSW at the state level.</li> </ul>
Representation and inclusion of local issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide more time, processes and resources for members to discuss issues with the CWPs and local communities prior to making decisions at the Regional Assembly.</li> </ul>
Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide better support (financial and administrative) to ensure MPRA LDM and Accords are discussed with all 16 member communities.</li> <li>• Resource the LDM to match the size and diversity of the Murdi Paaki region and the Accord priorities.</li> </ul>
Service System – capacity building connected services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Link local services with local Aboriginal services; for example, train and employ local Aboriginal people to carry out repairs and maintenance on local housing.</li> </ul>

Theme	Recommendation
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure a commitment by <u>all</u> NSW Government services to work with the Assembly to ensure Aboriginal community priorities are addressed.</li> </ul>
Service System – connected and responsive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All levels of government and other service providers to plan and operate a more connected and responsive service system.</li> <li>• All relevant agencies and service providers to attend and participate in CWP meetings as part of their working towards building a connected service system that is responsive to the self-determined needs of local Aboriginal peoples.</li> </ul>
Service System – evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure thorough monitoring and evaluation of services, including service needs and gaps, using local Aboriginal determined indicators.</li> </ul>

## 4 Future focus - next steps

### 4.1 Stage 1 of the evaluation

This is community-controlled research. We have listened to feedback on the draft report and made changes requested, without compromising the independence of the report. This is the final report for Stage 1 of the *OCHRE* Evaluation Murdi Paaki Local Decision Making. The Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly has accepted the report. The report will be provided to Aboriginal Affairs NSW (on 30 June 2018) and will then be presented formally to the Minister on 15 August 2018.

The evaluation team will draw lessons from all *OCHRE* sites being evaluated and present a synthesis report to the NSW Coalition of Aboriginal Regional Alliances (NCARA).

### 4.2 Direction of next conversations – Stage 2

There are two more stages to the evaluation:

- Stage 2, from July 2018 to June 2021 will identify changes experienced by communities, outcomes and make recommendations for improving the initiatives.
- Stage 3, from July 2021 to June 2024 will assess the contribution the initiative has made in meeting long-term goals and make recommendations for improving the initiative.

Based on the conversations to date (including co-design and using community researchers), we propose the next conversations (Stage 2) include and discuss:

- LDM Accord services undertake regular monitoring and formative evaluation to ensure programs are adapted to suit each community and are working well.
- Improved feedback about the evaluation to communities.
- The co-design process should involve people other than MPRA members.

This report belongs to the Aboriginal Communities of the Murdi Paaki region.

## Part B:

# About Murdi Paaki and *OCHRE* Local Decision Making

## 5 About the Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly

### 5.1 The Murdi Paaki Region

The Murdi Paaki region occupies greater than 40% of the land mass of New South Wales, from the Queensland border in the north to the Victorian border in the south, from Collarenebri in the east to the South Australian border in the west (MPRA, 2016b: 4). The region includes communities of Gulargambone, Coonamble, Walgett, Collarenebri, Lightning Ridge, Goodooga, Weilmoringle, Brewarrina, Enngonia, Bourke, Cobar, Wilcannia, Broken Hill, Menindee, Ivanhoe, and Dareton/Wentworth. There are close to 8,400 Aboriginal people living in these communities with an estimated 11% under 5 years of age.

A Community Portrait for the Murdi Paaki Region has been prepared by Aboriginal Affairs NSW, including the most recent 2016 Census data (Aboriginal Affairs NSW, 2018).

### 5.2 The Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly

The Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly is the regional Aboriginal governance body for the Murdi Paaki Region. The Assembly evolved from the previous Murdi Paaki Regional Council which was established under the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC), 1989, and has its origins in a system of Community Working Parties. 'The Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly is a formal affiliation of Aboriginal communities and, as such, purposely does not have legal standing' (Aboriginal Affairs NSW, 2017: 3). MPRA governance involves key elements of 'community control, engagement with government, improved service delivery, and cultural legitimacy' (Jeffries & Menham, 2009: 1). The Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly derives its authority from Community Working Parties and is not incorporated. The Assembly's governance model promotes the practice of good governance, responsible leadership and empowerment; this is a legacy of the former Murdi Paaki ATSIC Regional Council (Jeffries & Menham, 2009: 1).

