

The Practice of Participatory Planning at Mapoon Aboriginal Settlement: Towards Community Control, Ownership and Autonomy

MARK F. MORAN, *University of Queensland, Australia*

Abstract

The practice of participatory planning in discrete Indigenous settlements has been established since the early 1990s. In addition to technical and economic goals, participatory planning also seeks community development outcomes, including community control, ownership and autonomy. This paper presents an evaluation of one such planning project, conducted at Mapoon in 1995. The Plan successfully improved physical infrastructure and housing, but had mixed success in terms of community development. Despite various efforts to follow participatory processes, the Plan was essentially a passing event, community control progressively diminished after its completion, and outcomes fell short of notions of ownership and autonomy. This suggests some misunderstandings between the practice of participatory planning and the workings of governance.

KEY WORDS *Participatory planning; Indigenous settlements; community development; governance*

Introduction

Indigenous people increasingly participate in a wide variety of planning processes, including infrastructure planning, land use and resource management planning, regional planning, policy and program planning, community planning, strategic and operational planning, local government statutory planning and so on. This *practice* of planning involves different processes and outcomes, occurs from a variety of spatial bases across different scales, and is underpinned by a wide array of legislative frameworks. Planning events occur in Indigenous settlements on a frequent basis, facilitated by a growing number of planning practitioners, including consultants,

academics, community leaders and government officers.

The degree of beneficiary participation and the methods used vary from token consultation with elected councillors to many weeks of household surveys and focus group workshops. Table 1 gives a useful typology of planning according to the degree of participation. Whilst, strictly speaking, most planning is participatory to some extent, *participatory planning* is 'developmental' in nature, and is otherwise known as 'community development planning' or 'community-based planning'. In addition to the usual technical and economic goals, practitioners of participatory planning seek community development outcomes

Table 1 Types of Indigenous Planning according to Beneficiary Participation (Source: Davies, 1995, 44 after Boothroyd 1986, 19).

	<i>Peripheral</i> , to the decisions and actions of the community	<i>Directional</i> , relevant, linked to the directions and actions of the community
<i>Centralised</i> , involving only a small section of the community, usually elites and leaders	RITUALISTIC (going through the motions; 'top down' with token consultation only)	AUTOCRATIC (decisions made by an individual, elected council or interest group)
<i>Participatory</i> , involving the whole community (Council, elders, women, youth, etc.)	PLACATORY (‘wish list’; not linked to action, implementation and decision making)	DEVELOPMENTAL (non-manipulative participatory process involving whole community, linked to community action and decisions)

variously termed self-determination, wellbeing, empowerment, capacity building, community control, autonomy, ownership, and the like (Moran, 2002a).

In seeking community development goals, participatory planning is by necessity focused on the local and often proceeds on a household or individual basis. From this point, participatory planning is situated within a much larger context. It engages and negotiates with legislation, standards, economies, representation, expectations, assumptions and government policy at greater regional, state, national and international scales. The extent to which this happens is an important variable differentiating types of participatory planning practice.

Indigenous settlements can be considered as either discrete settlements or dispersed housing in towns and urban centres (Memmott and Moran, 2001). This paper focuses on remote *discrete Indigenous settlements* on Indigenous communal title land. Other researchers have examined participation by Indigenous people in planning in other contexts, such as non-Indigenous local government areas (e.g., Jackson, 1997), social impact assessments (e.g., Howitt, 1993a) and bioregional planning (e.g., Lane, 1997).

Despite its widespread usage, Indigenous settlements are not characterised by political unity or social cohesion as the term ‘community’ suggests (Smith, 1989). The internal social structures of some so-called ‘communities’ are better characterized by political divisiveness

and factionalism. Whilst participatory planning can still successfully operate in such settings, it is critical that the practice is not clouded by simplistic assumptions of social cohesion.

The practice of participatory planning first arose from critiques of planning practice in developing countries during the 1980s (e.g., Chambers, 1983; Escobar, 1992). From the early 1990s, an Australian literature emerged appraising service delivery in Aboriginal communities, finding it to be top-down, program-based, and imposing government agendas with limited participation (e.g., Dale, 1992a; Wolfe, 1993). A new approach was promoted advocating community-based, bottom-up planning with an emphasis on flexible, iterative and adaptive processes rather than on reports and measurable outcomes (e.g., Lea and Wolfe, 1993). The Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody recommended:

That the preparation of community development plans should be a participative process involving all members of the community, and should draw upon the knowledge and expertise of a wide range of professionals as well as upon the views and aspirations of Aboriginal people in the local area. It is critical that the processes by which plans are developed are culturally sensitive, unhurried and holistic in approach . . . (RCADIC, 1991, Vol. 4, 27)

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) responded by providing

small grant funding for organisations to undertake participatory planning, and produced guidelines for community-based planning (ATSIC, 1994). Dale (1992b, 201) was influential in setting this national policy framework:

The common characteristic of community-based planning should be that they *belong to* the community and are *conducted under* community control. . . . an examination of planning theory since the 1940s suggests community-based planning agencies . . . must apply three essential planning principles: (i) optimised community participation; (ii) competency in technical planning and (iii) a commitment to effective bargaining and negotiation both within the community and with external actors.

The plan under consideration here followed the process recommended by the Royal Commission and exhibited the three principles described by Dale above. It is therefore a useful case study to examine the practice and policy of participatory planning.

Despite its widespread use, few evaluations of participatory planning practice have been completed. Turning again to the international development literature, critiques emerged around simplistic assumptions of community cohesion, leadership acting in the common good, the motives and values of facilitators and inflexible menu-driven approaches (e.g., Rifkin, 1986; Mosse, 1994). More recently, previous proponents of participatory planning have come to advocate more inclusive forms of governance. Speaking of a program of decentralised governance in Uganda, Porter and Onyach-Olaa (1999, 57) argue:

. . . the key is not participation in planning, but rather creating an accountable, inclusive process within the broader framework of political representation at all levels and stages in the service planning and delivery cycle.

In Australia, Davies and Young (1996, 169) found participatory planning to be an effective means of raising awareness of Indigenous issues and of negotiating with outside interests, but

that it raised questions of whether Aboriginal understandings of country and of management can be adequately conveyed through non-Aboriginal texts such as planning reports. In an evaluation of their own practice at Aurukun, Lea and Clarke (1995) found participatory planning to be misguided unless preconditions of community development were present. They concluded that the need for capacity building in dysfunctional communities was greater than that for plan production, and that this required long time frames and a sympathetic bureaucracy to create the 'space' for local initiative to occur.

