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WHERE TO NOW?

Department of Social Security Payments and
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
Communities in North Australia.

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CONTENTS.

Acknowledgements.	p.3
About the Authors.	p.4
Foreword.	p.5
The Rationale and Structure of This Study.	p.7
Section 1. A Brief Historical Overview of Income Maintenance for Aboriginal Australians.	p.11
1.1 Legislation.	p.12
1.2 Policy.	p.15
1.3 Brief Overview of Some Significant Events which have Influenced Income Maintenance Policy and Delivery.	p.16
Section 2. Literature Review: Composite Summary of Issues Raised.	p.21
Section 3. Findings: Results of the Community Discussions.	p.24
3.1 Characteristics of Communities.	p.26
3.2 Issues Raised by Community Residents.	p.37
3.3 Summary of the More Significant Issues Reported in the Findings.	p.78
Appendix 1. Methodology: How the Views of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Residents were Sought: Plans and Outcomes.	p.87
Appendix 2. NADU Workshops with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Representatives.	p.95
Appendix 3. Community Characteristics: Variables.	p.106
Appendix 4. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities Proposed for Research.	p.110
Appendix 5. Communities Interviewed and Included in Research Results.	p.111
Bibliography.	p.112

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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While it is recognised that the report is the result of the contributions of many, the authors accept full responsibility for the reporting and presentation of the material.

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FOREWORD

ABOUT THE AUTHORS.

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Born in Cairns, grew up in Darwin. Mick was employed as one of the first Aboriginal Liaison Officers in the Department of Social Security (December 1977). Mick completed a Community Development Certificate and Associate Diploma in Social Work through the Aboriginal Task Force (SAIT) in 1976-77. Mick has had a long-standing association with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people throughout north Australia, through employment, sporting activities and family relationships. In 1982 Mick won an Overseas Study Award to work with north American and Canadian Indians. Mick's experience and employment history with YMCA Yuendumu, Department of Social Security, Northern Territory Public Service Commissioner's Office, Milingimbi Council and Department of Employment Education and Training (Thursday Island) has been very valuable with the community consultation and research phase of this project.

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BARRY SMITH - SENIOR PROJECT OFFICER, NADU.

Raised and educated in north and western Queensland, Barry was awarded his Bachelor of Social Work Degree at James Cook University in 1982. Since then he completed Post Graduate Honours by research work in 1987 and will complete his Masters Degree in Social Policy in 1990. He has held positions of Social Worker, Community Development Worker and Service/Office Manager in both the public and private sectors. Five of the last ten years have been with the Department of Social Security, including two years in Mt Isa. Barry's country town background, his work experience with rural and remote unemployed people and his client centred research experience equipped him to participate in this research project.

FOREWORD.

When NADU was created at the end of 1988 it was agreed that one of the first areas requiring research was the relationship between Social Security payments and programs and the future income support needs of Aboriginal people living on remote communities. It was suggested that the Department should understand the issues and needs of remote area community residents as they were perceived by the people themselves. Whilst it is acknowledged that client comments are not the only criterion on which the provision of services and programs is based, it is nevertheless a very important one.

NADU believed the way to carry out this research was to analyse existing reports and to add to and compare this information with the perceptions of the Aboriginal people. The perceptions of the residents would ensure that the information available for decision making was both balanced and comprehensive. This comparative and investigative approach would put the Department of Social Security in the best position to identify issues which required further action or research, and importantly, to consider fresh approaches to these issues from the field.

It was proposed that NADU staff discuss the needs and issues concerning Social Security payments and programs with residents of fifty geographic communities across the top of Australia. This we have done with the permission and co-operation of the Aboriginal people from these communities and excellent support from Social Security's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander field staff. We are now able to present this report, WHERE TO NOW?

The issues raised by the people are presented in Section 3. Many of the issues reported may not be new to people who have worked in this field for a number of years. The message from the communities however, is that government departments, whilst having endeavoured to understand their environment, do not yet have in place the philosophies, plans and strategies to service and develop communities.

The Department of Social Security has committed significant effort and resources to address a number of issues over the last ten years and has made important advances. There is, in most areas, much support for the Department's efforts and particularly those visible efforts by our field staff. However we now need, with the knowledge that this report gives us, to develop a long term vision and strategic plan to provide structured support and development for remote area people.

The challenge to NADU was to carry out the research and produce a report that would not be regarded as "just another study by a government department on services to Aboriginal people". This report is not "just another study". It is a detailed look at the areas Aboriginal people would like to see changed and what they would like to see developed by the Department of Social Security by way of programs and services. The report is not about people asking a government for more money from the welfare system, but rather about people asking for administrative, legislative and service delivery changes which better reflect their lifestyle and better target the resources. It is a report which highlights the critical need for more effective links between a number of state and federal departments.

This report has been taken to a number of workshops of representatives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities who were part of the research. They have discussed and endorsed the reported findings. The message from the communities is, "We have been researched too much, everybody knows our business and what we do, except for us. Everyone takes things away and nobody ever gives anything back." They want and expect, as is evident from their responses, the Department to take their perceptions seriously and act on the findings of this research.

This exploratory research raised quite a number of issues which are worthy of future research but are not the sole domain of the Department of Social Security. These issues were significant enough in their own right to be raised in this report. They are issues which highlight the need for other departments and agencies to become jointly involved in research, program development and service delivery.

The question confronting departments and agencies is, 'Can we co-operatively assist Aboriginal people to achieve access and equity to programs and services which meet their real needs and allow them to achieve a quality of life in the future that is the right of every Australian?'

What follows is a major report which I believe contains information which is important in today's social, economic and political environment and which has implications for the future direction of government services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

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THE RATIONALE AND STRUCTURE OF THIS STUDY.

RATIONALE.

During the last 20-25 years the Department of Social Security has been able to provide income maintenance support to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island communities without legislative restriction. The population distribution in Australia has encouraged large government departments and organisations, including the Department of Social Security, to place emphasis on the development of national programs and administrative arrangements for people who reside in urban and closely settled rural areas. In the main, the Department of Social Security requires all remote area clients, including those on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island communities, to meet the administrative requirements of its national urban based system.

Changes have been made to this system, especially over the last decade, to improve remote area Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island community residents' access to the national benefit programs. However, Sanders suggests that it has been administratively expedient to foster a reactive, incrementally adjustive approach rather than develop special programs and service delivery systems to meet the specific needs and circumstances of remote area people and in particular those of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island community residents. Anecdotal material suggests that the rationale for the policy of making minor incremental changes is the small percentage (nationally) of clients who reside in remote areas.