Membership of MPRA comprises Chairpersons or nominees from the sixteen Community Working Parties (CWPs) representing the communities ..., representatives of the Murdi Paaki Aboriginal Young and Emerging Leaders (MPAY&ELP), three NSW Aboriginal Land Council (NSWALC) Councillors, and an independent Chairperson (Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly, 2006: 1).

On 1 August 2005, the Commonwealth and New South Wales Governments signed a Shared Responsibility Agreement which recognised the Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly and its constituent Community Working Parties as the peak regional Indigenous community structure in the Murdi Paaki region of western New South Wales (Jeffries & Menham, 2009: 3).

The focus of the Regional Assembly is on determining regional priorities for 'government and service providers to align their service delivery arrangements to the needs of Aboriginal people and their communities' (Jeffries & Menham, 2009: 8). The Murdi Paaki Regional Plan continues the strategic development first established in July 1995 (MPRA, 2016b). The regional plan identifies objectives in heritage and culture; regional resourcing and capability; democracy, leadership and citizenship; economic development; law and justice; early childhood and school education; housing and infrastructure; and wellbeing. The Assembly is assisted in its work by Murdi Paaki Regional Services.

Regional Assembly representatives are volunteers, except for the chair. The position of chair is elected after talking with communities and government services. The current Chair of the Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly is Mr Des Jones. The Regional Assembly meets four times a year in Cobar. The auspices are conducted by Maari Maa (Health).

### 5.3 Community Working Parties

Community Working Parties were set up to enable community participation and have operated as advocate for rights, social, housing and other initiatives, and are an avenue of representation for local communities. In the 16 communities of the Murdi Paaki region, Community Working Parties were first formally established in the 1990s (Walden, 2016: 147).

In some communities the Community Working Party chair attends the MPRA, in others the role is shared.

Community Working Parties are voluntary organisations without financial administrative support. The Murdi Paaki website describes the Community Working Party as 'the foundation stones of the Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly and are the community's Aboriginal voice, not only on their needs and aspirations, but also on the issues faced by their community' (MPRA, n.d.).

The historical reality is that CWP (and MRPA) have only been able to survive and thrive in the long-term as peak decision-making entities because of the dedication of individual within their communities and the commitment of MPRA initiated regional enterprises (MPREC, Maari Ma and the MPRHC) which have stepped in to subsidise MPRA activities from time to time over the years (MPRA & University of Sydney, 2015: 34).

Volunteers in these organisations occupy multiple roles. One Community Working Party has a regular attendance of 15-25 members, in another location, there is no Community Working Party. Aboriginal people from communities without a Community Working Party have no representative at the Regional Assembly.

## 6 OCHRE Local Decision Making

### 6.1 About OCHRE

*POCHRE* (Opportunity, Choice, Healing, Responsibility, Empowerment) is a community-focused plan for Aboriginal people in NSW. *POCHRE* was developed by the NSW Government in response to conversations with over 2,700 Aboriginal people in NSW who identified Aboriginal language and culture, education and employment, and accountability as priorities for Aboriginal communities.

*POCHRE* includes a number of different programs and supports:

- Connected Communities where schools work in partnership with Aboriginal leaders in the local community to improve education outcomes for young Aboriginal people.
- Opportunity Hubs which provide young Aboriginal people with clear pathways and incentives to stay at school and transition into employment, training or further education.
- Industry Based Agreements with industry to support Aboriginal employment and enterprise.
- Language and Culture Nests to revitalise and maintain languages as an integral part of culture and identity.
- Local Decision Making where Aboriginal communities are given a progressively bigger say in what services are delivered in their communities, and how they are delivered.
- An Aboriginal Economic Prosperity Framework that drives the long-term and sustainable economic prosperity of Aboriginal people and their communities across NSW.
- A Deputy Ombudsman (Aboriginal Programs) to improve transparency and accountability in the provision of services to Aboriginal communities and the outcomes they deliver.