This paper evaluates the success of a participatory plan undertaken at a discrete Indigenous settlement in Queensland, measured against the community development outcomes of community control, ownership and autonomy. In doing so, the analysis moves beyond plan production, into allocation, implementation and management, and to the workings of local governance.

Legislative and Policy Background in Queensland

There is a bewildering array of legislative and policy frameworks underpinning participatory planning across the different States and Territories of Australia, so this discussion is by necessity focused on Queensland. As in all of Indigenous Australia, discrete Indigenous settlements in Queensland have multiple legislative bases. Most of the original Aboriginal reserves were replaced in the 1980s by a system of 'deeds of grant in trust' (DOGITs) through amendments to the *Aboriginal Land Act 1962*. Almost all DOGITs constitute an Indigenous Local Government Authority (LGA) area under the *Community Services (Aborigines) Act 1984*¹. Democratically elected Community Councils play a dual role of LGA and land trustee. In 1991, the Queensland Government introduced the *Aboriginal Land Act 1991* and all previously granted lands became transferable into inalienable freehold title to incorporated land trusts. Although representing an important step towards decentralised self-governance, these different land and governing structures were effectively imposed with minimal

consultation. Consequently, the legislation has been widely criticised and has been amended and reviewed ever since (for a more detailed account see Moran 2002a, 72–74).

The practice and policy of planning in Indigenous settlements is relatively new in Queensland, and can be classified as infrastructure-based, participatory, land management, statutory or regional (Moran, 2002a). Most plans were prepared in the 1990s and especially in the years since 1995. This largely corresponds with the period since the establishment of 34 Community Councils and the policy shift towards self-government. As Councils and Government have called for greater decentralisation and accountability respectively, planning has emerged as a key instrument of discourse and negotiation.

Although most of this planning has been narrowly focused on infrastructure and service delivery issues, the Queensland Government has come to actively promote participatory planning. From the mid 1990s, the Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy (DATSIP) provided funding for participatory planning through its Alternative Governing Structures Program and, more recently, its Community Development Program. Two innovative planning projects were implemented from 1998 to 2000: the Community Infrastructure Planning (CIP) and the Community Settlement Planning (CSP) projects. Although both were ostensibly infrastructure based, they adopted in-depth consultative processes and responded to a range of social and economic issues. Since 2001, the Queensland Government policy for Indigenous affairs has focused on implementing the findings of the Fitzgerald ‘Cape York Justice Study’, which recommend that a community plan should be a condition of funding assistance (Fitzgerald, 2001, 264). The Queensland Government is currently sponsoring the preparation of Alcohol Management Plans, to facilitate new statutory controls on alcohol.

Mapoon: Planning for a Healthy Community
The ‘Old Mapoon’² — Planning for a Healthy Community Project’ (hereafter referred to simply

as the ‘Plan’) began in 1994 and was completed in 1995. The process was facilitated by a non-government research organisation called the Centre for Appropriate Technology³ (CAT, 1995). Two Mapoon people who were employed as indigenous health promotion workers within the Tropical Public Health Unit of Queensland Health initiated contact. It was conceived as a pilot research project, with funding from Queensland Health and ATSIC, at a time when funding for participatory planning was not yet widely available. The Plan was at the forefront of the practice of participatory planning in Indigenous settlements, as it developed in Queensland.

Mapoon is located on the west coast of Cape York Peninsula, and was once one of the largest missions on the Cape (Figure 1). The Presbyterian Church and Queensland Government closed it against community wishes in the early 1960s to make way for a proposed mining development. The Queensland Police forcibly relocated the last remaining residents in 1963 to New



Figure 1 Locality map.

Mapoon, on the tip of the Cape. Government carpenters burnt mission houses and buildings to the ground (see Roberts, 1975a, 1975b). People gradually began to return from the 1970s, rebuilding their homes on their old mission house sites. Until the 1990s, this occurred with minimal government assistance and often against considerable adversity. The degree of this endeavour was evident in the prevalence of owner-built humpies, which were the norm in 1995 (Figure 2). People built these homes using bush timber and whatever building materials they could find, often salvaging materials from the dumpsite of the bauxite mine at Weipa.



Figure 2 Owner built humpy in 1995.

Mapoon people were granted a Deed of Grant in Trust (DOGIT) for their land in 1998. Marpuna Aboriginal Corporation was formed in 1984 and operated as the *de facto* governing body for the settlement until Mapoon was awarded local government status in 1999. In March 2000, Mapoon elected its first Aboriginal Community Council. A year later, the Premier of Queensland, Peter Beattie, formally apologised for the past behaviour of the Queensland Government. After almost 30 years, Mapoon finally received the recognition and legitimacy it once enjoyed.

The 1995 Plan was undertaken over a period of 18 months. The level of community participation exceeded the extent of participation normally undertaken in planning projects of this nature. It proceeded at an individual and house-

hold level, across the entire settlement, including community members not living at Mapoon. It did not begin and end with the Corporation, leaders and elders, which was the usual scenario. The committee members of Marpuna Corporation were happy to participate in the process on an individual basis, as both members of the community, as well as elected officials.

Mapoon, like most communities, has a range of internal social divisions and factions. By encouraging the participation of the majority of households in Mapoon, the process was able to undercut these divisions at a consensual level, such that most households felt that they had a voice in the process. Whilst there were inevitable disappointments with some areas of compromise, it was possible for most households to weigh this against what they would gain. The logistics and the procedural rigour required to achieve these outcomes were substantial.

The process was not predetermined and is best described as non-linear, iterative, and reactive: as issues emerged, different methods were selected to respond. These included:

1. Employment of a community member, Mervyn Wales, to the temporary position of planning officer.
2. Secondment into the project team of two Mapoon people (Robert Cockatoo and Linda McLachlan), who were employees of Queensland Health.
3. Election and training of a planning committee to oversee the project.
4. A household survey questionnaire across a representative sample of Mapoon households.
5. Public meetings.
6. Focus group workshops mainly held with the planning committee.
7. 'Drop-in days' to obtain community feedback as development of the Plan progressed.
8. Distribution of graphical flyers, tee shirts and other promotion materials.
9. Utilisation of aerial photographic mapping and sketch drawings during workshops.
10. Distribution of a pictorial summary of the final report (CAT, 1995, 23–28).



