

OUTBACK AREAS COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT TRUST

GOVERNANCE REVIEW

“RESPONDING TO CHANGES IN THE OUTBACK”

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT REPORT

August 2007

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1. INTRODUCTION

In June 2007, the Minister for State/Local Government Relations, the Hon Jennifer Rankine MP, together with the Outback Areas Community Development Trust (the Trust), initiated a review of governance structures for local governance in the outback areas.

As at the 2006 ABS Census, the outback areas population was approximately 5000 people living in about 2300 “households” in small communities and townships, and scattered across large pastoral areas. The population data excludes the towns of Roxby Downs, Coober Pedy, and the Aboriginal lands.

The review was initiated in response to the many challenges outback areas communities report they are facing, for example due to mining and tourism boom in some areas, and dwindling populations in other areas. The key issues emerging in the outback areas relate to:

- minimum levels and standards of service provision, and sustainability of projects;
- volunteer burnout due to reliance on a few individuals, greater expectations for management, greater need for compliance with increasing regulatory functions;
- limited capacity, skills, knowledge and expertise to perform certain functions;
- unmanageable administrative burden, and training needs; and
- planning and development issues, particularly in areas where populations are rapidly increasing.

The aim of the review was to look at the formal capacity of the Trust to respond adequately to the needs of the outback areas, and to propose possible future options for updated governance arrangements for the Trust.

2. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

The Minister endorsed a Community Engagement Strategy for implementation during June and July 2007. An open invitation was extended by the Minister and the Chair of the Trust, Mr Bill McIntosh, to all community associations in the outback areas and the broader community to participate in the review. The key components of the Strategy were as follows:

- Press releases and media statements by the Minister announcing the review and inviting community input.
- Preparation of an Information Pack including an *Open Invitation* Brochure with background to the review and the key issues identified to date, an invitation to attend a community forum, and a *Responding to Changes in the Outback* Feedback Form enabling a tick box response to options for future governance arrangements for the Trust.
- The Information Pack was delivered via an Australia Post “all household” mail out through the outback areas, and direct mailed to all community associations, relevant agencies and other key stakeholders.
- Six Community Forums were convened in key locations, at Yunta, Leigh Creek, two at Andamaooka, Coober Pedy and Penong. The Forums provided an opportunity to “walk through” proposals for possible future arrangements, to verify the pressures on specific communities, and to seek community views about options for future arrangements.
- Written comments through the Feedback Form were invited and encouraged.
- The brochure and Feedback Form were promoted as being available via the Trust’s website at www.oacdt.sa.gov.au

The design of the community engagement strategy focussed on minimising barriers to participation, and at the same time managing the consultation process within reasonable resource parameters in a cost effective manner. Unfortunately, this meant that visits to the more remote communities, such as Innamincka and Marla were not scheduled. If unable to attend a community forum, interested parties were encouraged to participate through the Feedback Form or by calling the Telephone Information Line.

The geographic remoteness and tyranny of distance in the outback posed significant challenges in fostering participation by outback residents, landholders and pastoralists, particularly attendance at public forums. The governance topic and concepts to be conveyed were also quite conceptual and complex, and for some people would require further explanation and discussion. Therefore, in addition to an invitation to attend a community forum the information brochure promoted the options of:

- commenting via a hard copy feedback form or responding via an electronic feedback form; and/or
- contacting the Trust via the call free telephone line to obtain further information, to clarify any aspect of the review, and/or to make comment.

3. COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN THE REVIEW

52 people attended a Community Forum (Refer Appendix A). Community forums were well attended by community association representatives in all locations. Those in attendance were asked to promote the review through their local information networks and to encourage input through the Feedback Form or via the telephone information line.

79 responses were received via the Responding to Changes in the Outback Feedback Form. Some of these responses were submitted by people who also attend a community forum.

The profile of Feedback Form respondents is depicted in the following table. Note: "Response %" represents the percentage of the total 79 respondents and that some respondents ticked more than one box.