The overall objective of *POCHRE* is to transform the NSW Government's relationship with Aboriginal communities in NSW, allowing Aboriginal communities to increase ownership of the policies and programs that affect them, and to ensure that government services are coordinated and effective.

The aims of *POCHRE* are to:

- Teach more Aboriginal language and culture to build people's pride and identity.
- Support more Aboriginal students to stay at school.
- Support more Aboriginal young people to get fulfilling and sustainable jobs.

- Grow local Aboriginal leaders' and communities' capacity to drive their own solutions.
- Focus on creating opportunities for economic empowerment.
- Make both government and communities more accountable for the money they spend (Aboriginal Affairs NSW, 2013: 5).

Evaluation is a key component of *OCHRE*, providing ongoing evidence to improve the effectiveness of *OCHRE* projects and outcomes into the future, and informing the NSW Government about the future expansion of *OCHRE*.

## 6.2 What is *OCHRE* Local Decision Making?

Local Decision Making was developed during the work of the Ministerial Taskforce on Aboriginal Affairs, based on conversations with Aboriginal people, and has been further developed and reviewed with Local Decision Making Alliances. The program aims to 'fundamentally and positively change the relationship between Aboriginal communities and government and enable Aboriginal communities to participate fully in decision making concerning service design and delivery'; ...'sovereignty and self-determination are a fundamental factor in generating sustained socio-economic development and wellbeing in Aboriginal communities' (Aboriginal Affairs NSW, 2017: 4). This approach recognises that governments also need to reform and develop capacity to enable this to happen.

Aboriginal Affairs NSW is the lead agency for Local Decision Making and provides support and coordination of the process. Other stakeholders are:

- The Regional Alliance, in establishing priorities and making decisions on behalf of the community.
- NCARA, in providing advocacy and oversight.
- The Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, in championing Local Decision Making within government as well as overseeing the implementation of *OCHRE*.
- NSW Department of Premier and Cabinet, in managing cross-government change.
- NSW Treasury, in supporting change and developing flexible funding arrangements.
- Secretaries Board, in approving arrangements.
- Other government agencies, in providing information and negotiating Accord.

The purpose of Local Decision Making is to 'give Aboriginal community-based regional decision-making groups (regional alliances) an increased say in government service delivery', 'placing Aboriginal people at the centre of service design, planning and delivery' (Aboriginal Affairs NSW, 2017: 5). The alliance enters into an agreement called the Accord that defines the relationship, identifies priorities

for the region, as well as 'key actions to achieve desired outcomes, timeframes, resources, responsibilities and define what success will look like'. The Alliance's decision-making powers will increase over time but will exclude statutory regulation functions such as policing, justice, child protection and environmental regulation.

The principles of self-determination are embedded in LDM, by the following:

- Aboriginal people have the right to determine their own governance and decision-making structures in accordance with their customs, traditions and in the best interests of their community.
- Aboriginal people have the right to develop and maintain their own tradition, procedures and practices.
- Aboriginal people have the right to recognition and enforcement of any agreements they enter into with the government. (Aboriginal Affairs NSW, 2017: 6)

## 6.3 Steps in implementing Local Decision Making

### 6.3.1 Expression of interest

Aboriginal Affairs NSW conducted an Expression of Interest process, aiming to pilot Local Decision Making in one urban, one remote, and one country location. The Expression of Interest process, advertised in Aboriginal media, the Aboriginal Affairs NSW website, and notified to key Aboriginal stakeholders and community organisations, was open to new or existing Aboriginal regional partnerships (or alliances) representing more than one town or location within a region. The Expression of Interest was open between 3 July 2013 and closed on 25 September 2013. Interested organisations were asked to complete a form. Support was available in terms of information (online) and staff available to assist communities that wished to apply.