Glaser and Strauss (1968) indicate that if a service or service delivery system is to fit and work in a particular setting then the theoretical basis and planning for that program should be "grounded" or based on the characteristic of the environment (social, economic, geographic, etc) to be serviced.

In the 1990s, Social Security wants its programs, and the systems to deliver those programs, to operate effectively in remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in north Australia. To achieve these goals the programs and services must be in tune with both the remaining traditional beliefs, structures and aspirations of community residents and the geographic and technical environment of the communities.

Research to date suggests that the Department's service delivery has been "grounded" on national needs and infrastructure and has resulted in national programs and administrative arrangements that:-

- are not always appropriate and/or effective for many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community settings; and

- impose cultural changes on the residents of those communities. The imposition of programs and services which bring about undesirable cultural changes appears to be in conflict with the policy of self-determination.

The research data to date has primarily been provided by internal Department of Social Security reviews, inter-departmental correspondence, anthropological research on specific communities, administrative reviews and secondary statistical analysis.

In late 1988 and early 1989, NADU staff visited Department of Social Security Regional Offices servicing the remote area Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island communities in north Australia. These offices reported that they continue to encounter and report serious and persistent client access and administrative difficulties in remote areas, even though some of the findings from this earlier research have been incorporated into some program and service delivery strategies.

When the research for this report (WHERE TO NOW? Department of Social Security Payments and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities in North Australia) was commissioned, no comprehensive study had been carried out across north Australia to ascertain what Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island residents think about the current benefit programs; the way they are promoted and delivered; the impact (positive and negative) the programs and their delivery have had and are continuing to have on their lives; and the direction or changes they want to see occur in the 1990s and beyond.

It was proposed that a user centred piece of research would give some additional indication of the future direction the Department of Social Security should take in terms of programs and service delivery options (administration) for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities for the 1990s. It was suggested that this approach would complement and augment the data and recommendations which are already recorded in the literature associated with this topic. It is accepted that client perceptions are not the only indication of need or means of measuring the quality and effectiveness of services. However, it is recognised that such perceptions are an important facet of any comprehensive body of information dealing with any human service program or delivery area. It is also recognised that client centred research can identify both issues for action and issues for further detailed research.

From a consumer research perspective, the area under consideration was an undeveloped field. Research, by necessity, had to be exploratory. Finestone and Kahn say the "general purpose of exploratory research is to prepare for more systematic research" (1975, p.61), if required, at a later stage.

The aims of this exploratory research were to:-

- make inquiries about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander residents' daily life and quality of life, on a range of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, prior to the direct payment of Social Security benefits (particularly Unemployment Benefit);
- inquire about the impact of benefit payments and their direct delivery on daily life, traditional structures and beliefs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community clients who live in different types of communities;
- seek, summarise and present the perceptions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community residents as to the:
 - (i) effectiveness, and
 - (ii) appropriatenessof the delivery of Social Security programs (payments and benefit types) (special attention to be paid to the system as it has operated over the past decade); and
- seek, summarise and present the perceptions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community residents regarding appropriate program/benefit options and service delivery and promotional strategies which they believe would fit and work in the cultural, geographical and technological environment of their communities.

STRUCTURE.

An exploratory study of Social Security payments to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities was carried out and the report on the research project and its findings are presented in the following three documents:-

- Document 1. Main Report WHERE TO NOW? Department of Social Security Payments and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities in North Australia. Barry Smith, Mick Adams and Dell Burgen, NADU, Darwin, NT, 1990.

The main report describes in Section 3.1 the characteristics of the communities consulted and in Section 3.2 the Department of Social Security program and service delivery issues raised by the community residents in the field research. Section 3.3 indicates which issues were of greatest significance to the communities consulted.

This research focused on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander residents in north Australia. It is accepted that many of the issues reported in the findings are similar to those experienced by other remote area residents, including non-Aboriginal people, in north and other parts of Australia. The issues raised may also be similar to those experienced by other bounded urban communities which have populations with high dependency ratios. The recognition of these facts however, should not detract attention from the particular circumstances and needs of the residents who have been the subject of this research. Nor should it stop policy developers from identifying the special needs and circumstances of this client group and investigating the need for specific remote area programs and policies.

It is also recognised that some action is currently being taken to address quite a number of the issues raised in the report. Some issues which are subject to current action were raised and are reported. This indicates that residents believe that certain types of activity should be continued but with better planning and more adequately resourced. In other instances the residents stated that the current activities are not culturally or environmentally suitable.

The Appendices of this paper describe how the researchers intended to collect the views of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander residents. They give a brief explanation why a semi-structured group discussion method was chosen. They indicate which communities were to be consulted and why. The Appendices indicate that care was taken to ensure that the community research sample was large enough to enable a number of communities with different combinations of profile characteristics to be represented and that the planned research process was rigorously implemented. Appendix 1 briefly reports on how the data gathering process took place and any research process difficulties encountered, in implementing the research plan. It indicates how the qualitative data collected in the interviews was quantified and analysed.

- Document 2. Department of Social Security Payments and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities: A Literature Review. Barry Smith, Mick Adams and Dell Burgen NADU, Darwin, NT, 1990.

This document reviews literature related to the research topic in the main report (Document 1). It is not an exhaustive review of the literature but rather aims to introduce the reader to a sample of documents and papers which have, over time, identified program and

service delivery issues which their authors believe need to be addressed. The review summarises the issues identified by the previous non-client opinion research and reviews. It provides an historical background and data balance to the client perceptions gathered in the field research. It enables the reader to compare the issues raised by these other sources with those raised by the community residents. The literature referred to dates from the 1960s.

The issues raised in the literature review are collated in a composite summary. This summary will enable the reader to make a comparison between the issues raised in the literature and the issues raised by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community residents in the Main Report (Document 1).

The literature review is an integral part of this study as it:-

demonstrates that the lack of a broad study of client perceptions represented a gap in the knowledge in this area; and

provides those who are new to this area with an overview of the issues identified by other research and other methods of research.

Document 3. WHERE TO NOW? Department of Social Security Payments and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities in north Australia. Executive Summary.

This document provides a brief and general overview of the findings of the main report. In such an overview it is not possible to report the rich and varied detail of the comments made and issues raised by the community residents.

SECTION 1.

A BRIEF HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF INCOME MAINTENANCE FOR ABORIGINAL AUSTRALIANS.

