INDIGENOUS WELLBEING
A framework for Governments’ Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Activities

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June 2006

Acknowledgements

The love from my children, extended family and kin enriches my life constantly and, in particular, the support and wisdom of Worimi elders Mrs Pat Davis Hurst, Mr Les Ridgeway and Mrs Mae Simon are most important to the development of this work. I acknowledge the special friendships of Louise Campbell, Fred Maher and Lillian Mosely, my cousin, who have also helped to develop my appreciation of Koori philosophy and spirituality.

This report would not have been possible without the full and frank giving of information about indicators of their wellbeing of the group of Aboriginal people who attended two focus groups in Redfern – I am very humbled and privileged by your participation and trust.

Dr Berenice Carrington of the Department of Environment and Conservation has been a constant source of intellectual collaboration and has a wonderful appreciation of Aboriginal cultural values – thank you.

Mr Darryl Griffen (Director) and Ms Grace Ferguson (Head Teacher) Eora College, Sydney Institute TAFE NSW have been very interested in this project and allowed the use of facilities at Eora for workshops.

To all my relations
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1. INTRODUCTION

This report is a component of an analysis of the current government policy approach to wellbeing to establish where Aboriginal cultural heritage activities\(^1\) are included and can be included. The major project, of which this report is a component, addresses the research question: How does cultural heritage, as an activity field, enhance Aboriginal wellbeing and how can cultural notions of wellbeing be applied to government policies concerned with Aboriginal people in NSW? This report aims to:

- describe and analyse the Commonwealth and NSW State Government Policies relating to wellbeing, with a focus on Aboriginal culture and heritage;
- describe and analyse the alignment between Commonwealth, NSW and Local Government wellbeing policies (and relevant legislation) and consideration of the nature of Aboriginal community participation in this area; and
- describe the conceptual framework that underpins the current government policy framework.

Wellbeing is one of the intangible social values\(^2\) that has been associated with Aboriginal cultural heritage. The NSW Department of Environment and Conservation (DEC) aims to develop indicators for wellbeing as a social value of Aboriginal cultural heritage. The intended function of these indicators will be to enhance Aboriginal wellbeing by informing the Department’s approach to project design; to inform the Department’s heritage assessment processes of social values; to demonstrate a relationship between wellbeing and cultural heritage activities, and to develop case studies that demonstrate how using the broad provisions of the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979* (NSW) and Part 6 of the *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974* could achieve better Aboriginal heritage outcomes\(^3\). This conceptualising phase will define wellbeing, for DEC purposes, this definition making particular reference to the way Aboriginal people define it and experience it.\(^4\) Thus this component of the project includes the findings of a reference group of Aboriginal experts on their own wellbeing that was conducted over two meetings in the inner Sydney suburb of Redfern in May-June 2006.

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\(^1\) A definition of Aboriginal cultural heritage: “Cultural heritage consists of places and objects which are valued by the community. As well as buildings and landscapes, it includes objects representing traditional ways of life and symbols of events which have touched communities” derived from the Cultural Heritage Resource Centre, University of Canberra 1997 in English and Gay 2005. *Living Land Living Culture: Aboriginal Heritage and Salinity*, Department of Environment and Conservation (NSW). Importantly, Aboriginal people also have a unique heritage as the first people of Australia, which is acknowledged by the Australian Government as Native Title. Moreover, Aboriginal cultural heritage can include intangible things that have their basis in ways of being and doing, also expressed in oral and performative expression, for example Aboriginal languages and dance.


\(^3\) English identifies Social Impact Assessment and the *Environmental Planning & Assessment Act 1979* (NSW) in his 2002 publication as opportunities for protecting the intangible values of Aboriginal cultural heritage. These intangible values have limited protection under the *National Parks & Wildlife Act 1974* (NSW), except where they are formally gazetted as Aboriginal Places. English outlines an approach that advocates a “[c]reative use of other statutes and policies… to address this gap in heritage law” (2002:x).

\(^4\) This introductory section is directly from the consultancy brief prepared by Dr Berenice Carrington.
2. PROJECT RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The initial brief included developing a compendium of targetted government policy documents around the concept of wellbeing, and describing their approach to Indigenous wellbeing under the following headings: lead agency; secondary agencies; legislation; links to other agencies; aims; programs; program objectives; performance indicators; milestones; Indigenous involvement; philosophical frameworks; international connections; (reference to) Indigenous cultural heritage; remarks about wellbeing; sources. From the compendium has been developed this associated report which summarises the research findings as outlined above. This report was to be structured so as to make clear the legislative, policy and program responsibilities of governments and the developments in relation to Indigenous wellbeing, and to include an analysis of the philosophical framework that underpin governments' wellbeing policies. The report was also to include recommendations for a framework for Aboriginal cultural heritage activities and wellbeing that maximises benefits to Aboriginal communities.

The specified targeting of policy and programs was also designed to cover a wide range; Native Title, land rights and cultural heritage, including language retrieval programs. However, as the project progressed to the report stage it became apparent that the examination of the core government policies, those introduced as alternatives to the operations of the abolished Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) and those that currently exist for social and emotional wellbeing, for example, were most important since they have not been analysed to date. By contrast, the polices attached to the NSW Land Rights Act have been analysed for their impact on Aboriginal wellbeing to a large extent, for example, by Dr Gaynor McDonald of the University of Sydney. Those of Native Title attract a large amount of scholarly interest and also the implementation of Indigenous language strategies and the existing polices of the NSW Department of Environment and Conservation are deserving of research projects in their own right.

Therefore this report came to be designed to showcase a critical, strenuous analysis of the term “wellbeing” as it appears in the context of existing core government policy for Indigenous people and to compare and contrast this with the findings of an Aboriginal focus group interrogating the basis of their own wellbeing. In connection with this, it is important to note that the concept of cultural heritage was left open-ended, potentially including tangible, material cultural heritage and intangible cultural heritage factors. Intangible cultural heritage factors came to the fore through the deliberations of the focus group.

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6 For example the Native Title Research Unit of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) is involved in major research projects, an annual conference and has a range of scholarly publications see http://ntru.aiatsis.gov.au/index.html
7 see for example Waters Consultancy, Wellbeing and Co-Management Report of June 2006
The focus group on Indigenous wellbeing was designed to comment on and develop the research findings. It was anticipated that the outcomes of the focus group would give a valuable Aboriginal community focus to this project and also provide some preliminary data on how the findings of this component of the project would be received and developed by NSW Aboriginal community members.

The focus group was to be required to complete an initial questionnaire giving details of their age, place of residence, their home community/family group and any other information necessary to establish the nature of the cohort.