The expressions of interest were evaluated based on the sustainability, robustness and strength of the regional alliance. They had to have satisfy threshold criteria in terms of geographic scope, location (urban, country or remote), and provide informed consent. They were then assessed based on:

- Aboriginal community capacity.
- NSW Government engagement.
- Commonwealth Government engagement.
- Local Government engagement.
- Demographic criteria such as population and disadvantage also informed the evaluation process.

### 6.3.2 Selection of Local Decision Making sites

The first sites announced on 4 December 2013 were:

- Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly (Far West)
- Illawarra Wingecarribee Alliance Aboriginal Corporation (Illawarra South East)
- Regional Aboriginal Development Alliance (Upper North Coast).

Due to high interest, the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs expanded Local Decision Making on 8 September 2014 to:

- Barang Regional Alliance (Central Coast)
- Three Rivers Regional Assembly (Central West).

On 5 March 2015 a further site was added:

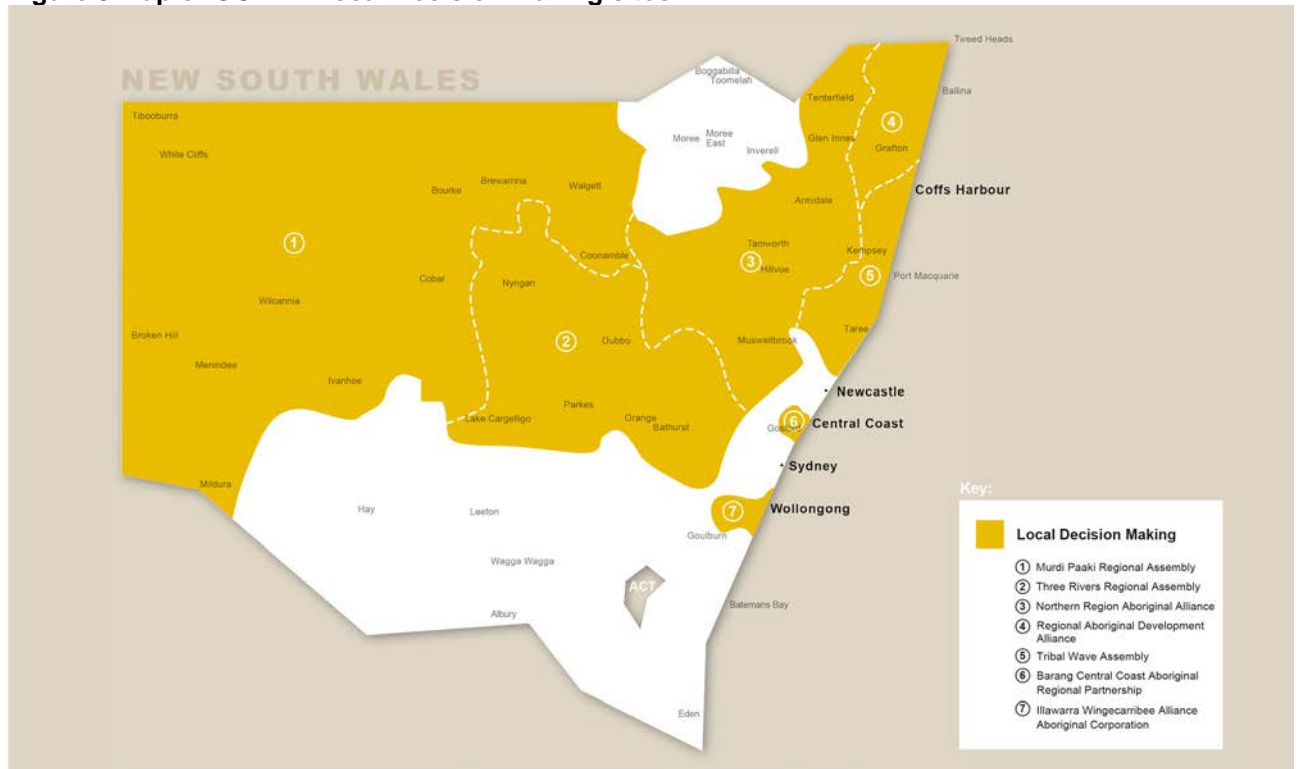
- Northern Region Aboriginal Alliance (New England North West).