(Prepared by Dell Burgen to provide an historical background to the findings. It does not attempt or pretend to offer a full history of Social Security policy, legislation, programs and services.)

"It is plain that Aborigines are not eligible for social service benefits on the same conditions as other members of the community. The prevailing practices, however, do not mean that Aborigines receive small cash allocations and nothing else. ... The point to be made here is that there is serious conflict between claiming that Aborigines are eligible, and the payment to them directly of a fractional proportion of their entitlement in some instances and nothing at all in others.

Several reasons have been put forward in explanation and justification of this system. The most common and generally accepted one, described by the Director-General of Social Services, is that Aborigines, by definition, are in need of care and assistance and incapable of managing their financial affairs. As wards they cannot handle wisely the sums involved in social service benefits. The managing authorities - the Welfare Branch, missions and pastoralists - therefore retain a great proportion and assert that these sums are spent in a manner calculated to serve the Aborigines' best interests" (Tatz, 1964, p.96).

1.1 LEGISLATION.

In 1901 the Commonwealth of Australia was founded. Amongst the inaugural Government's priorities was the development of national income maintenance legislation and programs, specifically age and invalid pensions. Although these pensions were a high priority, they were not introduced until 1908. Payments commenced in 1909 for the Age Pension and 1910 for the Invalid Pension.

Prior to the Commonwealth's involvement in the provision of these pensions, some states had been operating their own age pension schemes since the early 1900s (NSW - 1900, Victoria - 1900, Queensland - 1908). An invalid pension scheme had also been in operation in NSW since 1908. With the Commonwealth Government assuming responsibility for the age and invalid pensions the state pension schemes were repealed.

Despite the national (Commonwealth) nature of these pensions they were not available to all people in Australia. Under the Commonwealth Age and Invalid Pensions Act 1908 and 1910, "Aboriginal Natives" of Australia were disqualified from payment. Similarly, the Maternity Allowance introduced in 1912 excluded Aboriginal people. (See NADU Occasional Paper No. 4 for a full history of Aboriginal income maintenance legislation and policy.)

Prior to 1939 social services payments were administered by the Department of Treasury, but in that year the Department of Social Services was established. Its operations commenced in 1941. Amongst the Department of Social Services' first initiatives was the introduction of a new payment called "Child Endowment". This payment began in 1941 and was only payable to Aborigines if they were not nomadic or if the children, for whom they claimed this payment, were wholly dependent on State or Commonwealth Government support.

Although given restricted access to child endowment, Aborigines were still disqualified from receiving Age and Invalid Pensions and Maternity Allowance until 1942. The relevant Acts were amended in 1942 and "Aboriginal Natives" of Australia theoretically became eligible to receive these payments.

In reality the Social Services Act continued to discriminate against Aborigines by adding amendments that restricted access to pensions and allowance payments and placed Aboriginal Australians under the control of non-Aboriginal administered Aboriginal departments, missions, settlements, pastoral properties, etc.

The 1942 amendments were:-

"Aboriginals are eligible only if they were exempt from the provisions of a state or territory law relating to the control of Aboriginal Natives";

"Aboriginals who lived in a state or territory which did not provide for such exemption ... but were eligible on the grounds of character, standard of intelligence and development" (Section 4(a) Invalid and Old Age Pensions Amendment Act No. 3 1942);

"Maternity Allowance had to be paid to a person or authority in a state or territory if such a payment was considered desirable for benefit of the Aboriginal" (Maternity Allowance Act 1942).

Although the amendments did allow some Aborigines to receive the Age Pension and Maternity Allowance payments, in the main, were made directly to an authority and not to the individuals.

It was interesting to note that although the Social Services Act stated that an Aboriginal person's entitlement was to be paid to a person approved by the Deputy Commissioner, the Department "found itself in a state of unreadiness because it was unprepared for the processing of Aboriginal claims under the Act" (De Maria, 1986, p.33).

This was brought to light when the first Aboriginal mother lodged a claim for child endowment. Social Security had the problem of having no one to whom to pay the money. The department had to move quickly to build a surveillance mechanism into the payment procedures. They set about "negotiating with various state departments to secure their co-operation in establishing a payment monitoring scheme" (De Maria, 1986, p.33).

For 34 years from 1908 to 1942, Aborigines were disqualified from receiving an Age, Invalid Pension or Maternity Allowance due to the paternalistic and racist treatment by the Commonwealth and State authorities which reflected the government policy of subjugation of the "Aboriginal Natives" under the guise of protection.

The period from 1941-1944 saw the introduction of three new Social Services payments:- Child Endowment (1941), Widows Pension (1942), and Unemployment & Sickness Benefits (1944).

The introduction of these payments continued the discrimination against Aboriginal people. Although, theoretically, under the Social Services Act Aboriginal people were eligible to receive these pensions, benefits or allowances, the Act *still excluded* Aboriginal people who were:-

- not exempt from the control of their state or territory;
- nomadic or primitive; and
- not of good character, nor of an acceptable standard of intelligence and development.

The Unemployment & Sickness Benefit Act, introduced in 1944, stated that an Australian Aborigine was not qualified to receive this benefit unless:-

- the Director-General was satisfied that he was of good character;
- the standard of his intelligence and social development was good enough for him to receive it; and
- he was ordinarily engaged in employment which satisfied these standards and was, therefore, eligible for benefit on the same basis as everyone else in Australia (Department of Social Security Research and Statistics Branch, Development Division, 1983).

For reasons to be expanded upon later, almost no Aborigines received Unemployment or Sickness Benefit at this time.

In 1959, the Social Services Act was further amended and most disqualifications relating to Aborigines were removed - except for those who were regarded as nomadic or primitive. The amendments came into operation in February 1960.

However, as was evident in the Unemployment and Sickness Benefit Act, restrictions still applied to the amended Act of 1959 which reflected the Commonwealth's attitude to Aboriginal people and continued to limit those people's access to departmental assistance and payments.

Three restricting principles were:-

- 1) "Where an Aboriginal has demonstrated his ability to handle money wisely and to manage his own affairs, the payments will be made direct to him";
- 2) "Where an Aboriginal cannot handle the whole of the pension or perhaps some of it, the pension will be paid in two parts - one part to the Aboriginal as pocket money and one part to some authority or person to be used on the Aboriginal's behalf. This is the principle which generally applied to Aboriginals living on government settlements, church missions and pastoral properties"; and
- 3) "Only where a native, although not actually nomadic or primitive is unable to handle any money at all will the whole of the pension be paid to some person or authority on his behalf" (Social Services Journal, 1960, 13.3).