Figure 3 Family block living area in 1994.

In 1995, Mapoon was a small emerging settlement with minimal improvements in infrastructure and housing. The population fluctuated around 125 people. Almost all of the existing houses were self-built humpies clustered across an extended family block living area (Figure 3). In 1995, a large capital works program to the value of \$3 million was approved for Mapoon, with the promise of more funding to follow. Mapoon was on the verge of an explosion of expenditure and capital works on a scale it had never seen before. At the time, the Queensland Government proposed a medium-density housing development for the central Red Beach area only (see Figure 4 for the location of Red Beach), which was against the wishes of the majority of Mapoon people. The time was opportune to prepare a settlement plan, which ensured some community control of development.

Given the backlog of funding for housing and infrastructure, the implicit purpose of the Plan was to improve environmental health. This focused on built improvements including housing, living areas, water supply, sewage, dust control, electricity supply and drainage of stormwater. An interdisciplinary team of facilitators worked with the project, including engineers, architects, landscape architects, appropriate

technologists and water supply specialist, many of who were leaders in their respective fields (see acknowledgements). The dispersed nature of the plan and the sensitive coastal environment presented these professionals with some unique technical challenges. Furthermore, the local context demanded that introduced technology be appropriate and sustainable, and otherwise within the economic resources and technical skills of the people using it.

A major outcome of the 1995 Plan was the design of a dispersed settlement plan covering the whole settlement, which stretches along a 10 km coastal strip (Figure 4). The planning committee decided that family blocks should generally be one hectare in area. Each block was considered as an extended family living area, with the potential to accommodate up to 30 people, through a cluster of dwellings and structures. The large blocks provided adequate space and flexibility for various activities and for self-built yard improvements to occur informally over the greater external living area, which was consistent with existing living arrangements (Figure 3). Each family block was surrounded by a perimeter bush buffer of a nominal width of 20–60 m, to ensure some separation and privacy between neighbouring families. A useful

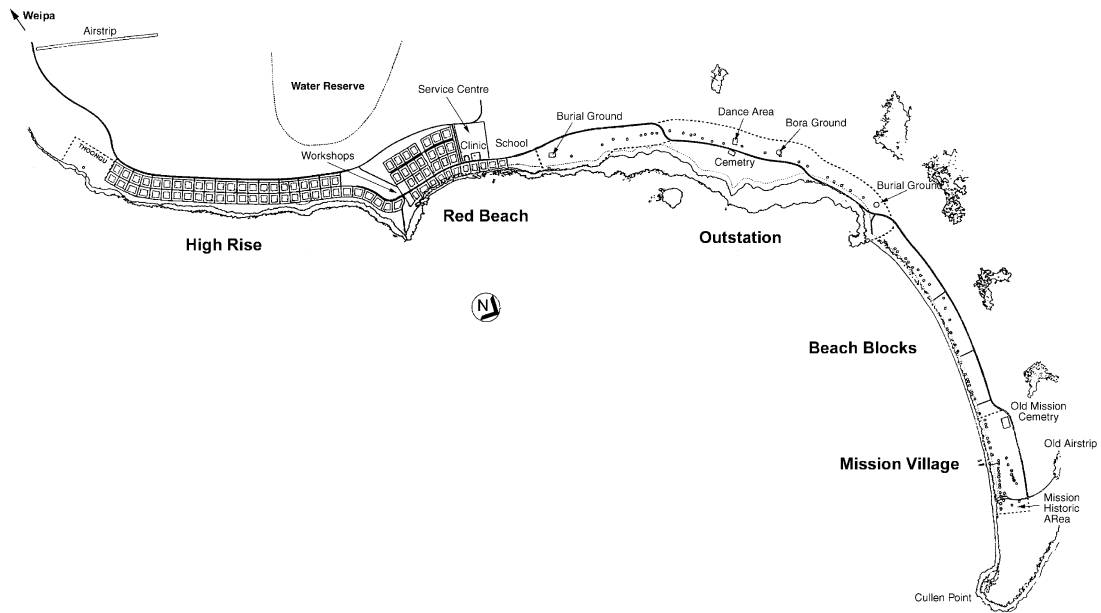


Figure 4 Mapoon settlement plan (drawn by Lachlan Walker).

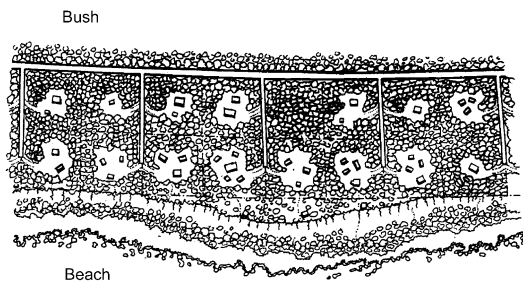


Figure 5 Negative space perspective of extended family blocks and clustered dwellings.

way to look at the Plan is in terms of the vegetation that is retained, rather than the area to be developed, from what can be described as a negative space perspective (Figure 5).

Mapoon is unlikely to see a repeat of the intensification of activity it witnessed over the period 1996–2000. The list of improvements includes roadworks, reticulated water and power

over the full 10 km length of the settlement, about 30 new houses, an airstrip, clinic, primary school and store. Almost all of this physical development proceeded in keeping with the 1995 Plan. By 2000, the rate of funding and expenditure on capital works had been reduced to a rolling works program of the order of \$700 000 per annum, mainly for housing and community buildings.

The settlement and development of Mapoon has come a long way since the first families began to return in the 1970s. In 2000, the population was over 200 people. Community leaders and many external stakeholders generally hold the Plan to be a contributing factor to the successful development of Mapoon. The ATSIC Peninsula Regional Council (1995, 50) recommended the approach for replication elsewhere on Cape York. With funding from Queensland Government agencies, the Centre for Appropriate Technology adapted the process to Port Stewart (CAT, 1997) and Mona Mona (CAT,

1999). The Queensland Government used the approach as the contractual basis for consultants preparing settlement plans at eight emerging settlements across Queensland (e.g., C&B, 2000). Despite this perception of success and its replication elsewhere, the success of the Plan has never been evaluated.