Finally, in September 2016, the Regional Aboriginal Development Alliance divided into two alliances due to their size, forming:

- Tribal Wave Regional Assembly (Lower North Coast).

The ambition is to have state-wide coverage, although this depends on whether communities want an Alliance in their areas. There are also other initiatives such as the Commonwealth Government's Empowered Communities operating in Inner Sydney and the Central Coast of NSW.

**Figure 3 Map of OCHRE Local Decision Making sites**



(Source: Aboriginal Affairs NSW website, <https://www.aboriginalaffairs.nsw.gov.au/conversations/ochre/about-the-communities-involved>)

### 6.3.3 Duration and nature of the agreement

While Local Decision Making is an ongoing commitment, the community enters into an agreement with Aboriginal Affairs NSW. The original agreement was for 1 year (2013-2014), the second agreement was for 2 years (2014-2016), and the current agreement is for 3 years (2016-2019). Under the agreement Alliances provide annual Project Proposals and Progress Reports which are reviewed prior to funding being released. Under the Agreement, both parties may end, suspend or pause the Agreement if either party believes that the other party has breached any obligation under the Agreement.

Each Alliance says how Local Decision Making will run in their community, from the Accord negotiation process through to the implementation of the Accords.

### 6.3.4 What happens under the agreement

Local Decision Making enables 'staged devolution of decision-making and accountability to the local level' (Aboriginal Affairs NSW, 2017: 5). Local Decision Making is implemented through a number of steps:

- Establishment and start up (see Section 6.3.1 above)
  - Government must be satisfied Alliance has governance capabilities

- Alliance must be satisfied that government has institutional arrangements in place.
- This step includes development of the Accord negotiation process for the site.
- Accord commencement
  - Both the Alliance and NSW Government demonstrate their readiness for the Accord negotiations through completing an Accord Readiness Self-Assessment document.
  - Priorities are identified and agreed through a Statement of Claim identifying priorities, desired outcomes, what should change, and what actions are needed to make that change happen.
  - Lead negotiators nominated, data assembled.
- Phase 1 (Advisory delegation)
  - Accord negotiated to establish long-term goals, activities and resources, targets and how they will be measured, responsibilities, governance and capacity needs, and the length of the agreement and review process.
  - Phase 1 Accord agreed.
- Phase 2 (Planning Delegation)
  - Regional Alliances become Boards of Management.
  - Phase 2 Accord negotiated to establish funding arrangements through Boards of Management.
  - Phase 2 Accord agreed.
- Phase 3 (Implementation Delegation)
  - Boards of Management manage agreed government resources/services.
  - Regional alliances progress through the steps in their own time. Each of the phases is presented in detail in Appendix A.

### 6.3.5 Funding

- Local Decision Making Funding Agreements have increased in value over time and provide resources to support each Alliance in establishing Local Decision Making:
- 2013-2014 Funding Agreement
  - Year 1: \$47,000 (2013-2014)
- 2014-2016 Funding Agreement
  - Year 2: \$68,000, with an additional payment of \$20,000
  - Year 3: \$79,000, with an additional payment of \$21,000
- 2016-2019 Funding Agreement

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- Year 4: \$79,000, with an additional payment of \$35,000
- Year 5: \$79,000
- Year 6: \$79,000

Funds must be spent on:

- Organisational support and governance.
- Talking with community (consultation) and facilitation.
- Capacity strengthening.
- Accord activities (negotiating or implementing the Accord).