These principles meant that discrimination was still entrenched in the 1959 Amendment Act and continued to be detrimental to Aboriginal people.

As Tatz said in the opening quote many of those people who received payments and lived on church missions, government settlements or pastoral properties, did not see their payments or only received a portion of it. This portion was received "in kind", consisting of tea, flour, sugar, rice, meat (residents stated that the meat was sometimes unfit for human consumption) and clothing.

Unbeknown to many Aboriginal people they were receiving their Department of Social Services entitlements in the form of rations, cheap clothes and blankets, poor housing, etc. In some cases and in most states this system represented almost a total neglect of the Aboriginal race (P Daylight & M Johnstone 1986, p.95).

In 1966 the Department of Social Services decided all specific references to Aboriginal people were to be removed from the Social Services Act, including the provisions disqualifying Aboriginal Natives who were nomadic or primitive from receiving benefits or pensions. After 178 years of settlement and 58 years of Social Services payments in Australia, Aborigines were recognised as equal Australian citizens and were legally eligible to receive those payments in their own right.

However, it was only in the early 1970s that many Aboriginal people began to receive their full entitlements to Unemployment and Sickness Benefits, even though some were entitled to such payments in 1944. Even after 1966 when all specific references to Aborigines were removed from the Social Services Act very few were eligible for Unemployment Benefit because of the 'works test'. Those who lived on missions or government settlements were excluded by policy and service delivery mechanisms until 1976.

Aboriginal people living on missions and government settlements were not considered eligible for Unemployment Benefit, because while on missions and government settlements they were considered wards of the state and in training and therefore fully employed. On pastoral properties, the managers were reimbursed by the Department of Social Security (renamed and restructured Dec. 1972) for the maintenance of Aborigines who were classified as 'government dependants'. It was not until 1973 in the Northern Territory that the maintenance and training schemes were phased out and Aboriginal people became eligible to receive Unemployment Benefit.

Full entitlement to all benefits did not occur until the late 1970s when all Aboriginal people started to get all Social Security payments in their own right. The Department of Social Security's and the Department of Aboriginal Affairs' files indicate that some people did not get these payments until 1976-1977. Some remote area residents state that they did not get direct individual payments until the early 1980s.

De Maria states that although over the years, government policies changed, they had "either locked Aboriginals out altogether from benefiting from various services or made the determination of eligibility so bureaucratically onerous and complicated that often the same exclusion was affected" (De Maria, 1986, p.25). He is saying the discriminatory legislation can be repealed but inadequate or inappropriate delivery systems can continue the discrimination.

1.2 POLICY.

The above Department of Social Security income maintenance legislation was a product of the national policy for Aboriginal people. This policy is recorded briefly here in dot point form. A fuller account can be found in NADU Occasional Paper No.4., Smith B (1990) Has Policy and Legislation Guaranteed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People Equal Access to Social Security Benefits and Services? NADU, Darwin, NT.

- From 1908 to 1951 the policy was one of segregation and protection.
- From 1951 to the late 1960s, the policy was one of assimilation but many segregationist and protectionist practices continued into the early 1970s.
- In 1972 the policy of self-determination was introduced by the Whitlam Government. However, since its original introduction, the policy has undergone a number of changes. Self-management and self sufficiency are currently often used instead of self-determination even though they do not mean the same thing. As will be indicated in Section 2 some social commentators believe Aboriginal people are now subject to two distinct policies. These are social and/or cultural self-determination and economic assimilation.
- Today (1990s) Aboriginal self-determination operates in the context of the broader Australian community. This means it is limited self-determination. The original principles of self-determination stated that delivery of services to Aboriginal clients should be based on the choices and systems chosen by Aboriginal people themselves. Over the last few years the terms self-management and self-determination appear to be used interchangeably. This usage suggests self-management is the same as self-determination. Some sources are suggesting that self-management is a more benign term for economic assimilation.

1.3 BRIEF OVERVIEW OF SOME SIGNIFICANT EVENTS WHICH HAVE INFLUENCED INCOME MAINTENANCE POLICY AND DELIVERY.

Over the years there has been events which influenced the changes to the Department's legislation and the development of service delivery by this Department to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

1.3.1 SEGREGATION ON MISSIONS, SETTLEMENTS & PASTORAL PROPERTIES.

Probably one of the most enduring set-backs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people was being forced to live on missions, government settlements and pastoral properties for their protection.

Aboriginal people commenced living on the above settlements, etc. in the late 1890s and many still continue to be land locked on economically marginal and remote communities or settlements.

This not only affected their traditional cultural way of life and caused the breakdown of family units, but it was also used as the means to discriminate against the people. They were legally discriminated against by the Department of Social Services who would limit access to payments such as Unemployment Benefit, simply because they lived on missions, government settlements or pastoral properties. According to the Social Services Act, if an Aboriginal person resided in one of these three places, they became eligible for a pension or an allowance only after their character was considered, their intelligence was questioned, and it was judged whether they were socially developed enough to receive a payment.

If Aboriginal people met these criteria their pension or allowance would be granted but it would be paid to an authority on their behalf. However, if they were exempt from living on the above three places they could receive a Social Service payment direct.

If an Aboriginal people did not live on a mission, government settlement or pastoral property and did not have an exemption to live elsewhere, then they were considered "nomadic" and/or "primitive" and excluded from receiving any payments from the Department of Social Services.

After 1966, Aboriginal people were theoretically able to live on missions, settlements or pastoral properties and receive Social Service payments directly (not via any agency or authority). In practice this entitlement did not apply to Unemployment Benefit. Only Aboriginal people living off the settlements, missions and pastoral properties were entitled to apply for Unemployment Benefit.

Full entitlement for all Aboriginal people did not actually occur until the late 1970s when all Aboriginal people could receive all Social Security payments in their own right. It was at this time that the former missions, settlements, and pastoral properties became communities and the residents could have equal access to benefits and services.

1.3.2 CITIZENSHIP, EQUAL RIGHTS, RECORDS AND AWARD WAGES

RECORDS

When Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were first forced or encouraged to live on missions, pastoral properties and government settlements, dates of birth, parents' names, marriages, etc. were not always recorded, were changed, were guessed or misspelt.

Therefore, many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people still have problems when applying for benefits and pensions from the Department of Social Security today.