The focus group was to be introduced to the rationale for this project and its findings so far, that is, the application of the concept of Aboriginal wellbeing to government policy. This was adjusted during the course of the research phase as it became obvious that it was necessary to clearly define wellbeing and to do this required an examination of the concept as it appears in Indigenous contexts internationally. The focus group was then to be asked answer a confidential questionnaire. The outcomes of this questionnaire were then to be used to develop another questionnaire that will be presented to the group in the next meeting. This methodology is based on the Delphi method for structuring a group communication process that has proven to be effective in allowing a group of individuals, experts in the field, and as a whole, to deal with a complex problem and move toward consensus. In accordance with this method, the cohort was to be asked to return for a final session in a week's time, after considering materials that they are given to take away with them. In the final session they will be given feedback on the findings of the first session and again asked to comment and provide information by way of the questionnaire developed from the outcomes of the first meeting.

Data gathered from focus group members was to be collated and all findings will be combined into a report of the workshops. Relevant findings of the focus group workshops were to be included in the final report.

The consultant is an Aboriginal person from Worimi, on the mid-north coast of NSW. She has been able to draw on research and disciplinary skills, particularly those of history, and experience as a public servant. She had experience in policy development and program management contexts with the Commonwealth public service from 1990 – 1995 in the then ATSIC, Department of Education, Employment and Training and with the Office of the Commonwealth Ombudsman. Therefore she is conversant with policy and program development processes and some of the policies examined are familiar to her.

The relationship developed between the consultant and the principal researcher, Dr Berenice Carrington has been of collaboration and a high level of discourse around the project, allowing a refinement of the brief and adjustment of the focus group development. This relationship reflects in part the best practise model for research in

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8 Vicki Grieves BA (Hons) with a double major in History UNSW 1981, Grad Dip Ed USyd 1982, Cert Uni Teach ANU 1995, currently enrolled in PhD Modern History program at the Macquarie University
Indigenous contexts as outlined in the Co-operative Research Centre for Aboriginal Health (CRCAH)\(^9\), Indigenous Research Reform Agenda, Links Monograph Series no 2 Rethinking Research Methodologies.\(^{10}\) This paper quotes the three fundamental and interrelated principles that inform the “Indigenous Australian struggle against orthodox form of epistemology in research” identified by Rigney\(^{11}\) as being:

1. Resistance as the emancipatory imperative in Indigenist research
2. Political integrity in Indigenist research
3. Privileging Indigenous voices in Indigenous research.\(^{12}\)

In the spirit of these principles, the Indigenous researcher has had the opportunity to have significant input into the design of the project, its adjustment to meet the needs of the Indigenous focus group and to reflect the deliberations and priorities of that group. For example, the deliberations of the focus group that indicated that some members’ wellbeing is affected by not growing up with their natural family led to the examination of policies developed in response to the Bringing them Home report. And, the deep reflections on Indigenous wellbeing developed as part of Australia’s Oceans Policy\(^{13}\) led to the inclusion of this policy in this report.

Further, ownership of the project has not been confined to the Department of Environment and Conservation; the findings have been delivered by the consultant to the Matauranga taketake: Traditional Knowledge 2006 Conference, Indigenous Indicators of Wellbeing: Perspectives, Practises, Solutions in Wellington, New Zealand, June 2006.\(^{14}\) An article developed from the findings of this report, by the Aboriginal consultant researcher, will be published in the edited volume of papers delivered at this conference. All Aboriginal participants in the focus group will be given the opportunity to have a copy of this report.

This research reflects an attempt at strenuous analysis of the concept of wellbeing as it applies to Indigenous peoples. This concept could readily become diminished by its use as a “feel good” word in the way that “community” has been used; in danger of becoming a marketing tool rather than a critical dynamic. Wellbeing is said to be a holistic concept but when it is used to cover almost anything, without definition or focus it can become meaningless and lose its relevance. This research establishes the concept of Indigenous wellbeing as unique and important. Greater attempts to understand Indigenous peoples’ understandings of their own wellbeing can inform governments in their policy and program development to achieve real gains in reforming

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\(^{12}\) Henry et al, op cit p 4


\(^{14}\) see [http://traditionalknowledge.co.nz/index.html](http://traditionalknowledge.co.nz/index.html)
the disadvantage faced by Indigenous people in their daily lives.

3. BACKGROUND

The term “wellbeing” (variously spelt as “well being”, “well-being” as well as “wellbeing”) is a comparatively new term, adopted in a range of Australian governments’ policy and program contexts within the last decade or so. In Australia it is most often used in reference to Indigenous people but also increasingly in reference to other groups in society as well. It is a term that Indigenous people like to use in reference to themselves.

Governments often use this term in the context of Indigenous health policy and program development as a factor that impacts on health status and that is missing from Indigenous contexts or needs to be developed further. It is used in ways such as, “health and wellbeing”,15 “socio-economic wellbeing”, “physical wellbeing”,16 “cultural wellbeing”, “socio-cultural wellbeing”, “mental wellbeing”, “communal wellbeing”, emotional wellbeing”,17 “spiritual wellbeing”18 and “total wellbeing”.19 Generally, it is not normally well defined and is used without a developed sense of definition or accuracy; sometimes synonymously with “health” and/or “mental health” or even referring to being employed, having a high level of income20 and the absence of political or social disruptions21.

Governments are also using this term in relation to non-Indigenous health issues. For example, it is often used interchangeably with “health” such as in reports about the

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15 The use of this term is ubiquitous see, for example, reports of the Department of Health and Ageing, Office of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health (OATSIH), including Indigenous male health: A report for Indigenous males, their families and communities, and those committed to improving Indigenous male health, Dr Mark Wenitong, September 2002
19 ibid p 53
20 This is evident in the Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage Report 2005 where there are no references to cultural heritage management as a component in Indigenous wellbeing, and there are many references to material wellbeing. For example, employment and income, opportunities for self development, living standards and self esteem, important for “overall wellbeing” (p26); household and individual income as a determinant of “economic” and “overall wellbeing” (p27); home ownership as an important element in improving ”Indigenous wellbeing” (p 28); the extent of participation in the economy as closely related to their living standards and “broader wellbeing”(p46); the type of employment that people are engaged in may impact on their “social and economic wellbeing” (p47); and finally how self employment reduces dependence on welfare, improve self reliance, participation in the economy and improve their "economic wellbeing" (p 48)
health status of the elderly, of children and remarkably even of foetus\(^{22}\). Since wellbeing is conceivably a broad term, tied to political, social, economic and cultural indicators, it seems hardly appropriate to attach the concept to a foetus without reference to the wellbeing of the mother and broader family/group as this article does. The term is also used as a synonym or euphemism for “mental health” such as in the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare report Young Australians: their health and wellbeing where wellbeing is clearly entirely about mental health.\(^{23}\)

In the general use of the term “wellbeing” there has been the question posed as to whether wellbeing can exist independently of standard of living and other material considerations. In fact, it is often a popular idea that a person may have considerable wealth but lack the prerequisites for “wellbeing”. Similarly, it may be difficult to understand but it is possible for a person to be physically unwell, incapacitated or diseased and still feel a sense of wellbeing.\(^{24}\)

In order to further understand the meaning of Indigenous wellbeing it is important to explore the background to the introduction of wellbeing to Indigenous policy and program contexts and its relationship to Indigenous cultural heritage.