Category	Response %	Response Count
Volunteer member of Community Association	53.33%	40
Community Member – Township resident	28.00%	21
Landholder outside township	18.67%	14
Other – community agency, other interest, absent landowner	13.33%	10

Respondent Community/Townships	(Refer Appendix F)
Andamooka	Leigh Creek
Bookabie	Lyndhurst
Beltana	Manna Hill
Birdsville Track	Marla
Blinman	Mintabie
Coorabie	Parachilna
Copley	Penong
Glendambo	Yunta
Innamincka	Roxby Downs
Iron Knob	

An important outcome of the community engagement process has been the compilation a mailing list of participants, including email address where available. The mailing list

will be further developed as the review process continues, and will enable cost effective dissemination of information at key stages in the process, and in future community consultation initiatives undertaken by the Trust.

4. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT OUTCOMES – THE KEY ISSUES

The outcomes summarised in this report are not presented as statistically valid, qualitative research data and the report is not intended to be used in that way.

Rather, the outcomes are presented as qualitative information provided in good faith by participants, many of whom are current or past community association members or involved in their local community in some other capacity such as through business, recreational, sporting or social activities.¹

The Community Forum Report is attached as Appendix A, and a profile of Feedback Form responses is attached as Appendices B.

In summary, generalised and strong support has been demonstrated for all of the “possible outcomes” for the Trust as proposed in the feedback form pro-forma.

Clear preferences for “possible future options” for updated governance arrangements also emerged for the Trust, namely:

- strategic planning in consultation with community association and key stakeholders;
- an advocate and voice for the outback areas;
- strengthened links between Planning SA and the Trust, with the Trust undertaking an advisory role in relation to outback areas planning and development matters;
- powers for the Trust to enforce standards of local amenity at the request of a community association; and
- providing support to volunteer organisations, enabling them to take on a more clearly defined role focussing on cultural and social development.

It was also generally recognised that a fair and equitable “user pays” arrangement for essential services to ensure future sustainability in the outback is inevitable. The reliance on volunteers to manage and maintain certain services in most communities is increasingly being recognised as unsustainable in the longer term. In some locations populations are dwindling and the volunteer “pool” is diminishing, whilst in others there is an unrealistic reliance on a few volunteers to take up increasingly onerous and complex management and regulatory responsibilities.

Participants also represented the view that any new governance arrangements for the Trust must include:

- flexible arrangements to tailor structures to individual community aspirations;
- mechanisms to support local decision making about strategic priorities; and
- involve local communities in identifying essential services and priorities, and in decisions about ownership, management, maintenance and resourcing arrangements for the provision of local essential services.

The past and current efforts of the Trust in effectively undertaking its role have been recognised, and there is strong support for maintaining the Trust’s presence as a “local

¹ Due to the unique geographic location and nature of the outback areas, It is difficult to make a meaningful comparison of participation rates in the community engagement process. However, it is to be noted that historically incorporated Local Government Councils in South Australia have struggled to gain high participation rates in legislative review or strategic planning processes.

governing type body” with a strengthened and expanded role as the “voice of the outback”.

The following key issues arising from the community engagement process are highlighted below. Feedback From responses referred to are attached as Appendix E.

4.1 Accountability and Transparency

Possible Outcomes for OACDT	Possible future options
<p><i>Enhanced accountability and transparency</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Outback communities have appropriate knowledge of and input into the Trust’s directions, policies and priorities, through a process which takes account of community issues and priorities.</i> 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Trust consults community organisations when developing its strategic plan</i> <i>Trust undertakes a strategic planning process (for example every three years) which includes consultation with communities and other key stakeholders and reviews progress regularly</i>

- Option 2 is supported and generally preferred (73.97% of Feedback From respondents,
- An effective strategic planning process will require consultation with community associations and other key stakeholders to ensure local priorities are understood within the broader regional and State policy and planning context.
- Community associations are well placed to take responsibility for consulting with their communities and representing local needs and priorities at the sub-regional level. However, a Feedback Form comment is noted: “Community organisations can sometimes be governed by a section of the community that does not represent everyone.”
- Opportunities for broader community input (electronically or written submissions) could be invited via direct mail out, community association newsletters, local media, and new resident information packs.

4.2. Leadership and Representation

Possible Outcomes for OACDT	Possible future options
<p><i>Demonstrating leadership and representing interests of outback communities</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Advocacy for community/regional interests to Governments and the wider community</i> 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Community associations publicly lobby on their own behalf, with the support of the Trust as required</i> <i>The Trust has a recognised leadership role and can publicly advocate for outback communities and the region</i>

- Option 2 is strongly supported and preferred (81.43% of Feedback From respondents). Importantly, there appears to be a widespread perception among participants that the specific and unique needs of outback communities are not well understood by centralised policy makers and service delivery agencies.
- The Trust was considered to be well placed and the appropriate agency to be the “voice of the outback”. This could be extended to advocacy for infrastructure needs (roads, telecommunications, re-broadcasting services, water, power and waste management) as well as social needs such as access to health and community services.