"Aborigines are being severely penalised because they have been deliberately excluded from official records, such as the census records, and register of births, marriages and deaths etc. The Department of Social Security now expects Aborigines to be able to prove facts such as age without the assistance of such records which are freely available to all other members of the Australian community (Andrews, 1964, p.3).

AWARD WAGES.

Another important catalyst for change was the decision by the Arbitration Commission in 1965 to grant equal pay to Aboriginal pastoral workers in the Northern Territory (Bennett, 1989, p.12).

Although the Arbitration Commission made this decision in 1965 the equal wages did not commence until 1968, a waiting period of almost 3 years. Because the Arbitration Commission's decision to pay equal wages was not implemented until 1968, a number of strikes occurred on missions, settlements, and pastoral properties. The most well known case was the walk off from Wave Hill Station in 1966 by the Gurindji people. Although the Gurindji people left Wave Hill Station in August 1966, the award wage was not paid until two and half years later in 1968.

"We are grateful to the unions which have helped us, but the issue on which we are protesting is neither purely economic nor political but moral. We address you as fellow citizens, but our citizenship has not bought us the opportunity to live a decent life ... For 85 years our people have accepted these conditions and works, but on August 22nd 1966, the Gurindji people ceased to live like dogs" (Rowley, 1971, p.341).

This was seen not only as a step forward for award wages but also for equal rights, land rights, and access to the normal benefits and services accessible to all Australians - including Social Security Unemployment Benefit.

CITIZENSHIP AND EQUAL RIGHTS.

Due to the lobbying of the FCAATSI (Federal Council for the Advancement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders) in 1964 attention was focussed on the Commonwealth Constitution which discriminated against Aboriginal people in Sections 51 (xxvi) and 127 (Bennett, 1989, p.10).

FCAATSI lobbied to have these offensive clauses deleted from the Commonwealth Constitution. The Holt Government legislated to have these words deleted from the Constitution. As part of the process a referendum was held on 27 May 1967.

The positive outcome of the referendum made Aborigines Australian Citizens, giving them the same rights as all other Australians.

"We've taken his land, decimated his tribes, degraded his women, taken away his dignity and forced him to live in squalor. This is our chance to make some sort of amends. We still have a long way to go. But at least we can make a start at treating him as an equal" (Bennett, 1989, p.11).

1.3.3 ABORIGINAL PARTICIPATION IN WORLD WAR II.

One public event which acted as a pressure for amendments to the Social Services Act was World War II and not voting rights as some would have us believe. De Maria indicates that to have or not to have voting rights was only an excuse to stall payments (1986, p.32).

During World War II Australian Aboriginal and black American soldiers shared a common experience of racial discrimination. However, Aborigines learnt that despite the prejudice suffered by black people in America, the black Americans had greater access to Social Security. When this was known by the broader Australian community there was mounting pressure to give Aboriginal people access to Social Security benefits. The following quote indicates the thinking of the day.

"... there seems to be difficulty in contesting the claim for Maternity Allowance and Old Age Pension in respect of Aborigines who are living the complete European life, particularly in the face of recent enlistment of Aboriginal youths and also bearing in mind that American negroes and semi-coloured Europeans qualify for both these social services" (De Maria, 1986, p.31).

1.3.4 CHANGE FROM ASSIMILATION TO SELF-DETERMINATION: THE RISE OF ABORIGINAL LEADERSHIP AND LAND RIGHTS.

From 1937, in practice, the policy of all governments for Aborigines was one of "assimilation". The policy was formally accepted as follows in 1951.

"The policy of assimilation means in the view of all Australian governments that all Aborigines and part Aborigines are expected eventually to attain the same manner of living as other Australians. Thus, any special measures taken for Aborigines and part Aborigines are regarded as temporary measures not based on colour but intended to meet their need for special care and assistance to protect them from any ill effects of sudden change and to assist them to make the transition from one stage to another in such a way as will be favourable to their future social economic and political advancement" (Bennett, 1989, p.23).

This policy later came under attack because it denied Aboriginal culture, contained the arrogant assumption that the white culture was superior and created a life of dependency which was, and is, suffered by Aborigines.

For a time "integration" (late 1960s) became Commonwealth policy, but it was difficult, in practice, to detect any real difference between assimilation and integration.

As early as the 1930s, Aboriginal leaders like Ferguson and Cooper began to make a stand on changing white attitudes and policy. There were only a small number of leaders like these people who were able to speak out and be heard. It was not until the post war years that the number of recognised Aboriginal leaders began to grow.

Bennett says,

"This second period saw increased assertiveness by many young Aborigines, a development which was pushed by the emergence of younger, better educated, articulate urban based leadership, a group well attuned to the importance of publicity.

"These leaders refocused the attention of Aboriginal communities from their social welfare concentration to a concern for the loss of Aboriginal identity that was the net result of so many years of white deprivation and paternalism.

"'Self-determination' became the cry, and with this came an expressed determination to move from a polite to a more aggressive style of political activity" (1989, p.12).

From this new group of leaders came people like Charles Perkins, who, in 1965, led the 'Freedom Rides' through New South Wales, drawing attention to discrimination of Aborigines in that state.

Groups like the FCAATSI became more vocal and started to get recognition from trade unions and churches. With this type of support FCAATSI was then able to lobby strongly for changes to be made. The positive result in the 1967 Referendum was a product of the growing public support.

The Labor Government, the Whitlam government, in 1972 set up the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and Aboriginal Legal Service, and supported Aboriginal land rights. This was the start of the new policy of self-determination and the recognition of the importance of the traditional lands to the Aboriginal people. Though land rights still have a long way to go before they deliver what was originally promised they were, and still are, seen as a symbol of hope and self-determination. Kath Walker said,

"Black Australians must strengthen themselves into a solid, determined fighting unit and dictate their own terms for their own advancement" (Bennett, 1989, p.12).

The current policy of self-determination seems to be more limited than Kath Walker would have envisioned. However, even under the guise of self-management and self sufficiency it continues to offer Aboriginal people the opportunity to have some say in their future.

1.3.5 ACCESS TO BENEFITS AND SERVICE DELIVERY.

"When remote Aborigines as a group first became potential clients of the Department of Social Security in 1960 the Department of Social Security did nothing to adapt its organisational arrangements to the special circumstances of this new client group" (Sanders, 1981, p.5).

Sanders (1981) suggests that from 1966-1975, no special service delivery strategies had been put into place to cater for the special needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in remote areas. In the absence of any of its own planned departmental initiatives and resources, the Department of Social Security depended on state departments, the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and other Commonwealth departments, voluntary and community welfare organisations and individuals to deliver its services. This situation existed at the very time that the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were trying to make the transition from segregated and controlled missions, settlements and pastoral properties to self determined equality.