### 3.1 International reference to Indigenous wellbeing

The concept of human wellbeing arises in the policies, programs and reports of international agencies, including the United Nations High Commission on Human Rights (UNHCR) and the World Health Organisation (WHO).\(^{25}\)

Interestingly, an indicator of the status of “wellbeing” and the looseness with which it is often used, is that it is not included on the list of health topics that are listed for easy reference on the WHO website.\(^{26}\) However, one of the few definitions found is that of the WHO that has defined the concept for the purposes of exploring the changing patterns of human wellbeing in the context of human relationship to the natural world. This definition indicates how wellbeing is closely allied to health and also not entirely confined to the indicators that are usually used to chart the health status of people. The WHO clearly delineates the relationship between “health” and “wellbeing” thus:

\(^{22}\) see WHO Foetal growth and well-being diagnosis at [http://www.euro.who.int/HEN/Syntheses/antenatalsupp/20051216_3](http://www.euro.who.int/HEN/Syntheses/antenatalsupp/20051216_3)


\(^{24}\) Manderson, L (Ed) Rethinking Wellbeing API Network, Curtin University of Technology 2005, p 15-16

\(^{25}\) It has become obvious that the term “wellbeing” is often used loosely and undefined. For example, it is often used interchangeably with “health” such as in reports about the health status of the elderly, of children and of foetus (see WHO Foetal growth and well-being diagnosis at [http://www.euro.who.int/HEN/Syntheses/antenatalsupp/20051216_3](http://www.euro.who.int/HEN/Syntheses/antenatalsupp/20051216_3)). Since wellbeing is tied to political, social, economic and cultural indicators it seems hardly appropriate to attach the concept to a foetus without reference to the wellbeing of the mother and broader family/group as this article does. The term is sometimes used as a synonym or euphemism for “mental health” such as in the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare report Young Australians: their health and wellbeing see [http://www.aihw.gov.au/publications/index.cfm/title/10247](http://www.aihw.gov.au/publications/index.cfm/title/10247) Thus, this report is confined to the more broad definitions and applications of the term.

\(^{26}\) See [http://www.who.int/topics/en/](http://www.who.int/topics/en/)
In many respects human health is a bottom-line (or integrating) component of well-being, since changes in economic, social, political, residential, psychological and behavioural circumstances all have health consequences.

This does not make clear which has the greater impact – does a loss of wellbeing cause health issues? Or does poor health lead to a loss of wellbeing? However, more light is shed on this complex issue when the components of wellbeing are further defined. In so doing the agency draws out the ramifications of wellbeing within changing ecosystems:

**Basic determinants of human well-being may be defined in terms of:** security; an adequate supply of basic materials for livelihood (e.g. food, shelter, clothing, energy, etc.); personal freedoms; good social relations; and physical health. By influencing patterns of livelihoods, income, local migration and political conflict, ecosystem services impact the determinants of human well-being.27

Reference is made to wellbeing in relation to culture and spirituality by explaining that the cultural services provided by ecosystems “may be less tangible than material services” but are nonetheless “highly valued by all societies”, and that “traditional practices linked to ecosystem services play an important role in developing social capital and enhancing social well-being”. 28

Further to this, the report clearly states the reason for the preoccupation with the concept of wellbeing generally:

*There is a hypothesis that stimulating contact with the rich and varied environment of ecosystems, including gardens, may benefit physical and mental health. There is limited evidence that this may help in the prevention and treatment of depression, drug addiction and behavioural disturbances as well as convalescence from illness or surgery. Regular contact with pets seems to prolong and enhance the quality of life, especially in old age. Beneficial contact with nature need not be physical and tactile. For example, there is some evidence that certain benefits may be obtained from visual or visualized contact.* 29

Though this report is not directly concerned with cultural heritage it does demonstrate its centrality to wellbeing in a diagram developed to illustrate associations between health, other aspects of human wellbeing and ecosystem services. Diagram 1, on the next page, clearly shows the interdependence between health, human wellbeing and supporting, provisioning, regulating and cultural, that is, non-material benefits, from ecosystem services.

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A report on the findings of the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment's (MA) global and sub-global assessments of how ecosystem changes do, or could, affect human health and wellbeing.

28 Ibid p 25

29 Ibid
This diagram indicates a holistic, interdependent basis for the provision of wellbeing through a relationship with the natural environment. The ability to be able to obtain food and other necessities, to have custodianship and support for ecosystems by providing services, regulating some aspects and practising and observing cultural heritage associations ensures a continuation of Indigenous wellbeing.

Diagram 1: shows how non-material benefits including cultural heritage and cultural services are an important component of human wellbeing that also includes health. Source: World Health Organisation (WHO) Ecosystems and human well-being: Health synthesis

http://www.who.int/globalchange/ecosystems/ecosystems05/en/

3.2 Indigenous people and wellbeing

The UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)’s Sub-Commission on the Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities, Working Group on Indigenous Populations has defined Indigenous populations in the following way:

*Indigenous communities, peoples and nations are those which, having a historical continuity with pre-invasion and pre-colonial societies that developed on their territories, consider themselves distinct from other sectors of the societies now prevailing in those territories, or parts of them. They form at present non-dominant sectors of society and are determined to preserve, develop, and transmit to future generations their ancestral territories, and their ethnic identity, as the basis of their continued existence as peoples, in accordance with their own cultural patterns, social institutions, and legal systems.* (my emphasis)  

This internationally recognised definition referring as it does to historical continuity, the impetus to transmit to future generations knowledge of territories and identities, identifies material and non-material cultural heritage as a major preoccupation in Indigenous peoples’ lives.

The International Labour Organisation (ILO) Convention no 169 of the UNHCR remains the only multilateral treaty to recognise the collective right of Indigenous peoples to preserve and develop their cultural identity. It states recognition of:

*The aspirations of these peoples to exercise control over their own institutions, ways of life and economic development and to maintain and develop their identities, languages and religions, within the framework of the States in which they live.*

The capacity to “maintain and develop…. identities, languages, religions” is in effect the power to transmit their own intangible cultural heritage, or way of life, to the succeeding generations, to ensure their wellbeing.

The United Nations has recognised the importance of Indigenous wellbeing in many contexts. For example, Indigenous wellbeing is mentioned in relationship to environmental change, in that the strategic course of development needs to recognise the special relationship between Indigenous people and the natural environment. Chapter 26 Agenda 21 of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (ECOSOC) declarations on global environmental change, specifies that:

...in view of the interrelationship between the natural environment and its sustainable development and the cultural, social, economic, and physical wellbeing of indigenous people, national and international efforts to implement

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31 E/CN.4/Sub.2/1983/21/Add.8, para. 369/
environmentally sound and sustainable development should recognize, accommodate, promote and strengthen the role of indigenous people and their communities.