4.3. Essential Services

Possible Outcomes for OACDT	Possible future options
<p>Provision of well managed essential services</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Essential services that are reliable, affordable and meet an accepted standard. These include water, power, effluent disposal, waste disposal, aerodromes, and television 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Community constructs and owns the infrastructure. The trust manages it on behalf of the community through a service agreement 2. The community with support and advice of the Trust, constructs, owns and manages the service and infrastructure 3. The Trust constructs, owns and manages the infrastructure that provides the service

- What is considered to be an “essential service”, and relevant issues and priorities vary across the outback. Therefore future arrangements will need to reflect this diversity, and a combination of any or all of the three options may apply in any one community.
 - In most communities there is concern about ongoing supply and maintenance of potable water and electricity, and effective waste and effluent management.
 - Reliable telecommunication and television re-broadband services are considered to be essential services for people living and working in the outback.
 - Airstrips must be retained and maintained to Royal Flying Doctor Service standards.
- Future arrangements will need to go beyond a “one size fits all” approach to enable arrangements to be tailored to individual community aspirations and service needs, and to respond to changing community development cycles.
 - This concept is reflected through the Feedback Form responses as follows. Note: some respondents ticked more than one option.
 - Option 1 – 49.30%, Option 2 – 46.48%, Option 3 – 38.03%
- Regulatory requirements and standards should reflect the geographic location and remoteness of outback communities rather than a City or metropolitan environment. Examples cited were in relation to effluent disposal and waste management requirements.
- Communities are keen to pursue sustainable practices such as recycling and water re-use where possible and practical.
- Opportunities for local employment should be pursued where relevant in any future new arrangements, as the most cost effective and sustainable solution.

4.4 Community Contributions

Possible Outcomes for OACDT	Possible future options
<p>Community contributions are collected equitable and fairly</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Essential services and community projects are adequately funded through a mix of government grants and community or direct beneficiary contributions. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Community contributions are collected on a voluntary or community fund raising basis 2. The Trust has powers to collect compulsory community contributions, but powers only applied upon formal request from the community of potential contributors/beneficiaries 3. The Trust has the power to apply enforceable cost share scheme where standards of service, public health or safety are at risk 4. The Trust has powers to collect a general regional levy based on principles of fairness and equity

- Option 2 was supported by 54.17% of Feedback Form respondents. However, whilst there was a general consensus that a community contribution/user pay system was inevitable, there were concerns that “the devil is in the detail”, and revenue being consumed by administration and/or Trust expenses.
- Option 1 (voluntary contributions) has been applied without success in the past by some community associations and whilst responses and comments from many community association members suggest Option 1 is not a preferred option, it was supported by 43.06% of Feedback Form respondents.
- Any future arrangement is more likely to be accepted if communities understand what they are paying for, how much the services cost to supply, and how the amount of the contribution is calculated.
- Option 3 was supported by 36.11% of Feedback form respondents. The Trust was considered as a “legitimate” collector of fees and charges and better placed to deal with slow payment and/or bad debts than community associations locally.
- Option 4 was supported by 40.28% of Feedback Form respondents. The option of applying a regional levy in conjunction with a “user pays” system was considered as worthy of further consideration.
- There was concern that if a regional levy was applied local priorities may be overtaken by other priorities in the regional. There was a generalised view that revenue raised in a particular community should be allocated for priorities within that community.
- Practical issues in applying a regional levy, related to
 - mapping property boundaries and identifying owners of land
 - local priorities being overshadowed by other priorities in the region resulting in no local community benefit
 - lack of support from absentee owners of properties in townships
 - would a “user pays” system apply to businesses and pastoral leases as well as residents in townships?
- The requirement to pay a levy to hold vacant land may be an incentive for “out of town” owners to sell, freeing up land in key locations in some townships for alternative use.