Over the last 15 years (1975-90) the Department of Social Security, at Central, State and Regional Office levels, has endeavoured to address a whole range of issues relating to services and programs for Aboriginal residents in remote areas.

One of the initial strategies introduced to overcome these problems was the establishment of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Section in Canberra. The Section's role is to advise the Minister and senior management on all matters relating to the Department concerning Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. It was also to develop, assess and evaluate policies. Once the units were established in Canberra and throughout the states and the Northern Territory, other initiatives began to emerge to ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were being properly serviced by the Department.

Some of these additional initiatives included the employment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Officers, Aboriginal Welfare Officers (now known as AIOs - Aboriginal and Islander Liaison Officers) and Aboriginal Counter Officers who were placed in

selected regional offices. These officers' overall roles are to disseminate information about the Department's services to individuals, organisations and communities; to provide initial contact for enquiries from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander beneficiaries with respect to Departmental services; and to break down the communication barriers which are the result of cultural factors and/or the complexity of Departmental forms and the Departmental payments system. The employment of these staff has also seen an increase in the frequency of visits by departmental officers to remote communities.

More recent initiatives have been the establishment of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Agents Program, Remote Visiting (benefits) Teams (RVTs) and the Support Network for Aboriginal Parents (SNAP) Officers.

Most of the above changes have been in the provision of staff to improve residents' access to the national system. Few changes have been made to the benefit programs themselves. One change which has been implemented is a system of extended reporting for Unemployment Benefit clients in remote areas. This is known as the Northern Territory Unemployment Benefit system. It is tacit recognition of the lack of employment opportunities on Aboriginal communities in remote areas. It allows for a relaxation of the works test and four weekly lodgement of forms rather than fortnightly.

There have been other positive but often short lived initiatives in areas such as information dissemination. These have often been carried out in a piecemeal, uncoordinated fashion. As Sanders (1986) indicated most changes have been in reaction to a breakdown in the system or the prevalence and persistence of an issue or problem. It must be emphasised many of these ad hoc and often regionally inspired changes have done much to improve service delivery for remote area residents.

However, the ad hoc and regional nature of many changes has often meant that the improvements have not been uniform and/or have not been adopted as long term strategies. Contrary to the claim in the Blanchard Report in 1987, there is still no specific policy or strategic plan for the delivery of Department of Social Security services and programs to remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients. This must be seen as one of the real weaknesses in terms of the development of a high quality service for these residents who are not only recognised as the most disadvantaged in Australia but also live in remote parts of the country.

3.3 SUMMARY OF THE MORE SIGNIFICANT ISSUES REPORTED IN THE FINDINGS.

WORKSHOPS ON DRAFT REPORT.

In the methodology (Appendix 1) it was stated that after the report reached the draft form, a number of workshops would be held to discuss the findings and their presentation. Representatives from many of the communities who agreed to take part in the research, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations servicing these communities were to be involved in the workshops. Appendix 2, "NADU Workshops With Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Representatives", reports that four (4) workshops were held (Alice Springs, Kununurra, Mt. Isa and Cairns). Community representatives were transported to relevant centres to participate.

The workshop facilitator, Mick Adams, said that a full draft of this report was reviewed and discussed by the workshop participants. He states that the workshops endorsed the report unconditionally. He said, "Participants of all four Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workshops stated that the draft report presented the views of the people in a fair and accurate manner. They said the findings should be actioned."

Appendix 2 gives more detailed information on the workshop agendas and the additional comments which the participants wished to make regarding specific issues.

MORE SIGNIFICANT ISSUES.

Section 3.2 has presented information on a range of issues raised by forty three (43) remote area Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. In the introduction to the report, Rationale and Structure, it was stated that many of the issues experienced and raised by remote area Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander residents:-

- can be experienced by other Social Security clients in other Australian communities, particularly those with high dependency ratios;
- can apply to other government departments and agencies;
- are recognised, to some extent, by the Department; and
- are, in part, being addressed through existing programs and strategies.

However, it was also stated,

"The recognition of these facts should not detract attention from the particular circumstances and needs of the residents who have been the subject of this research. Nor should it stop policy developers from identifying the special needs and circumstances of this client group and investigating the need for remote area programs and policies.

It is also recognised that some action is currently being taken to address quite a number of the issues raised in the report. Some issues which are subject to current action were raised and are reported. This indicates that residents believe certain types of activity should be continued but with better planning and more adequately resourced. In other instances the residents stated the current activities are not culturally or environmentally suitable."

In the following, an attempt will be made to highlight the report issues which are more significant because they were raised so consistently, so forcefully and/or are important to certain communities which are grouped according to certain characteristics. As far as possible the issues are presented in point form using extracts from the text.

ADMINISTRATIVE AND LEGISLATIVE DISCRIMINATION.

- Residents of 80% (35) of the forty three (43) communities made statements which indicated that Department of Social Security individual, direct payments were seen to be both a necessary and positive part of people growing and being equal to residents of the broader community. ... Almost 100% of residents indicated that access to individual, direct, personal payments is a civil right that only the individual has the liberty to relinquish.
- Some residents said that even though self-determination is the current government policy they still feel powerless to influence policies and programs. They believe that the issues concerning their communities are often identified by, and solutions are predominantly devised by, a white dominated bureaucracy. In regard to this latter point, some residents of nineteen (19) of the forty three (43) communities made statements similar to the following:-

"People have not had the opportunity to think about or work out different ways of supporting ourselves - that is decided by the government" (young man, traditional community, NT).

- It was reported by eight (8) traditional communities, in the Northern Territory and Western Australia, that all Social Security staff who visit, deal with people over the phone, by letter and at the counter need on-going training to enable them to understand Aboriginal traditional culture and history. They indicated that if this occurred, it would result in a greater understanding of the cultural responsibilities of the people especially regarding marriage, ceremonies, sorry business, their environment, and so on. They indicated that this would eventually result in no office staff speaking to and dealing with Aboriginal people in such a way that "the people would not be made to feel bad" or "shamed". Indications are that in more recent years staff selections and training have made improvements in this area but there is still more work to be done.
- Many residents stated that their access to Social Security benefits and services is inhibited by the lack or inadequacy of communication, postal and banking services.
- Many community residents believe that the current work, training, wage and income support arrangements offer:-
 - * too few options;
 - * too few opportunities;
 - * a fixed low income; and
 - * a fixed low standard of living.