In addition to financial support, Aboriginal Affairs NSW seconds regional officers to the alliances to provide support and build capacity (if required).

Government also records time spent on Local Decision Making in order to help inform future funding.

### 6.3.6 Monitoring, evaluation and reporting

The funding agreement and Accord both require information to be provided back to the government about how funds are spent and what has been achieved. Data is collected for tracking progress against milestones in the Local Decision Making process.

In 2017, Aboriginal Affairs NSW developed a minimum dataset for Local Decision Making based on data collected by the Alliances, Aboriginal Affairs NSW, and Department of Premier and Cabinet. The minimum data set will include:

- Details of the Alliance
- The priorities of each Alliance
- The details of the different meetings that are part of the process, including attendees (and their travel time) and what was discussed
- The number of disputes reported
- Details of government participants.

Aboriginal Affairs NSW is looking to capture the information for work completed to date. Data collected will be able to track progress and highlight achievements, as well as improve processes and inform decision making. This data is not currently available.

### 6.3.7 Governance of Local Decision Making

State-wide oversight is provided by

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- The Local Decision Making Strategic Implementation - made up of Department of Premier and Cabinet NSW, Aboriginal Affairs NSW, along with NSW Government Lead Negotiators for each site.
- In addition, the NSW Coalition of Aboriginal Regional Alliances (NCARA), comprising of chairs of each alliance, among other things provide support for participating and emerging regional alliances. NCARA also advocate on issues that relate to application of policy, program delivery and funding for Aboriginal peoples in regard to basic essential services; promote discussion and consider common issues; strategically plan for the future needs of Aboriginal communities; and support the aspirations and achievements of regions.

Local Decision Making site governance is provided by:

- An Accord Task Group (name varies by site), comprising agency lead negotiators, the NSW Government lead negotiator, and alliance members.

Each Local Decision Making site has its own governance arrangements in place, including:

- Terms of reference, charter of governance or constitution
- Policy and operating procedures
- Documentation on meeting attendance, agenda items, minutes, business/actions arising, decisions reached, etc.

## 6.4 Murdi Paaki Local Decision Making

Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly covers a vast area of NSW and each community within the region has distinct economic and social priorities due to very different external factors.

The Assembly is long established and highly functioning prior to taking part in *OCHRE* Local Decision Making – Local Decision Making is just one component of its funding and responsibilities. Each funding stream comes with its own performance measures and reporting requirements. The structure and governance of the Regional Assembly were not specifically designed for the *OCHRE* initiative but have been used to facilitate Local Decision Making.

Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly is deliberately not an incorporated body. Murdi Paaki Regional Services has been created as a separate legal entity that enables the community to receive and spend funding efficiently.

While Local Decision Making is a mechanism for improving self-determination by Aboriginal communities, it is not the only mechanism.

### 6.4.1 Accord priorities

In December 2013, the Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly became part of the *OCHRE* Local Decision Making program. The Assembly signed a binding Accord with the NSW Government in February 2015. Accord priorities include:

- affordable and appropriate housing
- economic development
- education
- early childhood services
- governance capacity and support.

The Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly and the NSW Government have also deferred priorities for future negotiation, including:

- Domestic, family and lateral violence
- Child safety
- Aboriginal incarceration rates and interaction with the justice system
- Activities to support Aboriginal culture and language development.

### 6.4.2 Negotiating the Accords

An evaluation of the negotiation of the MPRA Accords was conducted by the Cultural and Indigenous Research Centre Australia (CIRCA) and published in June 2015. That evaluation reported the key strengths of how the MPRA Accord was negotiated and outlined ways that might be improved.

Representation and negotiation to develop the Accord was complex and required commitment from community members, government and an independent facilitator. One **stakeholder**, working in health services explained:

I think there is an important kind of understanding to have around *OCHRE* and the Local Decision Making Accord that the assembly have signed with the state. And that is the naming of it, local decision making. It's an agreement signed by a regional group and sometimes that can become quite contentious for the Indigenous population given that we've got 16 communities and each of the representatives of the Regional Assembly are representative of their respective groups or communities I should say, all of which are different and have different priorities.