Evaluation Methodology

The Plan set a five-year planning horizon to the year 2000. Towards the end of 2000, the author approached Mapoon Community Council. Council agreed that it was time to evaluate the Plan and to make any corrections for the future. The evaluation was not funded. Four people undertook the fieldwork: the author, Robert Cockatoo (Queensland Health), Jane Lynch and Deb Erickson (both with CAT). The author's involvement occurred as part of his doctoral research. The other organisations provided resources for the internal evaluation of their past activities. A separate and more detailed report with recommendations was specifically prepared for Council (Moran, 2002b).

The author has a long history of past involvement with Mapoon people. He was the project manager for the initial Plan and then strongly involved with its implementation, especially over the three years from 1994 to 1997⁴. From this time, contact was maintained on an intermittent basis, either as an unpaid advisor or in the course of doctoral research.

The author's past experience with Mapoon enabled him to draw on a large body of research. Qualitative and quantitative data were collected from two household surveys: the first in the course of the Plan in 1995, and the second in the course of the evaluation in 2000. A semi-structured interview format was utilised for both surveys, primarily through open-ended questions. Both surveys passed statistical checks on sampling and interviewer bias (for full details of the survey including wording of interview prompts see CAT, 1995; Moran, 2002b).

In addition to household surveys, meetings and focus group discussions were facilitated or observed in the course of the Plan. Numerous

informal discussions were held with key informants. A variety of graphical methods were incorporated, including landscape drawings, aerial mapping and digital photography. Departmental officers were interviewed and the contents of policy documents analysed. This hybrid methodology permitted triangulation to compare and crosscheck findings.

The nature of the original Plan is best described as action research. A dialectic exchange developed between the local knowledge of Mapoon people and economic and technical knowledge of the facilitators. Howitt *et al.* (1990, 5) describes a similar process in central Australia, whereby the process of presenting results, drafting graphics and reports, oral presentations, and meeting briefings, became an integral part of the research process, generating new interpretative insights. Other researchers (e.g., Davies, 1995, 77) have chosen action research in their studies of participatory planning.

Whereas the 1995 Plan used a mixture of research methods over a long period, the evaluation was undertaken over a short period of time. The household survey for the evaluation was completed in five days (13–17 November, 2000). Longitudinal comparisons were made with the earlier survey to the extent that this was possible. At the time of household interviews, housing and yards were mapped using an intersecting grid of digital camera images. Unstructured interviews were also held with key informants and external stakeholders such as government officers. A workshop was held in Cairns with many of the facilitators involved in the original 1995 Plan.

Familiarity can expedite social research where the researcher is known and trusted. However, participant responses can also be clouded by familiarity. The author has never been a resident of Mapoon, other than for short periods of up to one month. He has also never worked for the community as a government employee or private consultant. This has permitted him to maintain a degree of neutrality. Nonetheless, it was necessary to guard against familiarity effects by testing responses during interviews.

The author's involvement with the Plan also raised questions about his ability to be objective during its evaluation. To cross-check this, other researchers were brought into the evaluation process. Two members of the survey team had not previously visited Mapoon. Stakeholders and facilitators involved in the process, and academic colleagues with no past involvement reviewed the analysis to detect any indication of bias. Their comments suggested that the author had tended to overcompensate, and adjustments were made accordingly.

Evaluation Results

The views and concerns of Mapoon people are a useful starting point. From the household survey conducted in the course of the evaluation, almost everyone interviewed (92%) was aware of the 'Planning for a Healthy Community Project' and the vast majority of those interviewed (71%) were actually living in Mapoon at the time of the initial Plan in 1995. This not only ensured a strong response rate to the survey, but also demonstrated the significance of the event. This contrasts with research under way by the author at Kowanyama where few people can recall past participatory planning events (Moran, 2003).

The survey posed a number of open-ended questions concerning the impact of the town plan and how it could be improved in the future. Almost everyone interviewed (96%) indicated that the town plan at Mapoon was better than those for other Indigenous communities where they had lived. Suggestions for improvements to the town plan were mostly restricted to the central Red Beach area. Otherwise, there was widespread and ongoing approval and support for the settlement plan.

To what extent did this translate into improved well-being at Mapoon? Most people thought that Mapoon was changing for the better (70%) or that it was not changing at all (22%). Again, most people (86%) indicated that they were planning to stay in Mapoon for a long time to come.

It is impossible to disaggregate the extent that this general optimism was due to the 1995

Plan, given all the other events and developments that had taken place between 1995 and 2000. Although the Plan undoubtedly contributed to improvements at Mapoon, other factors also played an important part, not the least being the Mapoon peoples' resilience. Recognition of Council status was also a major achievement after many years of lobbying the Queensland Government. The community also found the means to settle long-standing disputes between historical and traditional associations⁵. Alcohol abuse and binge drinking at Mapoon were said to have decreased due to improved access to Weipa. Education and health services also improved in Mapoon during this period.

More detailed evaluation proceeded by assessing the Plan against community development outcomes. The Plan did not clearly articulate a vision statement or a hierarchy of goals or verifiable indicators. From close reflection of the process and analyses of the documentation and survey results, the author distilled the following four themes: (a) healthy living environment; (b) preserve what Mapoon already had; (c) community control; and (d) ownership and autonomy.

Healthy Living Environment

Because the focus of this paper is on community development aspects of the Plan, only a summary will be given of the technical and environmental health outcomes (see Moran, 2002b for a full technical analysis). Generally, technical aspects of the Plan proved to be successful. Most of the physical improvements were constructed in Mapoon over the five-year period from 1995 to 2000. With the exception of some minor problems with the water supply pressure, all aspects of the built environment were functioning well. Where maintenance was required, this was within the resources and capacity of locally employed tradespeople. The Plan was able to demonstrate cost-effectiveness in comparison with the normal development costs of a discrete Indigenous settlement. This was despite the higher costs of reticulating water and power over the dispersed settlement plan (Moran, 1999).

Before 1995, many of the outlying blocks relied on carted water or backyard wells. Pit latrines were also common. It can be assumed that the completed water supply and new houses with septic tanks have had a positive impact on the environmental health status of Mapoon. If the 1995 Plan had not been completed, most housing and infrastructure would have been limited to the central Red Beach area, consistent with a previous and now obsolete town plan. It is likely that Mapoon would now be facing problems of neighbourhood crowding, poor environmental health and an unappealing urban landscape typical of remote Indigenous settlements across Australia (Reser, 1979; Leveridge and Lea, 1993).

