

Giving Feedback to Government: Report on L.A. Meeting Ngukurr, 17th May 2017

NOTE: Ian Gumbula, of Gumbula Consultancies, in Ngukurr, has validated this report.

What: Local Authority Meeting

Where: The Conference Room, Council Service Delivery Centre, Ngukurr

Date: 17th May 2017

1. Communication with the community

Power and Water presented at the LA Meeting to advise on a project they have engaged ARDS (Aboriginal Resource and Development Service) on – Power Meter Box Installation. In the presentation they talked about there being significant issues following the installation of the new meter boxes, with many Lots not appearing in the system at the Ngukurr Store and many people going without power for two to three days.

“There were quite a few Lots that weren’t reading on the system, so when people were going up to the Store to pay for credit, the Store wasn’t seeing that number on the system. So some people have had to call that 1800 number. Some people I know have been without power for a couple of days.” - ARDS worker, LA meeting

They also talked about residents tampering with their meter boxes (to try to bypass the broken metering system and access power). Power and Water advised that re-wiring is not safe and people risk electrocution. They also advised that tenants are accountable for tampering with their meter boxes, are required to pay for reconnection, and they should do so by arrangement with Centrelink. The houses that tampered with their meter boxes are likely to take even longer to be reconnected to power, and they won’t have power until they pay for the meter, either directly or through Centrelink payments.

Comments from Ngukurr Researchers:

- This is an example where the government – Power and Water as a services provider – has not communicated in an appropriate manner, quite apart from failing to deliver a basic community service. Households should have been told before the meter boxes were installed, not afterwards, and they should have been advised of why their meter boxes were not working. Houses were left without power for two days, and people’s safety and needs were compromised, because the government did not communicate sufficiently with the community.

“Through the chair, this is concerning those five houses with no power. I’ve got concerns, me personally. You guys, Power and Water, you do those pole things at the power pole, or what? Well can you not go to that pole and turn the power off and somebody go and fix those... power poles? We’re talking about people, living in houses, might be kids there or families. You can’t just brush it aside and say leave it until they get their payments sorted, fix it up now!” Tony Jack.

“That’s yumob problem, Power and Water problem [about the electricians needing a certificate of compliance]. Our problem is about community. People live in that house. You’ve got five families we’re talking about, five houses. You can’t just brush it aside.” - Tony Jack (See: <http://recier.pixelplatform.com.au/feedback-to-government-ngukurr/>)

“I can confirm the fastest process is being initiated to get the power back on to those houses.” – ARDS worker. “You’re talking about people’s lives here, houses, even kids might be living in that house.” – Tony Jack

“Across the street where I live, there’s some people sleeping out, little ones, out in the cold. I’m worried, they’re my families too as well.” – Gwen Rami. “That’s one of those houses?” – TJ. “Yes” – GR. “Well, there you go.” – TJ. “What’s happening? This is the sort of thing that we, the people of this community, we need. We have to go through those stages until something is done. People will be struggling. We’re trying to work together. I’ve seen those people next door [sleeping outside], they’ve been there for maybe more than five days! Might be one and a half weeks! And they’ve got small babies, sleeping outside in tents. And it’s very cold outside. This is something that is an issue for us. This is the community where we live!” – Gwen Rami (See: <http://recier.pixelplatform.com.au/feedback-to-government-ngukurr/>)

Comments from Ngukurr Researchers:

- Engaging ARDS to communicate with the community to do household visits has been questioned as to whether that was appropriate to be conducted through a non-local organisation. The communication at the LA meeting was done solely through the ARDS worker, even though he told the meeting he would have local people working with him.
- In this meeting it was not clear who the players are, because the person doing the engagement – ARDS – is different to the actual contractor, and this is confusing for the community for who they are actually talking to and what they are talking about.

“I don’t work for Power and Water. Power and Water have sent ARDS out here to talk to people about the installation” – ARDS worker. “Have you got some people working with you, on the ground? That’s what we want to see.” – Eric Roberts. “For the house visits this week we’ve got a couple of local people who will be doing those house visits with us, to follow up those issues, and at the end of this week I’ll provide Power and Water a report on where the issues were and what needs to be done to make sure we can get those guys power again.” – ARDS worker. (See: <http://recier.pixelplatform.com.au/feedback-to-government-ngukurr/>)

Comments from CDU Researchers:

- Expressed here is an understanding that seeming *technical issues* such as that with the metre boxes are also *engagement issues*. It is best if communication with householders happens as quickly as possible in situations like this, with Power and Water working with a local community member skilled in engagement work to explain the situation. This will help prevent the damage to property and safety risks that eventuated in this situation, and alleviate the need for another external broker (e.g. ARDS) to come in and smooth out the situation later.

2. Housing

The final item discussed at the meeting was a housing update. The information provided included that the Room to Breathe Program is a 10 year program with Yugul Mangi, providing upgrades to ten dwellings. The second stage of the program has been awarded to Binjari. There is a transitional plan for tenant accommodation. Urapanga is in the scoping stage. Kevin Fisher is working on the Final Stage. Housing is very happy with the housing contract in Ngukurr.

