

Regional inequity in South Australia

Arabana Aboriginal Corporation (AAC)
Written by Dr Veronica Arbon, Member

Fiscal policies at federal, state and local government levels;

Port Augusta, Marree, Oodnadatta not to mention supporting Arabana people visiting Finniss Springs is difficult to understand in relation to fiscal policy. In these areas the 2015 Dropping off the Edge (DOTE) report defined Aboriginal populations residing in these areas as 'extremely disadvantaged' and experiencing health, educational, housing and economic disadvantage. For Aboriginal Australia an ideological, project driven and fractured approach appears to under-pin policy. Fiscal policy also appears to focus on particular areas such as industry and business not Aboriginal Affairs. Sadly, in Aboriginal Affairs fiscal policy and accountabilities can change annually. This leaves Aboriginal people confused and fighting to survive.

- Extremely disadvantaged
- Ideological, project based and fractured approach
- Support one year and not the next in Aboriginal Affairs

Improved co-ordination of federal, state and local government policies;

This area too can be a nightmare and all policies when put into action come with their own accountabilities and timelines. All do not support long-term planning nor long-term development. Some have money tied to them but often these are limited amounts of funding for a year or three. Very difficult to have a long-term vision and manage.

- Different policies and approaches in relation to accountabilities
- Hard to work toward a future

Regional development policies;

Focussed on larger towns and not necessarily the Aboriginal populations in these towns. Provides outcomes for the 'population' the assumed 'norm'. Often development not seen as responding to diverse needs in a region or town and that these needs are operating differently in various economic areas of the town

- Not focused on diversity
- One model to fit all
- Excludes and misses different populations and businesses

Infrastructure;

This area is very difficult if one lives in a town like Marree or Oodnadatta. Although recently bitumen roads were put into Marree and mobile phones (although not very stable) now operate in this town, it remains difficult to develop infrastructure.

Recently Arabana people have had some experience seeking funds (demountable to be put into Finniss Springs, 68 klms from Marree). It is seriously difficult as all costs from purchase, road support, water tanks, sewerage and solar must be considered and costs become huge. Contractors have to, in the main, be brought up from Adelaide or from Port Augusta which are another 650/700 klms away. Difficult to find grants to cover all such cost in the one. For example, we also recently considered putting a couple of large rainwater tanks at Finniss Springs which were quite cheap but have been unable to find grants anywhere including the Indigenous Advancement Strategy.

- Distance makes matters complex,
- Building anything is costly
- No money

Education;

To go to University or TAFE/VET from most of the communities in the north students, if they have completed year 12, will need to move to Whyalla, Port Augusta or Adelaide. This comes at a great cost to the student and family black white or purple. Scholarships are sought in the Aboriginal area. However, this is a piecemeal affair and support has been peeled back over the years in Abstudy and to TAFE/VET and Universities. I was fortunate when I went to University as a single mother who was Aboriginal that I had support even when I completed my PHD. All data on these communities north of Adelaide highlight the lack of post-secondary education and at secondary level the NAPLAN highlights the failure of the educational system. This has been slightly improved by the support offered to Aboriginal Highschool students through the after-school 'Polly Farmer'?? centre. Also when I headed Wirto Yerlo, at the University of Adelaide, a Higher education Bridging program was offered here in Port Augusta that supported a number of students to then enrol in Adelaide or the other Universities or TAFE/VET but funding has been cut as mentioned. So huge failure rates remain at all levels including high school.

- NAPLAN and other research highlight the lack of education in the north
- Students have to leave home for high school, TAFE or University
- Support and enabling programs defunded

Building human capital;

Due to the above building human capital is very difficult. This is further hindered as businesses are limited, for example in Marree there is the Hotel and a shop. The police, school and small hospital are all staffed from external sources. There may be rangers in the area but they are very low key. My understanding is that there is only 1 Aboriginal staff member between all employment areas up there in Marree. With the Arabana now getting funded to run a Ranger Program this may improve as a few of our people get out on country. There is also the Arabana Centre but not clear on how many they support as a private business in Marree. Some Arabana and other Aboriginal people, who live in Marree, Oodnadatta, Cooper Pedy, may also work on CDEP or at the mines (Prominent Hill, Roxby) to the west or on cattle/sheep properties. However there are limited employment and human capital building opportunities.