Preserve what Mapoon already had

Given the critical literature on planning practice in Indigenous Australia and developing countries, it was pragmatic to 'preserve what Mapoon already had'. This was particularly pertinent to Mapoon. In 1995, Mapoon in many ways was already a healthy community. People were living close to their country, and their diet (and daily exercise) was largely supplemented by the collection of bush tucker and seafood. The largely undisturbed environment preserved an important relationship between Mapoon people and their country. The social character of Mapoon was dominated by an atmosphere of self-sufficiency and community control (CAT, 1995, 11, 16, 18).

In 1995, almost all the housing consisted of self-built humpies, representing what people were able to achieve within their limited financial resources. This was a strong expression of self-sufficiency which the Plan sought to encourage into the future. However, by the year 2000, owner builder activity had sharply declined. Few, if any, new humpies had been built since 1995 and the existing humpies were falling into disrepair. Nonetheless, people maintained sentimental attachments and in all cases, bar one, the old humpies remained standing:

We don't use the old shacks, just ruins now. When we lived down there we had a fireplace,

but now we just use the gas stove. Something I miss is cooking fish in the fireplace and telling stories. We only light a fire now sometimes, when we run out of gas.

We had it hard in the humpy, but we were busy, outside cooking, always something to do, on the go every day, healthier . . . the new house has slowed us down.

The shift from owner-built to rental housing was accompanied with a shift in onus of responsibility. In 1995, most people (70%) attended to housing maintenance and repairs themselves, consistent with private ownership. In 2000, the reverse was true and almost everyone (91%) relied on the Council to undertake repairs, consistent with their rental agreements. This clearly represents a decrease in self-sufficiency and an increase in the reliance on Council.

This perhaps raises a question of whether funding for new housing was appropriate. Although there is a general nostalgia about the old days, it is hard to imagine anyone in Mapoon raising this question and it was certainly not raised in the course of either the 1995 Plan or the evaluation in 2000. In the court of public opinion across Australia, from Mapoon residents to the readership of the *Sydney Morning Herald*, funding and development of Mapoon was inevitable. A self-built humpy may be seen by a community development worker as testament to years of skilfully acquiring materials and ingenious bush craft, and as appropriate to the economic resources of the people building it. A journalist, lawyer or activist is likely to see a decrepit hovel testifying to racism and the degradation of Indigenous Australia. The owner of the humpy may have a sentimental attachment and pride in their home, but not to the extent that they would pass up an opportunity to get a new house, even with the condition of rental payments.

The Plan pragmatically faced up to the inevitable development of Mapoon. It sought to sustain and learn from what Mapoon already had and to limit the impact of future pressures from population growth and associated development. In particular, it sought to avoid the environmental

health problems consistent with the typical congested housing patterns of remote Indigenous settlements.

So how effective was the Plan in preserving what Mapoon already had? According to the survey conducted during the evaluation, about half of the people interviewed were cultivating vegetables and everyone indicated that they had eaten bush tucker or seafood in the week preceding the survey. These levels had remained unchanged since the earlier 1994 survey. This suggested that the Mapoon way of living close to country with a diet supplemented by bush tucker had not been adversely affected.

It was also evident from site inspections during the evaluation that developments built according to the new settlement plan had not compromised the spatial order between people and place, according to the historical associations to the Old Mission. Coconut palms and fruit trees from the Old Mission were retained, as well as significant historical sites, including the old mission church buildings and cemetery. There were still considerable distances between the houses with generous bush buffer zones which afforded residents' privacy and a pleasing setting. There was little crowding of housing sites, thereby reducing tensions that might develop between neighbours. A concentration of housing in the Red Beach area was avoided. A 50 metre wide esplanade protected the sensitive beach foreshore and maintained public access for fishing. Generally, the Plan was effective in preserving these important aspects of the 'Mapoon lifestyle'. However, this did not come without a price in terms of community control.

Community Control

After the Plan was completed and moved into the implementation stage, participation in the process progressively diminished. Implementation is considered in three stages: (1) funding allocation and negotiation; (2) construction; and (3) management.

There was never any question that funds were available to implement the Plan through two different infrastructure and housing programs⁶.

The Plan was able to negotiate a high level of collaboration with the consulting engineers, project managers, construction contractors and departmental officers involved. In retrospect, it is now difficult to separate planning from implementation, and the two are inseparable in the eyes of Mapoon people and the external stakeholders. In this regard, the Plan was as much 'project' planning, as it was 'participatory' planning.

The role played by the Plan in mediating this integration was an important outcome of the project. It did not occur as a matter of course. There was no statutory or other funded basis. Rather, integration occurred because the Plan created a discourse and political climate which was responsive to both the internal requirements of Mapoon and the external requirements for financial accountability and engineering rigour. The Plan was easy for the engineers, project managers and government officials to understand, accept and 'run with', as well as successfully expressing the desires of the Mapoon people.

A critical role was played by a number of the planning facilitators (including the author) who acted in the interests of Mapoon during the transitional period into implementation. These professionals effectively acted as brokers between Mapoon and the Government, using the Plan as a license for their actions. Although they were able to undertake this role successfully, their position was tenuous in terms of community control. The whole process would have benefited immensely if it had been possible to extend community participation into this allocation phase of the project. Participatory negotiation methods could have been included in the process, rather than limiting participation to the planning stage. This could have provided an effective 'exit strategy' for the facilitators at the completion of the Plan.

The 1995 Plan produced two separate documents: a pictorial summary (CAT, 1994) and a technical report (CAT, 1995). The pictorial summary was specifically designed to be accessible to Mapoon people, whereas the main report was much more technical and complicated, despite the attention paid to graphic design. Mapoon

people were happy to endorse the technical report even though the contents were largely inaccessible to most Mapoon people. Adopting the distinctly non-Indigenous text as their own text, Mapoon people were able to take control of the way that Government interpreted the needs of Mapoon (similarly see Davies and Young, 1996, 161). To this extent, Mapoon people were able to exert some control over the allocation process, even though their level of direct participation was greatly reduced from the time of completion of the Plan.

Once construction began, the level of participation diminished further. Although infrastructure works were constructed in accordance with the Plan, participation in the construction process was limited to the employment of a few workers by external construction contractors, and the subcontracting of a few minor works to Council.

The effects of this could have been reduced through more labour intensive construction methods. Indeed, in the course of the household survey in 1995, 71% of people interviewed indicated that they wished to work on the construction of their house. Furthermore, 89% of people indicated that houses should be built in Mapoon using a mixture of contractors and CDEP⁷. Several options were discussed in early 1996, but there was widespread impatience in Mapoon for the expedient delivery of the long awaited housing. Marpuna Corporation acquiesced and tendered external building contracts.