The International Labour Organization's (ILO) Convention No. 169 Concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries of 5 September 1991 mentions Indigenous wellbeing only in terms of a “spiritual” wellbeing which is arguably a component of non-material cultural heritage, that is intangible cultural heritage. Article 7 item 1 states that:

The peoples concerned shall have the right to decide their own priorities for the process of development as it affects their lives, beliefs, institutions and spiritual well-being and the lands they occupy or otherwise use, and to exercise control, to the extent possible, over their own economic, social and cultural development. In addition, they shall participate in the formulation, implementation and evaluation of plans and programmes for national and regional development which may affect them directly.

In June 1993, the second World Conference on Human Rights was held in Vienna. Many hundreds of indigenous people attended the conference and their representatives addressed the plenary session. In the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action which it adopted, the World Conference recognized the:

...inherent dignity and the unique contribution of indigenous people to the development and plurality of society.

And reaffirmed,

......the commitment of the international community to their economic, social and cultural well-being and their enjoyment of the fruits of sustainable development.

The conference also resolved that member states need to:

......take concerted positive steps to ensure respect for all human rights and fundamental freedoms of indigenous people, on the basis of equality and non-discrimination, and recognize the value and diversity of their distinct identities, cultures and social organization.

It was at this conference that recommendations for an International Decade of the World's Indigenous Peoples (IYWIP) be proclaimed and consideration of the establishment of a permanent forum for Indigenous people in the United Nations were passed.

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35 ibid (Part I, para. 20)
The promotional material for the United Nations sponsored International Year for the World’s Indigenous People 1992 mentioned the issues of concern to the worlds’ Indigenous peoples as being, commonly:

- land and resources
- human rights
- internal colonization
- self-government
- self-development
- environment
- discrimination
- health
- education
- language
- cultural survival
- intellectual property rights
- social and economic conditions.\(^\text{36}\)

While there is no mention of the term “wellbeing”, perhaps it can be assumed that while many of these issues of concern, listed above, remain unaddressed, then Indigenous wellbeing would suffer. Of particular interest on this list of issues for wellbeing are cultural survival, language, intellectual property rights, internal colonisation and land and resources that are indicative of intangible cultural heritage issues in Indigenous Australia.

It is worth noting that the only mention of “wellbeing” in the Draft United Nations declaration on the rights of Indigenous peoples is in relation to Indigenous children whereby the UN resolved:

> Recognizing in particular the right of indigenous families and communities to retain shared responsibility for the upbringing, training, education and well-being of their children....

That is, recognising the right of the Indigenous people to transmit to future generations their intangible cultural heritage and therefore to provide for the wellbeing of their children. However, according to Vrdoljak, each article reflects “Indigenous peoples’ holistic understanding of culture as combining land, tangible and intangible heritage”:

> Article 12 pertaining to the right of indigenous peoples to ‘maintain, protect and develop the past, present and future manifestations of their cultures’ including ‘archaeological and historical sites, artefacts, designs, ceremonies, technologies and visual and performing arts and literature.’\(^\text{37}\)

\(^{36}\) see [http://www.ciesin.org/docs/010-000a/Year_Worlds_Indig.html](http://www.ciesin.org/docs/010-000a/Year_Worlds_Indig.html)

\(^{37}\) Vrdoljak *ibid* p11
And, there was strong concern to ensure international protection of these rights from the policies and practices of states and transnational corporations as well as support for the continuing practice of Indigenous religions and use of their own languages. Article 27 states:

*Indigenous peoples have the right to ‘revitalize, use, develop and transmit to future generations their histories, languages, oral traditions, philosophies, writing systems and literatures, and to designate and retain their own names for communities, places and persons.’*

All of these can be seen as attempts to ensure the continuation of Indigenous wellbeing by the protection of rights to tangible and intangible cultural practices.

### 3.3 Indigenous Wellbeing and Health in Australia

In the introduction it has been outlined how wellbeing is most often used in the context of health; this is most evident when it comes to the health of Indigenous people. Aboriginal people working in the context of health have come to recognise an important, special relationship between the health of Indigenous people and wellbeing.

Further, Australian Indigenous peoples’ wellbeing has most often been expressed as a concern in the context of health. The National Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (NACCHO), an organisation that has membership of all the Aboriginal community controlled health organisations in Australia and as such is the peak body for these organisations, defines Indigenous health as including the concept of wellbeing:

*(Indigenous) health is not just the physical wellbeing of an individual, but the social, emotional, and cultural wellbeing of the whole community in which each individual is able to achieve their full potential as a human being thereby bringing about the total wellbeing of their community.*

Health to Aboriginal people is a multi-dimensional concept that embraces all aspects of living and stresses the importance of survival in harmony with the environment. The national Aboriginal Health Strategy (NAHS) of 1989, developed with a significant Aboriginal input, states that health is:

*Not the physical well being of the individual; but the social cultural well being of the whole community. This is a whole of life view and it includes a cyclical concept of life. Health care services should strive to achieve the state where every individual is able to achieve their full potential as human beings, and thus bring about the total well being of their community...*

It is clear from the above that while wellbeing is often seen to be the preserve of health

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38 ibid
policy and programs that even in these contexts it is recognised as being much more than a health issue. It is also clear from these definitions that the concept of wellbeing is culturally based. However, this is as far as explanations of wellbeing go within the context of Aboriginal health. This will be explored further in the later section of this report that deals with the take-up of the concept of wellbeing in government policy.

### 3.4 Towards an understanding of Indigenous wellbeing

The Concise Oxford Dictionary meaning for the word “wellbeing” is “welfare”, which does not adequately explain Indigenous meanings inscribed in the term. The Oxford meaning of “well” also indicates that the word has application beyond that of health, and a nuances of meaning that is understood in Indigenous renderings of the term. These meanings are:

1. *In good manner or style, satisfactorily, rightly* (e.g. looking after country well [producing a state of being well])

2. *Thoroughly, with care or completeness, sufficiently*, to a considerable distance or extent, with margin enough to justify description, quite

It is the case that different languages have different concepts and these are not always easily translatable. The adoption of the word “dreaming” to explain Aboriginal religious philosophy is a case in point, whereby Aranda elders gave much consideration and finally informed the anthropologist WEH Stanner that this was the closest word in English to their word “alcheringa”. It seems that the term “wellbeing” is an English term adopted to explain the meaning of an Aboriginal concept that goes far beyond welfare. Unfortunately, the original Indigenous concept is not adequately explained by the term “wellbeing”. Professor Judy Atkinson has explained:

> There is no word in Aboriginal languages for Health. The closest words mean "well being" and well being in the language of Nurwugen people of the Northern Territory means 'strong, happy, knowledgeable, socially responsible, to take a care, beautiful, clean' both in the sense of being with in the Law and in the sense of being cared for and that suggests to me that country and people and land and health and Law cannot be separated. They are all One and it's how we work with and respect each other and how we work with and respect the country on which we live that will enable us to continue to live across generations.