SELF-DETERMINATION, PLANNING AND CO-ORDINATION.

- Residents of twelve (12) communities made statements such as, "With so many government people coming and going, people often don't even know who is in town. People just get to a stage that they don't even worry"
- When the researchers pressed the residents further on those statements three issues seemed to surface:-
 - (1) government department visits are often unco-ordinated, sometimes several departments are in the community, all wanting attention and often chasing the same people;

- (2) visits and the presence of government staff are not widely or appropriately promoted and the visits are too short; and
- (3) residents are becoming tired of a constant barrage of different state and federal government people coming in and asking questions about needs and services, etc. without anything changing.

POVERTY AND "SMALL MONEY".

- People had said they lived "too long on small money" and "can only really look forward to a life of small money".
- Residents of twenty nine (29) communities, 67% of the sample, stated that their people are trapped at a standard of living which is unacceptable to them and can only be described as living in poverty. Nineteen (19) of these communities added that long term dependence on CDEP and Unemployment Benefit payments and programs locks them into this life style. They indicated that these programs place a 'ceiling' on them which they believe they will not be able to penetrate.
- Recurrent statements in community interviews referred to the high cost of living (29 communities) and the financial difficulties families face, raising and educating children (9 communities) in remote area communities.

Most of these people stated that food, clothing, household appliances, car parts, petrol were as high as twice the price of Supermarket prices in the nearest major service centre. Many of the major service centres for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities are located in high cost areas of Australia. Residents said that because of their geographic location they are doubly disadvantaged and see themselves as doubly poor.

- Poverty, in terms of finances, infrastructure, services and opportunities was reported by all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in the research sample. In the minds of the people, high cost of living, few and/or inadequate services, "small money", and few full time award wage job opportunities, are all closely linked and are all facets of environmental poverty. Residents recognise that cheaper food, clothes, etc. alone will not address all facets of their poverty but feel that if this area is under control they can cope better with other areas of comparative deprivation. The field research indicated that cost of living and environmental poverty in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities requires more detailed investigation and definition. Because of the perceived inter-relatedness of the different facets of environmental poverty this detailed investigation is likely to have greater impact if it is carried out co-operatively on an inter-departmental basis.

BENEFIT PROGRAMS.

Unemployment Benefit.

An analysis of the statements and issues reported, concerning the Unemployment Benefit program and the Community Development Employment Program indicates that community residents in the sample believe:-

- both programs are seen to have program, delivery and administrative limitations for Aboriginal residents in remote areas;
- in their national form, the programs are not able to meet the needs of the diverse range of communities to whom they are being applied;
- the current programs do not have clear long term goals for the clients;

- the current programs are not long term solutions to the income support or labour force needs of remote communities;
- the current range of options do not offer residents opportunities for personal development or life chances similar to those available to non-Aboriginal residents in remote areas and to most Australians in the broader community;
- the current programs in their present form are not long term acceptable alternatives to "real jobs, real training, real wages";
- the assessment of alternatives or the serious remodelling and resourcing of the existing programs has not been undertaken;
- residents are the recipients of predetermined programs which allow little room for self-determination; and
- their people are bearing the burden of "small money", a lower standard of living and limited socio-economic life chances. Some residents will choose social and cultural gains over economic gains. They indicated that this should be a matter of choice not a normal state of life.

Age Pension.

- Older residents of twenty (20) communities regularly asked two questions about the age criteria of the Age Pension.
 - (1) Why is there a different age limit for men and women?
 - (2) Why is the age set at 60 and 65 when people are old before they reach that age?
- It was stated, especially on more traditional communities in the Northern Territory and Western Australia, "in the old days (under traditional law) people often sat down at about 40-50". It was said old people sat down, because they were too "buggered up" to do heavy work and/or because they needed to concentrate on traditional, cultural activities (storytelling, ceremonies, teaching the young, talking about law, etc.). The age a person "sat down" was not important. What was important was the person's physical condition and/or other traditional, cultural, or spiritual responsibilities.

Family Allowance and Family Allowance Supplement.

- Twenty seven (27) communities made statements saying that Family Allowance payments made sense and were a "good way of helping families with children". All respondents indicated that "the person who looks after the child should get the money for that child". However, as reported earlier under the headings "Small Money" and "Cost of Living", most of these respondents stated that the amount of money paid for children did not meet the cost of raising and educating children in remote areas.
- Of the eighteen (18) communities which reported that Family Allowance Supplement was a "good top up pay for families with children", thirteen (13) were CDEP. All eighteen (18) communities on which statements about Family Allowance Supplement were made had community or private enterprises and therefore some full or part time job opportunities.

- Other issues raised in regard to Family Allowance Supplement were:-
 - * People easily confused Family Allowance and Family Allowance Supplement because of the names;
 - * People found the forms complex, long and therefore difficult to complete;
 - * People could not see why the Department of Social Security could not liaise with the council for a report on earnings when they were on CDEP and the pays were set and paid out by the council.
 - * Some residents and community administrators had not heard of Family Allowance Supplement. This included a community which had a large number of council and enterprise jobs. Forty plus council workers with children would have had an entitlement to Family Allowance Supplement because of the low wages and part time work. None was receiving Family Allowance Supplement.

Invalid Pension.

- The concept of "invalidity" as defined by the Department does not appear to be clear and/or appropriate to remote Aboriginal people. Responses indicated that age, invalidity and disability appear to be defined differently by these residents for cultural and/or environmental reasons. It was not within the scope of this project to investigate these conceptual problems in detail. However, it is noted that these conceptual issues require detailed investigation.
- Access and determination of claims are influenced by distance, frequency of doctors' visits, and the trust the Aboriginal people, particularly those in remote areas, have in many of the local service providers. From an assessment point of view residents said that the dependence on appointments in town or with visiting Commonwealth Medical Officers is not appropriate. The visiting doctors often cannot see the people because they run out of time, the people are not available because of other cultural business, or the visiting doctors do not really understand disability as it applies to the remote area, the local resources and traditional Aboriginal residents. Residents stated that medical assessments should be carried out by local health providers to ensure that the determination of claims is both timely and culturally and environmentally accurate.

Traditional Culture and Benefit Programs.