Comments from Ngukurr Researchers:

- Before housing contracts are awarded there should be a big community meeting to explain to the community what's happening. The community need to know the impact of the contract, where the money will be spent and who will benefit from the program.
- The housing item was the final item in a 3 hour long meeting, in the 'Other Business' section. This did not encourage engaged and robust debate, or deep listening from the LA members present, as they were not aware the presentation was coming up and had already sat through a long meeting.

Comments from CDU Researchers:

- Communication and discussion around programs such as Room to Breathe need to occur prior to decisions about building contractors are made, not afterwards.
- Discussions around funding need to focus on community specific budgets, rather than budgets relating to the project as a whole, so that people can understand clearly what funds will be available when, where and through who in Ngukurr.

3. Organisations delivering communication

Many of the agenda items concerned the Roper Gulf Shire. The communication from the Shire was always delivered by a Munanga (white person) working at the Shire. It is likely that the community, through the LA members, would not understand or engage with what was being said. The information was delivered by someone that understands what they're talking about because they work in that job and understand the business of the Shire.

Comments from Ngukurr Researchers:

- No local translators were provided to explain the information from the Shire, and the other organisation presentations, to the LA members, and therefore to the community. This is a serious problem with engagement and communication.
- The most engaging discussion with the LA members came after a Yolngu person (Ian Gumbula) described the project (the REC-IER project). This also occurred when Tony Jack delivered messages about the Roper Gulf Shire. LA members feel more empowered to talk when the message is delivered by a Yolngu person.

Comments from CDU Researchers:

- A good guide to positive and productive engagement is the level of enthusiasm and participation from people in the room. This is often a better guide to levels of understanding, than asking people if something is clear or if they have understood.

Comments from community members who attended the meeting

"They [the LA meeting] should do the message because I myself am struggling to do the message from here to there as a Local Authority member. I have found it is too much for me."

- Daphne Daniels, in answer to the question: "Outside of the LA meeting is there any way for the community to know what was happening in the meeting?"

"They are not informed and they are thinking there will be 20 houses but there are probably only going to be 10 house... When government distribute the money to remote community with the grant bucket they need to explain to each community depending on the population,

how much, which remote town. That information is going to cover the whole housing program and it's not the funding. It's only going to allow a few house renovations and upgrades. ... The community is saying what they heard that there is going to be 20 houses built, but it's going to come down. Renovations in 10 houses.

- Daphne Daniels, talking about miscommunications between the Room to Breathe program and the community.

“Young people don't want to attend, but if you want to know why you have to look back to the governance training, it wasn't a priority of the organisation, but it is a priority for us.”

- Daphne Daniels, talking about why so few young people attend Local Authority meetings.

“They just come for one or two days and then they go. ... Whenever they come in they just do it and are gone. Don't talk much or explain more.”

- Colin Hall, talking about the length of time that government workers spend in Ngukurr being too short.

“Sometimes they explain clearly but people don't understand Munanga (white people) politics much.”

- Colin Hall, talking about government communication not being easy for the community to understand.

“I agree that recording meetings will provide solid evidence and assist the community. However, I'm concerned about what happens after this takes place, and I want to know whether the government will respond and take action.”

- Bobby Nungumajbarr, Local Authority Meeting, 17 May 2017, talking about wanting the government to respond to the research and comments from community on how they are engaging and communicating in Ngukurr.

Who attended:

Elected Members	Councillor Daphne Daniels (Chairperson)
	Councillor Eric Roberts
	Mayor Tony Jack
	Bobby Nungumajbarr
	Colin Hall
	Ian Gumbula
Staff	Amanda Haigh – Governance Manager (Minute Taker)
	Michael Berto – CEO Roper Gulf Regional Council
	Sharon Hillen – Director of Council and Community Services
	Janeen Bulsey – Area Manager Roper
	Lyndon Keane – Communications Coordinator
	Janelle Iszlaub – CDP Regional Manager
	Marc Gardner – Director Contracts & Technical Services
	Penny Henderson – Operations Coordinator Community Services
	Victoria Haig – CDP Senior Employment Consultant
	Candy Coates – Senior Administration Support Co-ordinator (Minute Taker)
Guests	Ben Laidlaw – ARDS / Power Water
	Kevin Fisher – DHCD
	Donna McMasters – Power & Water
	Nick Sharah – Department of Housing and Community Development

	Sean Carroll – Power Water
	Martin Schahinger – Yugul Mangi Development
	Frank Day – DHCD
	Selena Uibo – Member for Arnhem
	Grant Thompson – Ngukurr Language Centre
	Jude Emmett – Ngukurr Art Centre
	Shelley Back – Sunrise Health Service
	Jeanie Govan – Dept Chief Minister
	Donna Masters – Power Water (Video Conferencing)
	Nic Sharah – DHCD (Video Conferencing)
	Sean Carrol – Power Water (Video Conferencing)
	Jennifer Macdonald – Charles Darwin University (with the researchers)
Researchers	Ian Gumbula – Gumbula Consultancies
	Mercy Gumbula – CDU
	Gwen Rami – CDU
	Keisha Wanambi – CDU
	Katelyn JohnForrest – CDU
	Brandy Gumbula - CDU