And, again she has said that:

> The word punyu, from the language of the Ngaringman of the Northern Territory, explains that concepts and functions of health or wellbeing must be considered

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43 Professor Judy Atkinson “Healing Relationships between People and Country” an address given at the Wollumbin Dreaming Festival 2002 at http://www.wollumbindreaming.org/people.htm
from an interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary approach. Punyu encompasses person and country, and is associated with being strong, happy, knowledgeable, socially responsible (to “take a care”), beautiful, clean, and safe — both in the sense of being within the law/lore and in the sense of being cared for.44

Atkinson is part of a discussion about the importance of psychosocial factors and their impact on health and has argued that reliance on biomedical indicators of Indigenous health “fails to embrace the less easily measured aspects of community living and wellbeing, now deemed to be of prime importance by Indigenous peoples and public health researchers alike”.45 These less easily measured aspects include intangible cultural heritage and wellbeing.

Indigenous wellbeing then is firmly culturally based and that exists through a continuation of cultural knowledges and practices.

4. **INDIGENOUS WELLBEING IN AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT POLICY CONTEXTS**

4.1 **Australian Government Indigenous Policy**

The Australian government has abolished the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC), a representative body established to administer government policy in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander affairs, in 2004.46 There are now new arrangements for the administration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander affairs. The cornerstone of these new developments began in 2002 and involves collaboration and coordination between the Commonwealth and the States in the delivery of services to Indigenous communities, through the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) initiatives. The COAG has agreed on the development of Shared Responsibility Agreements (SRAs) and Regional Partnership Agreements (RPAs) between state and federal government agencies and Indigenous communities.

To this end the government has established eight trial sites across the country including Murdi Paaki in NSW47 where government agencies take responsibility for the

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45 ibid

46 This occurred following a review in which it was found that ‘the organisation is in urgent need of structural change’. It argued that ATSIC had failed to be shaped by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people at the regional level, and lacked effective relationships with the main service providers to Indigenous people, the state and territory governments. In spite of the problems, the Review recommended ATSIC be retained because “To the extent ATSIC has succeeded, it has done so because Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people largely want it to continue as a representative organisation on their behalf”. In the Hands of the Regions – A New ATSIC; Report of the review of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission Commonwealth of Australia, November 2003, pp 5 – 7, 30


Other trial sites include: Cape York in Queensland;
development of SRAs and RPAs. Day to day accountability for progress in each trial site has been given to an individual Australian Government Departmental Secretary (or sponsor), whose agency will act as a lead agent within a trial site. For Murdi Paaki, this is the Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST). Coordination and development of this COAG initiative is managed by the Secretaries' Group on Indigenous issues, chaired by the Secretary of the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet. Since 1 July 2004, the role of the Secretaries Group has broadened to include implementation and oversight of the Australian Government's new Indigenous affairs arrangements.

The Office of Indigenous Policy Coordination (OIPC), within the Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs (DIMA) supports the Secretaries Group. OIPC leads coordination across Australian Government Agencies and fosters cross-portfolio partnerships to develop and deliver initiatives in the COAG Indigenous trial communities. Indigenous Coordination Centres (ICCs) have been set up by OIPC to assist in this process.

All of the above initiatives report to the Ministerial Taskforce on Indigenous Affairs (MTF) which is currently chaired by the Hon Mal Brough MP, the Minister for Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, and includes as members:
- the Minister for Transport and Regional Services
- the Minister for Health and Ageing
- the Attorney-General
- the Minister for Communications, Information Technology and the Arts
- the Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations
- the Minister for the Environment and Heritage
- the Minister for Education, Science and Training
- the Minister for Justice and Customs.

Other Ministers are invited to attend meetings as appropriate. This taskforce has established an appointed National Indigenous Council (NIC) comprised of prominent Aboriginal people to give advice to the government on Indigenous issues. The NIC gives advice to the Ministerial Taskforce on Indigenous Affairs by invitation.

As at 24 November 2005, 121 SRAs had been signed with 98 Indigenous communities and one RPA has been signed with the Ngaanyatjarra Council in Western Australia during August 2005.

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There are references to the wellbeing of the communities in some of the SRAs, such as "improving the health and well being of children and youth" as a priority in the Murdi Paaki SRA, but these mentions are infrequent, there is no definition of wellbeing given and no indications of how this is to be achieved. The wellbeing of the community is not mentioned as a goal in any of the SRAs or the RPA signed to date. Similarly, there is no mention of Indigenous cultural heritage in any of the SRAs or the RPA signed to date.

An examination of the policy statement underpinning these recent developments in Indigenous affairs at the Commonwealth level reveals that the MTF makes reference to Indigenous well being on two occasions: firstly to remark that despite the commitments of governments over a long period progress on the indicators of social and economic “well being” for Indigenous Australians has only been gradual. Secondly, to establish as urgent priorities health, housing, education and employment, which are essential to Indigenous “well being”. This is a clear statement of what the current government sees as the basis of Indigenous wellbeing; the infrastructure to provide the basic services in health and housing, initiatives to further Indigenous education outcomes and the opportunity to work in paid employment. However, there is no indication of what the government thinks wellbeing is and no indication of how Indigenous people themselves perceive that their wellbeing could be improved.

The Secretaries of the Departments that comprise the MTF also meet regularly and produce an Annual Report of the Secretaries group on Indigenous Affairs. Their first annual report for 2004-5 has one reference to economic wellbeing “Through SRAs the Government invests in the priority needs of communities, clans and families. In return the community agrees to take steps to implement local solutions, consistent with good health, family stability, community safety, education and economic wellbeing”. However, there is no reference to cultural heritage in connection with Indigenous wellbeing.

However, the COAG Indigenous Whole of Government Initiative report Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage of 2005 has some interesting findings on Indigenous wellbeing and cultural heritage. The introduction explains that in April 2002 the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) commissioned the Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision to produce a regular report against key indicators of Indigenous disadvantage. The reports have the long-term aim of informing Australian governments about whether their policy, programs and services are achieving positive outcomes for Indigenous people. The Report on Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage “needs to be meaningful to Indigenous Australians” (and therefore) needs to be more than a collection of data. Its purpose is both visionary and strategic. The vision is that Indigenous people will one day enjoy the same overall standard of living as other Australians. They will be as healthy, live as long, and participate as fully...

52 see Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage Report 2005 at
53 ibid
in the social and economic life of the nation, while maintaining their cultural identity.\textsuperscript{54}

Prior to the release of the first Report in 2003, an extensive consultation process took place. The primary purpose of the consultations was to get Indigenous input to assist in development of the policy framework. The Australian, State and Territory governments conducted consultations with Indigenous groups and service providers within their jurisdictions. In addition, the Chairman and Secretariat held discussions with a number of Indigenous leaders and organisations, and a range of officials and researchers across the country. Following release of the report, consultations continued to obtain feedback about the report from Indigenous organisations and people, and from governments, on how they are using and implementing it. For the most part, such feedback was positive. The reasoning behind the framework and its diagrammatic representation (see page 16) meant that it was easily explained and generally understood, and broadly accepted, by stakeholders.