Traditional cultural issues/practices identified by community residents which they said the Department of Social Security could accommodate were:-

- cultural mobility and time away from their home community because of commitments connected with sorry business and sorry camps, ceremonies (men's and women's business), meetings and family networking;
- traditional adoptions;
- the independent status of initiated young men;
- marriages, including traditional marriage ceremonies, polygamous marriages and the marriage of young women (12-13 years onwards);
- widows of traditional marriages, including polygamous marriages; and
- the responsibility of adults for providing and managing their own resources.

Own Pay.

- Twenty eight (28) communities, 65% of the sample, stated that each adult should be seen as an independent recipient. They said the only people whose benefits should be dependent on another person are children. Adults, as already stated, include initiated young men and young married women (underaged spouses).

INFRASTRUCTURE.

- Twenty one (21) communities have indicated that their postal services are inadequate and/or too infrequent to ensure equal access to Social Security services. ... Fifty percent (50%) of the sample had no banking services at all. ... Even though most communities in the sample have access to at least one STD phone some still reported that they had difficulty contacting the department because: the phones were located in areas which were too public; the phones were out of order; only one phone was available; or the phone was always being used during office hours.
- The level of other community services was not reported in "Community Characteristics" description because of the extreme variation in the level and quality of services. Categorising the information would have been an injustice to the residents. It is sufficient to state that it appears that services (stores, child care, health, housing, recreation etc.) did not exist in quantity and often were not of the quality which would be expected in non-Aboriginal communities of similar size. In addition, services on communities varied greatly with the size, stage of development, administrative structure, state, location, and so on, of each community.
- The current system of delivering Social Security's benefit programs depends on the existence of key community services. These include communication, banking, and postal facilities and deliveries. Inadequate and antiquated technology in these facilities and services can:-
 - * inhibit people's access to the Department's staff and programs;
 - * cause payment delays;
 - * cause difficulties with bank credits and/or encashment of cheques; and
 - * inhibit cash management.

SERVICE DELIVERY.

- The patterns appearing in the qualitative data which are relevant to the delivery of Department of Social Security services and programs focus on the following issues:-
 - * the importance of face to face contact with departmental staff;
 - * cultural training for staff and staff turnover;
 - * promotion and co-ordination of visits by government departments;
 - * the profusion and complexity of forms and letters;
 - * the oral tradition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and its implications for information dissemination;
 - * the effects of infrequent mail services and lost forms on payment delays;

- * difficulties of obtaining and retaining documents and their implications; and
- * lack of, or inadequate infrastructure (mail deliveries, post offices, banks, and telephones).
- Communities suggested that Social Security and other commonwealth government departments, such as the Department of Employment Education and Training, and the Department of Community Services and Health, should have somebody on the community who is trained and able to help people with business relating to all these departments. It was suggested that these local agents would be supported by the individual visiting services.
- Eighty percent (80%) of the communities in the sample made statements about forms and letters. They said that Social Security:-
 - * had too many forms;
 - * forms and letters were too long;
 - * forms and letters used too many big words, that is, jargon and references to the Social Security Act, eg. "pursuant to Section such and such of the Social Security Act"; and
 - * often did not make clear "to the point" statements.
- Ten (10) communities specifically stated, "there should be one form for all the different pays".
- An analysis of the community characteristics of the twenty one (21) communities who raised the issues of payment delays and lost forms reveals the following:-
 - * seven (7) were from each of the three states;
 - * fourteen (14) of the twenty one (21) had mail deliveries of one-three per week;
 - * fourteen (14) were located more than two hundred (200) kilometres from their major service centre (nine (9) were over four hundred (400) kilometres from their service centre); and
 - * eleven (11) do not have a post office and five (5) have only a part time postal agency.
- Twenty four (24) communities made statements regarding the frequency of payments. Three alternatives were offered. Statements on pay cycles and preferred methods of payment appear to highlight the need for further investigation into banking services for Aboriginal community residents and the possibility of meeting community pay cycle preferences. The responses suggest that certain pay cycle preferences could assist cash management and therefore an improved quality of life, particularly for children and older residents.
- During the field trips, residents of nine (9) communities informed the researchers that some particular shops, post offices, banks, taxi drivers, hawkers, hotels, etc. are "cheating our people" either by overcharging for goods and services or charging exorbitant cheque encashment fees or levies.

INFORMATION DISSEMINATION.

- Statements concerning information/knowledge issues were raised by thirty four (34), 80%, of the communities interviewed.

- Residents reported that they did not:-
 - "get taught about sit down money (Unemployment Benefit) early on";
 - fully understand the importance of all the different benefit names;
 - know what the government hoped to achieve through the different benefit programs;
 - fully understand who was paid for what and for what purpose;
 - fully understand their specific responsibilities under each of the different benefit programs; and
 - know their rights and how to access help when they disagreed with a decision on issues such as overpayments, non-declaration of other income, and so on.
- Nineteen (19) communities said that because a substantial number of their people do not understand the Department of Social Security programs and services and cannot cope with the forms and letters, they have to rely heavily on "other more educated people".

While residents reported that many of the intermediaries are helpful, it was stated by the people, and in the literature, that intermediaries can also inhibit people's access because the intermediaries lack knowledge or they can use this knowledge to exploit the people.
- Residents of all communities (100% of the sample) indicated that many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community people have a tendency to "hang back", lack confidence, and are often reluctant to approach official and/or government organisations and officers. ... It was said that to help build the confidence, trust, knowledge and skills of the people "the government departments need to take the service to the people and not just wait for the people to approach them". ... (This) require(s) an increase of face to face contact between the community residents and Department of Social Security staff and their trained agents. To the people, time spent talking to them in their own surroundings is important in building up rapport and credibility.
- The communities said that the preferred method of disseminating information was face to face, by word of mouth. They said that this approach gave people the opportunity to ask questions and check out information that applies to their specific case. It was stated that this might need to be repeated a number of times.
- Residents of eleven (11) communities stated that in addition to the word of mouth method, using visual (television advertisements and videos) and audio (radio) material was also "a good means of getting information across to a lot of people".
- Letters and posters were not seen as 'stand-alone' methods of giving out information. They were seen to be most useful, and therefore effective, when they are part of a multi-media, co-ordinated information dissemination strategy.

CONCLUDING STATEMENT.

The goal of this research was to present the views of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island residents of remote communities (in north Australia) on Department of Social Security programs and services. It was not the intention of this paper to make recommendations for action but rather to provide information which would be the basis for action. This information is presented in this main report and the literature review. A working party of north Australia Area, Regional Office and NADU staff was held in Darwin to consider the findings of the research. This working party developed proposals for action. An overview of the findings of the report and the proposals from the working party are presented in the Executive Summary of this report.