- Limited employment sites
- No training opportunities through TAFE/VET in Marree or Oodnadatta
- No services such as study centres, or aged care, childcare

Enhancing local workforce skills;

The Internet Centre such as in Marree could be used by those studying their high school qualifications remotely through the school or distance education from some Universities. Placements in local jobs with financial support where possible is also a must. In the Territory there is a Police Cadet scheme – not sure if this exists here in SA – where year 11/12

students apply, are interviewed, have training, get a uniform and work along with officers during busy periods to support in crowd management or showing people where to go in a small town. Could possibly be copied in other areas such as school or hospital or ranger areas or even a business such as the farm here in Port Augusta.

Employment arrangements;

It appears that there is a need for the governments to keep services including Aboriginal services active in remote areas and towns like Port Augusta, Marree and Oodnadatta along with Cooper Pedy Whyalla and so on. However, funding from all levels has been reduced over the years. When this occurs, there is nothing left to sustain communities.

- No local agencies
- No or limited service providers
- No money circulating as Governments withdraw funds.

Decentralisation policies;

This would be great but would need a lot of development and thought on breadth covered and how one works from ground up while quality is maintained and long-term vision is enabled.

- Breadth of policy positions
- Longterm vision (3 or more years)

Innovation;

Innovation is an area that is wide open;

*Installing solar power plants in these small towns. Would need to specifically fund these towns to do it as they have little to stand on to compete. Not submission based. Support Aboriginal communities to move to solar with battery (even small organisations such as the Arabana Aboriginal Corporation at Finnis Springs). We looked into this recently and again there are many arms to getting set up (there are the panels, battery, secure storage of battery, cooling of battery, how big, electricians etc, transport) and the cost is over \$120,000.

*One of the biggest solar systems could be built in our desert and could power many homes in Australia. If built on Aboriginal land there should be some fiscal sharing back to the community (renting of the land) to enable them to have a 'hand up'.

*Tourism is an area that Arabana and others can work with through dual naming, support to innovate on marked and named camping areas, establishment of small information cultural centres on entry to country. Managing the many who are camping anywhere and polluting country.

- Solar and batteries and sharing of profits (renting the land)
- Support for local systems to lower electricity costs
- Tourism that is controlled by small fees and Aboriginal ranger programs

Manufacturing;

Not sure on this area but there is a lot of possibility on exploring bush foods, medicines and value adding with the use of solar as is occurring in Whyalla. This has to initially start with small communities with a move way from diesel/fuel generators which are incredibly costly.

Any other related matters.

Arabana People are extremely concerned about the impact of the expanded Roxby Downs mine and the proposed Adana mine on the Lake Eyre artesian basin (Roxby is in its south western corner while Adani is in the far north east). Both are or will be using mega-litres of water. Moreover with the drought, climate change, farmers in NSW being funded to put in bores and to dam tributaries what happens to all those in the environment that depend on this artesian water. Again, both have huge potential to impact the Lake Eyre artesian basin. Then there is fracking occurring in the channel country in outback Queensland and in the Beetaloo basin in the Northern Territory all of which bring water to the Basin through the Diamantina, the Finke and the Cooper. This fracking could poison the water forever. For the Arabana society this water through the artesian springs supports all life and our knowledge (spiritual) system in our country. The governments, both Federal and State need to govern and manage for sustainability. The Federal government must develop strong Environmental policy that pulls States into line for our very lives depend on water along with all else in this country. Fiscal policy must also respond to such sustainability written into Environmental policy.