However, what is most interesting is the Indigenous perspective that emerged during consultations. The issue most often raised during was “whether cultural dimensions of Indigenous wellbeing could be better represented”. The report states that while there have been no changes to the framework in this Report, it is an area that will need to be revisited in future reports and that nevertheless, reporting on culture has improved over what was reported in 2003. Along with more data and case studies for the key indicators relating to ‘Indigenous cultural studies in school curriculum’, ‘participation in organised sport, arts or community group activities’, and ‘access to traditional lands’, the section containing case studies in governance recognises “the fundamental importance of culture in the development of good governance arrangements in Indigenous organisations and communities”. This is in connection with the two case studies presented — on the Thamarrurr Council in Wadeye in the Northern Territory and the Koorie Heritage Trust in Victoria — both demonstrate (in different ways) the significance of culture in their organisational arrangements and the relationship to their respective communities.\textsuperscript{55}

Thus there is no mention of Indigenous wellbeing or cultural heritage in the reporting framework for new Commonwealth policy in Indigenous affairs. This framework is represented diagrammatically as follows:

\textsuperscript{54} ibid p2
\textsuperscript{55} ibid Preliminaries p22
The framework of the report is designed to fit the Australian government's philosophical framework in Indigenous affairs. Three priority outcomes sit at the apex of this framework:

1. Safe healthy and supportive family environments with strong communities and cultural identity;
2. Positive child development and prevention of violence, crime and self-harm;
3. Improved wealth creation and economic sustainability for individuals, families and communities.

These priority outcomes reflect COAG’s vision for reducing disadvantage and were reportedly widely endorsed by Indigenous people, though detail of the consultative
process is not given.\textsuperscript{57} These outcomes are said to be interlinked and should not be viewed in isolation from each other. The goal is that improvements in the next two tiers of the framework will in time overcome the disadvantage which, at this time, precludes these outcomes for a large number of Indigenous people and communities.

The first tier (the headline indicators) provides an overview of the state of Indigenous disadvantage. It is designed to keep a national focus on the challenge of reducing disadvantage and includes:

1. Life expectancy at birth – Rates of disability and/or core activity restriction – Years 10 and 12 retention and attainment – Post secondary education participation and attainment;
2. Labour force participation and unemployment – Household and individual income – Home ownership – Suicide and self-harm; and

The second tier is of more immediate relevance to policy as it contains seven ‘strategic areas for action’, which are designed to make inroads into headline disadvantage over time. A series of strategic change indicators have been identified that shed light on whether policy actions are making a difference in the strategic areas for action. These include:

1. Early child development and growth (prenatal to age 3);
2. Early school engagement and performance (preschool to year 3);
3. Positive childhood and transition to adulthood;
4. Functional and resilient families and communities;
5. Effective environmental health systems;
6. Economic participation and development; and
7. Substance use and misuse.

It is notable here that in this most important area of the framework there is no mention of wellbeing and/or Indigenous cultural heritage.

The policy states that this framework was developed in order to prevent Indigenous disadvantage. It is designed to encourage policy makers and service delivery staff to concentrate on actions in the ‘strategic areas for action’ that are causing disadvantage at the headline level.\textsuperscript{58} It is admitted that not everyone agrees with all aspects of the framework or the process, but asserts that there is widespread agreement about its vision of ‘a society where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples should enjoy a similar standard of living to that of other Australians, without losing their cultural identity’.\textsuperscript{59} Having said this, there is no explanation in this report of what Aboriginal cultural identity is and what this means for the implementation of government policy.

\textsuperscript{57} ibid
\textsuperscript{58} ibid Chapter 1 p 2
\textsuperscript{59} ibid this is in reference to the report of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation 2000), Chapter 1 p 1
Elsewhere in the preliminaries of the report, reference is made to wellbeing as follows: life expectancy as a measure of "health and wellbeing"; employment and income, opportunities for self development, living standards and self esteem, important for "overall wellbeing"; household and individual income as a determinant of "economic" and "overall wellbeing"; home ownership as an important element in improving "Indigenous wellbeing"; infant mortality as a indicator of the general "health and wellbeing" of a population; how decayed teeth can cause or contribute to low self esteem and "social wellbeing"; the extent of participation in the economy as closely related to their living standards and "broader wellbeing"; the type of employment that people are engaged in may impact on their "social and economic wellbeing"; and finally how self employment reduces dependence on welfare, improves self reliance, participation in the economy and improve their "economic wellbeing".

These references indicate that the policy does not recognise Aboriginal cultural heritage as a factor in the wellbeing of Indigenous peoples. The indicators are overwhelmingly to do with health and economic standard of living of Indigenous people with no reference to Indigenous wellbeing as it is understood in international and local Indigenous contexts.

The other agencies involved in the Ministerial Taskforce on Indigenous Affairs that have a central role in the implementation of this framework are the Department of Health and Ageing, the Department of Education, Science and Training and the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations and the Department of Environment and Heritage.

Of these, the agencies with responsibility for education and employment do not mention Indigenous wellbeing or cultural heritage in their policy documents at all. However, Indigenous wellbeing and/or cultural heritage are mentioned in the health and social and emotional wellbeing policies and the heritage and environment policies of Australian government agencies. The extent of the importance of Indigenous wellbeing to policy outcomes and the perceptions, if any, of its connection to Indigenous cultural heritage in these initiatives, are considered below.

### 4.2 Australian Government Health and Social and Emotional Wellbeing Policies

Australian governments have had a deep commitment to outcomes in Aboriginal health
for the last decade when responsibility for Aboriginal health was shifted from the former ATSIC, into the then Department of Health and Aged Care. There has been a plethora of enquiries and new policy developed over this time. For example, The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Family and Community Affairs has developed an Inquiry into Indigenous health and reported on this in 1999. In view of the unacceptably high morbidity and mortality of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people this Committee was asked to report on:

a) ways to achieve effective Commonwealth coordination of the provision of health and related programs to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, with particular emphasis on the regulation, planning and delivery of such services;
b) barriers to access to mainstream health services, to explore avenues to improve the capacity and quality of mainstream health service delivery to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and the development of linkages between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and mainstream services;
c) the need for improved education of medical practitioners, specialists, nurses and health workers, with respect to the health status of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and its implications for care;
d) the extent to which social and cultural factors, and location, influence health, especially maternal and child health, diet, alcohol and tobacco consumption;
e) the extent to which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health status is affected by educational and employment opportunities, access to transport services and proximity to other community supports, particularly in rural and remote communities; and
f) the extent to which past structures for delivery of health care services have contributed to the poor health status of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.69

These terms of reference importantly address issues to do with access of Indigenous Australians to adequate primary health care by provision of services, training of staff and issues to do with remoteness and inefficient delivery. The only mention of cultural factors is in the need to examine whether they have a detrimental effect on health, (see term of reference d).