In the period immediately before the 1995 Plan, Marpuna Corporation had constructed several prefabricated houses using a mixture of CDEP and Council workers' labour, with varying degrees of success. There was also a strong history of owner-builder activity and self-built humpies, which dominated the housing in Mapoon. In comparison, external contractors undertook all major building and construction work from 1995 to 2000. Despite fostering a high level of participation in planning and design, the completion of the Plan actually marked a decline in participation in community building activity⁸.

From 1997 to 2000, a further 25 houses were built. The design principles established in the



Figure 6 Change in house design standard for two large families from 1995 (top) to 2000 (bottom).

1995 Plan were not considered in the design of these houses, and participation in the design process was largely limited to picking a design from a catalogue (Figure 6). In 2000, over half of the people interviewed indicated that they were not satisfied with the amount of control they had over the design and siting of their new house.

The Plan did not address a system for the management of ongoing development. No formal system of development control had been instituted by Council, as is normally found in mainstream local government authorities. There were no formal processes for assessing and deciding on development applications, referral

to State Government agencies, and evaluating and amending the original Plan. In 2000, there were few remaining copies of the Plan in circulation. The planning committee established and trained in the course of the Plan had not met again. It was therefore surprising to see that development had deviated little from the settlement plan. This is partly because the initial flurry of construction in 1996 'set the plan in stone'. This applied in particular to the construction of roads throughout the settlement, which provided the 'backbone' for future development.

It can also be explained by the fact that the Plan was largely a reflection of community aspirations, not a source of them. From 1995 to 2000, new houses were built according to historical associations, in keeping with Mapoon people's commitment to maintaining the old mission layout. This commitment existed prior to the 1995 Plan, and was still strongly evident in 2000. Although the reports from the 1995 Plan were not in widespread use, community leaders were nonetheless still making decisions and controlling development, albeit through more informal means. The Plan did at least create some institutional space to permit this community control to continue.

Ownership and Autonomy

It is questionable whether the participation which occurred during the Plan could be interpreted to be 'ownership' of the process, as claimed by the Plan documents and its facilitators. The term 'ownership' is problematic in a community context and is more relevant in an individual or family sense. People and families own motorcars, houses, personal effects and certain rights to land. A community is a much more tenuous social entity full of social divisions and competing interests. The Mapoon community may have a sense of sharing a lifestyle or a football team. It is, however, perhaps overly optimistic to expect a community to feel a sense of 'ownership' of a community planning process, especially when this is essentially a transient event. Whilst this may just seem a matter of semantics, such terminology raises the status of

participatory planning (and of its facilitators) to misleading heights.

In a component of the Plan, the design and siting of six houses was undertaken in a participatory manner utilising the services of a specialist architect. The notion of ownership is more relevant here due to the more personal nature of housing. The six households involved had strong memories of their contribution to the design, and one male elder expressed a sense of ownership:

Our house, I designed it to suit us, like the kitchen outside for ___'s asthma . . . and we left that space there for ___'s place; I'll do the design for her place too. I'd do a few things different this time, like security grills, insect screens and fence . . .

Beyond the scope of the Plan, the process which was developed sought to be equally as important as the written documents and drawings that emerged as outcomes. In the context of other developmental issues that Mapoon must constantly face, the Plan sought to provide a process which could be adapted internally for making community decisions.

Amongst the terms used to express community development in the Plan, 'capacity building' was not stated. The Plan did not include a formal training component, other than a work information tour to Arnhem Land for the planning committee at the start of the project. It is safe to assume that some skills transfer occurred in participatory planning methods, and that people otherwise learnt from the experience. Since the 1995 Plan, Mapoon people have on occasion internally organised participatory planning events⁹. There continued to be a 'Mapoon way' of getting things out in the open at public meetings, much as there was prior to the Plan.

The Plan also sought to sustain the autonomy that pre-existed it. It noted the significance of the past initiatives of the owner-builders and sought to support and encourage this. Although noting a very real need for increased government assistance, the Plan sought a process whereby government assistance would not lead to the dependency cycle typical of many Aboriginal communities.

Whilst people were involved in the design of the houses and infrastructure and the town plan, and while this resulted in a more appropriate intervention, the intervention was nonetheless externally funded and thus inescapably external to Mapoon. People were pleased with the level of influence that they were able to exert over the process which exceeded everyone's expectation at the time. But such influence can only be measured by the degree to which it falls short of notions of 'autonomy'. Community control over the process diminished with the onset of the construction programs which followed on from the Plan. The core nature of the power relationship remained largely outside Mapoon: the funding, professionals, consultants, organisations and the contractors were not from Mapoon.

Notwithstanding this, Mapoon people were not neutral bystanders. The micro-economy at Mapoon could never have afforded the level of intervention that was delivered, and Mapoon people had strongly demanded that the external funding and infrastructure be forthcoming. The Marpuna Corporation decided in 1996 to build the housing through construction contractors. In 2000, it was evident that people had chosen not to self-build new humpies and other yard improvements, despite ample space being available on their housing blocks for them to do so.

These issues reflect the conundrum of the political economy of a settlement like Mapoon. On examination of the economic resources and building skills of Mapoon people, it would be easy to conclude that a self-built housing program would have been an appropriate intervention, based on an upscaled model of the existing humpies. However, this would not have satisfied a wide range of national standards, ranging from building standards to notions of social justice and equity, nor would it necessarily have been what Mapoon people wanted. Thus, change was always inevitable at Mapoon. The 1995 Plan was successful to the extent that it helped the local people to mediate this change and to retain certain important aspects of Mapoon lifestyle. It was more correctly a tool to influence external project funding and introduce technology, rather

than a means of enhancing autonomy. Indeed, the decline of owner-builder activity and the lack of community participation in the implementation process would suggest that a certain loss of (or shift in) autonomy became inevitable during the process.

Regardless of all the vagaries in the degree of ownership and autonomy, the Plan was implemented for all to see: pipes were laid, roads were sealed, and houses were built. The real tangible nature of technology delivery was inescapable. The Mapoon people, consultants, contractors and funded agencies all shared in the energy of seeing something done. This in itself was a considerable achievement and the source for the popular perception of the project's success.