This point was substantiated by another **government stakeholder** who said:

One of the underpinning principles behind local decision making - which really isn't local, so we should stop call it that - the one

requirement that we had was that we couldn't have just a single community. We need to have scale.

The CIRCA report outlines the strengths of the negotiation process:

- Strong leadership in the MPRA negotiating panel with clear authority to sign the Accord.
- Time and resources were allocated to 'ensure the priorities and statement of claim was valued'.
- Independent facilitator Lead government negotiator who was 'impartial, professional, committed, confident, diligent and well connected'.
- Support for MPRA and DPC in facilitating and documenting the negotiation. Aboriginal Affairs NSW coordination and support was valued.
- NSW Government representatives with authority to make decisions on the support was 'critical to the success of the Accord negotiation' (CIRCA, 2015: 5).

Areas for improvement included:

- More resources to prepare government representatives for participation, background information, documentation and briefings. NSW Government representatives could be 'allowed more time to consider their response to the statement of claim'.
- Ensure NSW Government representatives had adequate authority.
- Focus on developing innovative and holistic solutions.
- Enhance the capacity of regional alliance representatives – useful for MPRA representatives to know about the process and their roles within the process – remembering they are volunteers and may require training in negotiation skills.
- Increase understanding of the roles of all negotiating parties, including the lead negotiator (CIRCA, 2015: 6).

## 6.5 How are the Regional Assembly and Accords working?

This evaluation looks at how the Regional Assembly as an avenue for local representation and establishing local priorities is working.

## 7 About the conversations

### 7.1 Who did we have conversations with?

There are many different people and organisations who have been or are involved in implementing Local Decision Making in the Murdi Paaki region. The evaluation team had conversations with two key groups of stakeholders:

- Regional and Local Aboriginal Community representatives made up of:
  - The Chair of the Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly
  - Community Working Party chairs and members
  - Other members of the Regional Assembly, including the Murdi Paaki Aboriginal Young and Emerging Leaders (Young Leaders), and Local Aboriginal Land Councils (LALCs).
- Government agencies involved in developing and implementing the Accords, and supporting the Local Decision Making process locally. This includes:
  - Policy staff to understand the process of establishing Local Decision Making
  - Regional officers of Aboriginal Affairs NSW who provide ongoing support
  - Other staff involved in developing and implementing the Accord.

In December 2016 we had conversations with community members and Community Working Party Chairs in Wilcannia, Broken Hill, Ivanhoe, Dareton and Menindee. In December 2017 we had conversations with six Community Working Party Chairs in Bourke, Enngonia, Brewarrina, Lightning Ridge, Collarenebri and Coonamble. We also had conversations with community representatives including the Young Leaders attending the Assembly meetings, as well as conversations with the Chair. While every effort was made to have conversations face to face, some conversations occurred later by telephone. An online survey was also made available to ensure that more people could tell us what they thought.

At the initial co-design, the Young and Emerging Leaders Group were identified as potential Community Researchers. However, for logistical reasons, and to meet the community's request of visiting each location within the Assembly, Community Researchers were not used for this initial fieldwork.

### 7.2 What sorts of information did we collect

The evaluation team collected different sorts of information:

- From conversations - either face to face, by telephone
- From meetings and workshops (Co-design)

This report belongs to the Aboriginal Communities of the Murdi Paaki region.

- From publicly available reports about Murdi Paaki, the Accords process and government policy and other publications
- Other publicly available information about the community (ABS data).

This information gives us the most up-to-date information about Local Decision Making and the Regional Assemblies.

Note that we have not received to date any data from the new Minimum Data Set (see Section 6.3.6 above).