Indigenous involvement in this report was by way of a proportion of the 98 submissions received, hearings in all capital cities and a number of regional centres whereby the Committee visited many Aboriginal communities and health related organisations. Nonetheless this report does not mention Indigenous wellbeing and cultural heritage even though submissions stressed the need to view the health of Indigenous Australians in a holistic framework: "Not just the physical well-being of the individual but the social, emotional and cultural well-being of the whole community".70 There are 34 references to culture in this 60 page document, giving an idea of its centrality to ideas about health. However, there is no explanation of what is meant by Aboriginal culture, for

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70 ib id
example, what are the values, ethics and protocols of Aboriginal society. And there are no indicators as to how activities around Aboriginal cultural heritage can actually contribute to improved health status.

4.2.1 Social Health Reference Group\(^{71}\)

A Social Health Reference Group was specially appointed to develop a national strategic framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' Mental Health and Social and Emotional Well Being (sic).\(^{72}\) This reference group was developed under the auspices of the National Mental Health Working Group and the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Council. Made up of a majority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people from a range of organisations with expertise in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social and emotional wellbeing, it includes representatives from the Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Sector, mainstream mental health, peak bodies in the mental health and suicide prevention, government and non-government organisations.\(^{73}\)

This group aims to respond to the high incidence of social and emotional wellbeing problems and mental ill health amongst Indigenous Australians, by providing a framework for national action.\(^{74}\)

The terms of Reference for the Social Health Reference Group were to:

1. Develop a revised Social and Emotional Well Being Strategic Framework linked to the revised National Strategic Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health.
   • Revised plan to include a five-year plan for progressing social and emotional well being in the community controlled sector.
   • Revised plan to link with the development of a 3rd National Mental Health Plan, with a focus on implementation of existing State, Territory and National commitments;
2. Engage in productive consultation to inform policy development with a wide range of key stakeholders;
3. Develop a communications strategy that will ensure that stakeholders are kept informed; and
4. Identify and develop a staged approach to implementation, reporting, monitoring, support and evaluation activities in the Action Plan.

\(^{71}\) the Office of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health (OATSIH) has commissioned the consultancy group Urbis Keys Young to evaluate OATSIH’s Bringing Them Home and Indigenous Mental Health Programs in March 2006 at the direction of this reference group.


\(^{73}\) ibid p 62

\(^{74}\) ibid p 5
The framework includes five strategic directions and each has a list of those agencies that need to be involved in developing programs to meet these objectives in a whole of government and community approach.

Strategies were developed for the following agencies to carry out:

- The Department of Education Science and Training (DEST);
- The Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet;
- The Commonwealth Attorney General;
- The then Department of family and Community Services (FaCS);
- Australian Capital Territory (ACT) Department of Health;
- the then Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC);
- the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS); and
- state and territory governments.

The report recommends "On-going data development work and implementation of the National Performance Indicators for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health". State and Territory governments are required to provide information as required by the Performance Indicators through the Framework Agreement forums.

The nine guiding principles for this Framework have been extracted from Ways Forward and further emphasise the holistic view in that report. This view includes the essential need to support self-determination and culturally valid understandings of health, and recognise the impact of trauma, grief, loss, discrimination and human rights issues on the social and emotional well being of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. These principles highlight, and are intended to build on, the great strengths, resilience and endurance within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. The framework is also mindful of the responsibility to acknowledge and respect the important historical and cultural diversity between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their respective communities. And further states that "Mental health clinicians must recognise the impact of cultural and spiritual factors on the way mental health problems develop and present, in order to provide accurate diagnosis and effective treatment."

Cultural factors are mentioned throughout the report in a variety of ways - appropriateness of treatment; diversity in communities; the impact of cultural

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75 *ibid* p 55 see also Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health National Performance Indicators(Cooperative Research Centre for Aboriginal and Tropical Health for the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2000) p 50; and SCATSIH review process for National Performance Indicators for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health (NPIs) and Bringing them Home Performance Indicators p54;  
76 *ibid* p 59 and also CRCRATH for the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2000), Technical Refinement of the National Performance Indicators for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health, Casuarina is listed in references  
78 *Social and Emotional Well Being Framework op cit p 6  
79 *ib id* p 7
breakdown; the disruption to cultural wellbeing caused by the European invasion; cultural factors as an influence on health and wellbeing; sensitivity; the need for culturally appropriate consultations; cultural wellbeing as an important component of the health of the whole community, and so on. However, this in truth indicates a lack of clarity of understanding of what culture is and how it operates in individuals and communities lives. For example, if culture has broken down as a result of the invasion, how much does it have to be considered in dealings with Aboriginal people? There is no real definition of “culture” in this context and no explanation of what this means in terms of how people think and behave around mental health issues.

The report includes a section "Understanding Social and Emotional Well Being" which emphasises the relationship of wellbeing to mental health, maintaining that they are distinct “although the two interact and influence each other”; the need for a collaborative approach to the provision of essential services to Indigenous people; the response to social and emotional well being issues is the core business of the health sector; a summary of the reasons for social and emotional wellbeing problems which again, and ambiguously, seems to place them within the province of mental health; a summary of mental health disorders; recognition of recent new responses including "cultural and healing activities, community based promotion and prevention programs, and workforce development initiatives". The latter is in reference to social health teams operating out of Aboriginal community controlled health organisations. While the report emphasizes the importance of wellbeing it is not defined and is constructed as being (mostly) a mental health issue.

The Social and Emotional Well Being (Mental Health) action plan was evaluated in 2001 and this evaluation also underlines the fact that the main thrust of Australian government policy about Indigenous wellbeing does not consider Indigenous cultural heritage as a factor. This report has ramifications for State and Territory governments and agencies as well as Aboriginal community controlled health organisations and their peak body NACCHO.

The terms of reference applied to the final report of the evaluation makes it clear that the action plan has had virtually no reference to Indigenous wellbeing and cultural heritage. They included a need for a description of what has happened under the Action Plan particularly in relation to:

- Improving access to culturally appropriate high quality health care in emotional and social well being - improving mental health outcomes - addressing issues affecting youth suicide - enhancing the appropriateness and effectiveness of mainstream and specific mental health care services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people;
- An assessment of the progress that has been made including identification of factors which have assisted or hindered progress in the implementation of the

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80 ib id attached to the report in full at Appendix 1
81 ib id p 7 - 8
82 Evaluation of the Social and Emotional Well Being (Mental Health) Action Plan, May 2001 URBIS Keys Young for the then Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care
Action Plan, recognising the importance of basic steps undertaken in areas such as intersectoral collaboration and capacity building;

- A description of approaches which have worked well;
- Suggestions as to which components of the Action Plan could appropriately be applied more broadly; and
- Suggestions for additional strategies which might be used to provide sustainable and culturally appropriate emotional and social well being services.