4.5 Planning and Development

Possible Outcomes for OACDT	Possible future options
<p>Maintaining development standards</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Development standards and controls are appropriate to the community/outback environment 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Strengthen links between State Government Development Assessment Commission and Planning SA, and outback areas communities for future planning and development proposals that reflect local community aspirations OACDT has appropriate powers to facilitate and control orderly development that reflects local community aspirations (through a DAP structure)

- Option 1 is strongly supported (61.97% of Feedback Form respondents). A role for the Trust as an advisor to Planning SA in relation to planning and development matters, and in resolving land tenure issues (reference to Lyndhurst in particular) was strongly supported.
- Option 2 was also strongly supported (73.24% of Feedback From respondents). However, it is noted that the option of a DAP structure as drafted would duplicate the current role of Planning SA and a DAP structure is therefore unlikely to be pursued by OACDT or the State Government.
- Common themes related to difficulties in obtaining consistent and timely advice about planing and development matters, complexity of the process, delays in securing approvals, and perceptions of development standards and controls being imposed which are not appropriate and/or relevant to the outback areas.
- Specific issues regarding planning and development in Andamooka were noted, including concerns about being “over-regulated”. These issues are being dealt with outside of the governance review framework.

4.6. Community Amenity

Possible Outcomes for OACDT	Possible future options
<p>Maintaining community amenity standards</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is an agreed standard of community amenity and the Trust has powers to deal with inappropriate activities. For example, local noise, unauthorised dumping, roaming animals, unsafe buildings and excavations or littered allotments. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Community associations apply locally agreed standards, which relies on voluntary compliance The Trust has powers to enforce a standard of amenity if formally requested by a community to do so The Trust has powers to independently apply a standard where public health, safety or quality of life compromised.

- Option 2 (75.71% of Feedback Form respondents) and Option 3 (57.14% of Feedback Form respondents) are both strongly supported.
- Option 1 maintains the status quo and was supported by 35.71% of Feedback From respondents. Difficulties have been reported relating to experiences in enforcing standards locally, for example, dumping of car wrecks in Iron Knob.
- The Trust is seen as a legitimate authority to enforce a requirement and therefore more likely to achieve compliance. However, it is noted that the Trust would need to be positioned to enforce a regulation in a timely manner if Option 3 is to be effective.

4.7. Supporting Volunteers

Possible Outcomes for OACDT	Possible future options
<p>Supporting volunteers, avoiding burnout, and minimising exposure to risk and liability</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community association volunteers have administrative and advisory support necessary to carry out a more clearly defined role, including strengthening social and cultural aspects of community life. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Community associations seek professional assistance as required. For example book-keepers, auditors and training which could be provided by the Trust The Trust enters into service agreements with community organisations to provide direct support Community organisations are supported and encouraged to take responsibility for strengthening of cultural and social characteristics locally while the Trust take responsibility for all other aspects of community management.

- Support for volunteers is strongly supported, as indicated by Feedback Form responses as follows:
 - Option 1 - 63.01%, Option 2 – 60.27%, Option 3 45.21%.
- Succession planning by community associations could be promoted, supported by increased opportunities for training (for example in administration, meeting procedures, and book-keeping)

4.8 Other Issues and Suggestions

Other issues and suggestions not referred to previously are attached as Appendix F, and summarised as follows.

- An ongoing public awareness campaign would assist in promoting the role of the Trust and community associations, what is involved in providing essential services, and service provision costs.
 - Community associations could promote how they make decisions and be more active in consulting with local communities about priorities for the area.
 - Increased use of the internet will facilitate communication and consultation.
- The Trust could have a greater role in liaising with Government agencies regarding mining exploration and leases in outback areas, to ensure the natural environment is protected and preserved, and eco-tourism is sustained.
- “If the Trust is to take on a greater advocacy role, would it be more appropriate for Trust members to be elected rather than appointed?” (Feedback Form comment)
- Tenure of mining leases in Mintabie was raised as a factor impacting on community cohesion and the work of the community association.
- Concerns were expressed that a Community Forum was not convened in the Far North East (Innamincka). Note: These concerns were acknowledged as due to resource parameters and taken into account in the strategy design referred to at “2. Community Engagement Strategy”. People in more remote communities were encouraged to participate via the Feedback Form or Telephone Information Line.
- A review of the Trust’s staffing arrangements and clearly defined roles and responsibilities was suggested as being required under any new arrangements.

5. APPENDICES SCHEDULE

Appendix A Community Forum Report