Conclusion

The 1995 Plan successfully introduced housing, infrastructure and new technologies into the settlement. It articulated the needs and desires of Mapoon people in a format and style which could positively inform the decision-making processes of outside agencies. Fortunately, the Plan was also completed at a time when Government funding and commitment was available for its implementation.

Despite this success, the Plan had its shortcomings. It focused on one aspect of development: the built environment. This required an exhaustive and complex process of analysis and reporting, but nonetheless, much was left out. Interestingly, the Plan focused on those physical development factors which respond immediately to inputs of capital, resources and expertise. It did not tackle more intractable issues to do with native title, health, education, legislation and governing structures, none of which was immediately manipulable. Narrowing of the scope of the Plan was a significant factor in the success of its implementation.

This leads to questions of the scale upon which a participatory plan is, or can be successful. The nature of community development is a private, diverse, evolving, multi-faceted thing, which goes well beyond what it is possible to

capture in a participatory plan, regardless of how inclusive and holistic it attempts to be. Beyond the local, remote settlements must also engage and negotiate with legislation, standards, economies, representation, expectations, assumptions and government policy at greater regional, state, national and international scales. As noted by Howitt (1993b), such interactions must be conceptualised as occurring simultaneously and multidirectionally, within and between various scales. Even if, through some gargantuan effort, it were possible to understand and model this complex web of internal and external interactions, the whole dynamic would change over time. It is therefore not possible to examine a participatory plan without questioning what parts have been left out, and at what time they were relevant.

Furthermore, the completion of the Plan effectively ended the process. Although the Plan was conducted over a 12 to 18 month time-frame, it was nonetheless a passing event. The Plan claimed outcomes relating to community control, ownership and autonomy. Whilst the Plan made important contributions, it remained largely separate and subordinate to daily community life. This raises an ethical issue for planning facilitators, lest participatory planning be misconstrued by Governments as a substitute for that which it is not.

Whilst the Plan fostered a high degree of participation, the process was heavily reliant on outside facilitators and little capacity building occurred. This can also be said of the conduct of the evaluation. Regardless of the rigorous logistical management of participatory events and the technical expertise of the facilitators involved (including the author), the evaluation reveals the need to examine taken-for-granted assumptions around community development. As Suchet contends (2001, 132), the notion of capacity building is something that outsiders provide to communities, yet often it is these outsiders who need their capacity built.

The Plan included a detailed contextual analysis of the history, people and physical resources, to ensure that the technology and other proposed interventions were locally appropriate. However,

it did not undertake a contextual analysis of the existing governing structures and decision-making systems, whether formal or informal. Had it done so, the duration and types of planning processes could have been adjusted to fit, that is, the process itself could have been made more locally appropriate to local governance.

Similarly, in terms of scale, the Plan firmly engaged with Mapoon people at an individual and household level. It also engaged at a state and federal level to the extent necessary to secure funding and overcome constraints. It did not, however, engage sufficiently at the local and regional levels at which Indigenous organisations, including the then Marpuna Corporation, predominantly operate.

This suggests some misunderstanding between the practice of participatory planning and the workings of local governance. Further research is required to examine how the process and techniques inherent to good participatory planning might be better integrated into more inclusive forms of local and regional governance. A downwardly accountable governing structure could achieve similar ends to a participatory planning process through representative governing bodies, proportional elections, sub-committees, transparent decision-making, open meetings, funding allocation guidelines, grievance mechanisms, and annual planning cycles. Such approaches are inherently more sustainable than a participatory planning event. This is not to signal an end to participatory planning practice, but rather to suggest that participatory planning cannot operate effectively or sustainably without certain preconditions of governance in place. Further research is required to better understand how the two can interrelate practically.

Whilst this evaluation focused on ways to improve future planning practice, this should not underrate the success of the Plan at the time it was conducted. The lessons that have become evident emphasise the need for further exploratory projects and partnerships with communities, and more importantly, they advocate that such projects and partnerships should be followed by an evaluation of their outcomes.

Correspondence: Mark Moran, Aboriginal Environments Research Centre, School of Geography, Planning and Architecture, University of Queensland, St Lucia, Qld 4067, Australia. E-mail: mfmoran@despammed.com

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Dr. Paul Memmott, Susan Jensen and Michael Martin made useful comments on an early draft of this paper. The author especially thanks the constructive and challenging comments made by Sandy Suchet-Pearson and an anonymous referee. The professionals who facilitated the project were the author, Julian Wigley, Jim Sinatra, Phin Murphy, Lachlan Walker, Jonathon Duddles, Su Groome, Duncan Wallis, Paul Pholeros, Bruce Walker, Kurt Seemann and Steve Patman. Thanks also to the people and leaders at Mapoon for participating in the evaluation. It is hoped that they will come to realise some benefits from the improved practice of participatory planning in the future.

NOTES

1. The shires of Aurukun and Mornington Island were established under the Local Government (Aboriginal Lands) Act 1978.
2. Whilst widely known in 1995 as 'Old Mapoon', the paper adopts the now more popular convention of simply 'Mapoon'.
3. CAT is a non-profit Indigenous organisation with an Aboriginal board of management based in Alice Springs and Cairns (www.icat.org.au).
4. During this time he was employed as a research technologist with the Centre for Appropriate Technology.
5. Historical associations have developed in the period since colonial contact whereas traditional associations are based on pre-contact cultural practices, which have persisted and been modified into contemporary forms.
6. Funded through the ATSIC Health Infrastructure Priority Project (HIPP). Housing was funded through the Queensland Government, ATSI Housing program.
7. Commonwealth Development Employment Program, through which participants work in lieu of social security payments.
8. Since the completion of the 2000 Evaluation, this has changed. In 2003, Mapoon Council was undertaking an effective housing construction program, using community tradesmen and labour.
9. In 2003, Mapoon Council internally organised a participatory planning process for alcohol management, which included a series of public meetings and a household survey.

REFERENCES

ATSIC (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission), 1994: *Community Based Planning: Principles and Practices*. Commonwealth Government, Canberra.