### 7.3 How did we come up with these findings?

The evaluation team collected community views to answer the evaluation questions. This involved looking at each conversation and identifying common themes and, in some cases, unique differences. The themes, and examples of what people told us, are presented in the findings.

### 7.4 Checking and confirming findings

SPRC evaluation team returned to community following analysis of the conversations based on questions regarding the implementation and evaluation of *OCHRE* Local Decision Making. The draft report was circulated prior to meetings with communities and this was a chance to check in about what we had found based on our conversations. Importantly, community discussions can tell us what we need to change or add, tell us if we have misunderstood, or if members of communities involved in the evaluation agree on identified priorities and recommendations. Feedback from those meetings is incorporated into this final report.

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## Appendix A Summary of community validation process

Date	Action	Comments
1 March 2018	Draft report and draft summary sent to MPRA secretariat	N/A
8 March 2018	Draft presented to communities	Assembly members provided some feedback at the meeting. Attendees asked to take the report back to their Community Working Parties to get their feedback. SPRC invited back to next MPRA meeting.
27 March 2018	Revised summary sent to MPRA for attendees to take back to community working parties	Added the following points: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We also looked at data produced by the Accord process</li> <li>Data shows progress against agreed priorities</li> <li>Include NGOs as service providers</li> <li>All relevant agencies and services providers should attend CWP meetings to meet needs of local Aboriginal communities</li> <li>Directed recommendations to government</li> <li>Introduced requirement for local agreements to be put in place</li> <li>Clarified recommendation for MPRA</li> </ul> Deleted <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>More effort should be made to ensure all communities represented at MPRA</li> </ul>
April/May	Revision to report (content)	To reflect changes to summary
April/May	Revision to report (format)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Addition of a one-page table summary of findings</li> <li>Addition of one page prior to summary about what is community-controlled research</li> <li>Addition to summary of what the <i>OCHRE</i> program is</li> <li>Change of recommendations in the summary (and report) to table form</li> <li>Change of format to quotes from participants into orange highlight and call out sign</li> <li>Other minor changes to identify who is speaking (bolding of community members and students, parents and carers)</li> <li>Small editing to reduce repetition and ensure consistency within the report and across the reports highlighted in blue.</li> </ul>
6 June 2018	Second validation meeting with MPRA	Purpose to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Confirm changes requested at March meeting</li> <li>Seek feedback from Community Working Parties</li> </ul>
7 June 2018	Report sign off	MPRA Chair confirmed sign off of the report
15 August 2018	Presentation to the Minister	

## Appendix B Steps in Local Decision Making

### Establishment and start up

- Arrangements are made for the implementation of LDM;
- NSW Government LDM accountability arrangements are established;
- Existing or newly formed regional alliances have the opportunity to apply for LDM and provide their informed consent to participate;
- Regional alliances formalise their governance arrangements, including how their member communities will be represented and engaged in decision-making; and
- LDM evaluation framework developed with stakeholders.

### Accord commencement

- Regional alliance and NSW Government demonstrate their readiness for Accord negotiations
- Priorities for negotiation are identified and agreed, lead negotiators are nominated, preliminary data is assembled.

### Phase 1 (Advisory delegation):

- Regional alliances and the NSW Government (and other relevant stakeholders) agree via an Accord on the initial priorities for action, how decision-making will be shared and investment in capacity strengthening
- Accord delivery, including governance (task group) and monitoring and reporting

### Phase 2 (Planning delegation):

- Regional alliances become Boards of Management;
- Priorities and actions (strategic directions) are negotiated, agreed and formalised via an Accord;
- Boards of Management work with a single Senior Officer from government who can direct government activity depending on what the Boards of Management decide; and the
- Flexible fund arrangements are established.

### Phase 3 (Implementation delegation):

- Boards of Management manage some government resources and/or services;
- Boards of Management will be accountable and responsible for those resources and services; and
- Boards of Management may also be in charge of some government staff.

Source: Aboriginal Affairs NSW (2017: 10-11).