- ATSIC PRC (ATSIC Peninsula Regional Council), 1995: *Regional Plan ATSIC Peninsula Region 1995–2005*. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, Commonwealth Government, Cairns.
- Boothroyd, P., 1986: Enhancing local planning skills for native self reliance: The UBC Experience. *Canadian Journal of Native Studies* 6(1), 13–42.
- C&B (C&B Consulting Group), 2000: Community Settlement Plan, Old Doomadgee: Pictorial Summary and Main Report. Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy and Development, Brisbane.
- CAT (Centre for Appropriate Technology), 1994: *A Pictorial Summary: Old Mapoon Planning for a Healthy Community*. Queensland Health, Wigley Architects, Sinatra and Murphy, Health Habitat, Cairns.
- CAT, 1995: Old Mapoon Planning for a Healthy Community: Stage II Main Report. Queensland Health, Tropical Public Health Unit, Cairns.
- CAT, 1997: *Moojeeba-Theethinji: Planning for a Healthy Growing Community*. Port Stewart Aboriginal Community, Cairns.
- CAT, 1999: *Mona Mona Infrastructure Project: Housing Design Report Stage II Works*. Djabugay Tribal Aboriginal Corporation, Cairns.
- Chambers, R., 1983: *Rural Development: Putting the Last First*. Longman Scientific and Technical, Harlow, Essex.
- Dale, A.P. 1992a: Aboriginal councils and natural resource use planning: participation by bargaining and negotiating. *Australian Geographical Studies* 30(1), 9–26.
- Dale, A.P., 1992b: Planning for rural development in Aboriginal communities: a community-based planning approach. In Moffatt, I. and Webb, A. (eds) *Conservation and Development Issues in North Australia*. Northern Australia Research Unit, Australian National University, Darwin, 200–212.
- Davies, J., 1995: Appropriate planning for Aboriginal self-determination. Unpublished PhD Thesis, Department of Geography and Oceanography, University of New South Wales, Sydney.
- Davies, J. and Young, E., 1996: Taking centre stage: Aboriginal strategies for redressing marginalisation. In Howitt, R., Connell, J. and Hirsch, P. (eds) *Resource, Nations and Indigenous Peoples: Case Studies from Australasia, Melanesia and Southeast Asia*. Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 152–171.
- Escobar, A., 1992: Planning. In Sachs, W. (ed.) *The Development Dictionary: A Guide to Knowledge as Power*. Zed Books, London, 132–145.
- Fitzgerald, A., 2001: *Cape York Justice Study: The Situation of Cape York Indigenous Communities*. Vol. 2. Department of Premier and Cabinet, Queensland Government, Brisbane.
- Howitt, R., 1993a: Social impact assessment as 'applied peoples geography'. *Australian Geographical Studies* 31(2), 127–140.
- Howitt, R., 1993b: 'A world in a grain of sand': towards a reconceptualisation of geographical scale. *Australian Geographer* 24(1), 33–44.

- Howitt, R., Crough, G. and Pritchard, W., 1990: Participation, power and social research in central Australia. *Australian Aboriginal Studies* (1), 2–10.
- Jackson, S., 1997: A disturbing story: the fiction of rationality in land use planning in Aboriginal Australia. *Australian Planner* 34(4), 221–226.
- Lane, M., 1997: Aboriginal participation in environmental planning. *Australian Geographical Studies* 35(3), 308–323.
- Lea, D., and Clark, G., 1995: *Aurukun and Community Planning 1991–1995: Practice and Policy*. Manth Thayan Association and ATSIC Peninsula Regional Council, Aurukun, Cape York Peninsula.
- Lea, D., and Wolfe, J., 1993: Community development planning and Aboriginal community control. Discussion Paper No. 14. ANU, North Australia Research Unit, Darwin.
- Leveridge, V., and Lea, D., 1993: *Takeback: Planning for Change in Aurukun*. North Australia Research Unit, Australian National University, Darwin.
- Memmott, P. and Moran, M., 2001: *Indigenous Settlements of Australia [online]*. Environment Australia, Canberra. Retrieved June, 2003 from <<http://www.ea.gov.au/soe/techpapers/indigenous/index.html>>.
- Moran, M., 1999: *Improved Settlement Planning and Environmental Health in Remote Aboriginal Communities* (Report No. cat 99/6) [online]. Centre for Appropriate Technology, Alice Springs. Retrieved June, 2003 from <<http://www.mfmoran.com>>.
- Moran, M., 2002a: The Devolution of Indigenous Local Government Authority in Queensland: Opportunities for Statutory Planning. *Australian Planner* 39(2), 72–82.
- Moran, M., 2002b: *Evaluation of Settlement Planning at Old Mapoon and Port Stewart* [online]. University of Queensland, Aboriginal Environments Research Centre, Brisbane. Retrieved June, 2003 from <<http://www.mfmoran.com>>.
- Moran, Mark, 2003. Planning Kowanyama: Draft Chapter of PhD Thesis. Brisbane: University of Queensland, Aboriginal Environments Research Centre.
- Mosse, D., 1994: Authority, gender and knowledge: theoretical reflections on the practice of participatory rural appraisal. *Development and Change* 25, 497–526.
- Porter, D. and Onyach-Olaa, M., 1999: Inclusive planning and allocation for rural services. *Development in Practice* 9(1&2), 56–67.
- RCADIC (Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody), 1991: *Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, Vol. 1–6*. Commonwealth Government, Canberra.
- Reser, J., 1979. A matter of control: Aboriginal housing circumstances in remote communities and settlements. In Heppell, M. (ed.) *Black Reality*. Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, Canberra, 65–96.
- Rifkin, S.B., 1986: Lessons from community participation in health programmes. *Health Policy and Planning* 1(3), 240–49.
- Roberts, J., 1975a: *The Mapoon Story according to the Invaders: Church Mission, Queensland Government and Mining Companies. Vol. 2*. International Development Action, Melbourne.
- Roberts, J., 1975b: *The Mapoon Story by the Mapoon People. Vol. 1*. International Development Action, Melbourne.
- Smith, B., 1989: The Concept of ‘Community’ in Aboriginal Policy and Service Delivery. In NADU Occasional Paper No. 1, Northern Australia Development Unit, Australian National University Darwin.
- Suchet, S., 2001: Challenging ‘wildlife management’: lessons for Australia, Zimbabwe, Namibia and South Africa. In Baker, R., Davies, J. and Young, E. (eds) *Working on Country: Contemporary Indigenous Management of Australia's Lands and Coastal Regions*. Oxford University Press, South Melbourne, 123–136.
- Wolfe, J., 1993: Whose planning, whose plans? The DEET-ATSIC Aboriginal Community Development Planning Pilot Scheme. Discussion Paper No. 15. Australian National University, North Australia Research Unit, Darwin.