The reference to culturally appropriate high quality health care seems to be addressed by the provision of cultural awareness training to staff and this was a part of the review. Other than this, there is no definition of culture, no reference to cultural heritage and many references to cultural appropriateness (as in culturally appropriate models of service) with no real explanation of what this means. In fact it may mean many different things to different people and especially to different Aboriginal communities.

The term "well being" is used overwhelmingly in the context of social wellbeing within this report but again, with no reference to Indigenous cultural heritage. Social and mental health factors have been seen to be the main areas of need in terms of the wellbeing of the “stolen generations”. An examination of the proposed initiatives developed as a response to the enquiry into the “stolen generations” allows a further understanding of the concept of wellbeing and its connection to Indigenous cultural heritage in government policy and program development.

4.2.2 “Bringing them Home” Initiatives

It has been established that thousands of Indigenous children in Australia were removed from their families as a result of government policies for at least five decades after the turn of the twentieth century. These policies have been recognised as genocidal, in that the crime of genocide does not necessarily mean the immediate physical destruction of a group. The Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, which was adopted by the United Nations in 1948 and ratified by Australia in 1949, defines genocide in Article II as such:

*In the present Convention, genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethical, racial or religious group, as such:*

(a) Killing members of the group;
(b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm of members of the group;
(c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
(d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the groups;
(e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group. 83

Some of the members of the Redfern focus group discussed later in this report are people who did not grow up with their natural families as a direct result of these policies. In 2001 the Australian government announced initiatives in response to the Bringing them Home Report developed out of the enquiry into the children taken from their families, “the stolen children”, during 1995-6. The 54 recommendations of the report fell into three categories: various forms of reparation and compensation to the individuals removed, their families, communities and descendants; a range of family reunion, health and other services for those affected by past policies and practices, (the key areas of the report); and measures to address contemporary separation practices, in particular legislation to govern adoption, child welfare and juvenile justice procedures.

The initiatives announced by the government are interesting because many of them promise to assist the development of wellbeing by the implementation of programs to increase intangible cultural heritage activity. The $63 million in practical assistance over four years included:

- $2 million for Australian Archives to index, copy and preserve thousands of files so that they are more readily accessible;
- close to $6 million for further development of indigenous family support and parenting programs;
- in recognition of the importance of Indigenous people and others telling their stories of family separation, $1.6 million to the National Library for an oral history project;
- a $9 million boost to culture and language maintenance programs;
- $11.25 million to establish a national network of family link-up services to assist individuals;
- $16 million for 50 new counsellors to assist those affected by past policies and for those going through the reunion process; and
- $17 million to expand the network of regional centres for emotional and social well being, giving counsellors professional support and assistance.

As a result, for example, the Victorian government launched their own set of initiatives and also took the opportunity develop initiatives funded by the Commonwealth including providing:

- $390,000 over three years to the Koorie Heritage Trust Inc. for the development of a Koorie Family History Service;
- $60,000 to the Public Records Office Victoria for the training of two Koorie archivists.

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84 Some of these people chose to complete a special form during the second meeting of the focus group but the exact number of participants who experienced removal as a child is not known.
86 see the Minsiter’s media release at www.atsia.gov.au/Media/Reports/PDF/bth.pdf
87 ib id
88 ib id
In Victoria, as with the Commonwealth, the greater financial commitment, which directly helped Koorie people removed from their families to be reunited is directly related to Indigenous wellbeing through maintenance of intangible cultural heritage.

However, the Australian Indigenous Law Reporter has developed a summary of governments’ responses to recommendations of the report and the overall picture is not a good one. The funding for such programs as that in Victoria have not been at all adequate to meet the need and far from systematic.

The recommendations about wellbeing for example, including the development of an Indigenous wellbeing model are recorded as “Sentiment supported; indeterminate action taken by all governments”. And funding for community based initiatives in Indigenous wellbeing “Indeterminate, but certainly not all funding so directed. It is yet unclear precisely how the Commonwealth’s new regional health centres will be structured and where the 50 new health counsellors will be located”. This initiative also included the development of specialist mental health services including 50 new counsellors to be engaged. Such wellbeing initiatives are clearly based firmly in the mental health area, rather than in cultural heritage.

4.2.3 National Drug Strategy: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples’ Complementary Action Plan 2003 - 2006

Although this strategy itself does not elaborate on the connections between Indigenous wellbeing and cultural heritage any more than the other government policy documents, it does include important information that indicates how the term “wellbeing” has come to be understood within the context of Indigenous mental health. The glossary for the strategy includes a definition:

**Social and emotional wellbeing**

Broadly, a comprehensive term for the physical, psychological, and cultural welfare and happiness of an individual within his or her community. Since the Way Forward report (Swann & Raphael 1995) and the Emotional and Social Well Being (Mental Health) Action Plan (DHA 1996), it has been used to describe a range of holistic approaches to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mental health, including:

- mental health promotion activities;
- trauma and grief counselling;
- strategies to prevent youth suicide; and
- the particular needs, experiences and contexts of Aboriginal people diagnosed with a mental health disorder, their carers and other family members, and culturally appropriate mental health care.  

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Again, this is a broad definition that is useful within the context of mental health treatment but has no real reference to cultural heritage and its relationship to wellbeing that may conceivably impact on prevention and rehabilitation. Also within the glossary is a definition:

**Holistic health**
A comprehensive view of health, regarded as not only individual physical wellness, but also the social, emotional and cultural wellbeing of a whole community. In order to achieve whole-of-life, culturally appropriate and relevant health outcomes in prevention, treatment, and continuing care, holistic health care may include traditional cultural practices alongside curative or treatment services.\(^91\)

This definition notably includes the introduction of cultural practices in the medical interventions in mental health initiatives for Indigenous people. However, there is no explanation of what form these may take and their connections to wellbeing.

### 4.3 Australian Government Oceans Policy

The Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (AFFA) North Australian Indigenous Land and Sea Management Alliance (NAILSMA) have developed policy to facilitate the involvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the use, conservation and management of Australia’s marine jurisdictions. Under Australia’s Oceans Policy, the Australian Government is committed to ecologically sustainable oceans management in accordance with the *The Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (EPBC Act)*. Ecologically sustainable oceans management has four key components:

- Ecosystem-based management of human activities;
- Integrated multiple-use management in marine environments;
- Maintenance of ecosystem health; and
- Sustainable and internationally-competitive marine-based industries.\(^92\)

Therefore AFFA has commissioned a report on the importance of Indigenous involvement in the development of this policy *Sea Country: an Indigenous perspective* prepared by NAILSMA, June 2004.\(^93\) The report states that to achieve the goal of ecologically sustainable oceans management it is considered important to look at all ocean uses and resources collectively rather than in isolation, and management decisions need to be informed by a sound understanding of natural systems and of the human interactions with them. This is the core of regional marine planning for Australia’s oceans.\(^94\)

\(^91\) *ib id*


\(^94\) *ib id*
While not mentioning rights, the report recognises the interests and responsibilities of Indigenous peoples:

- The cultural interests and traditional knowledge and management practices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples should be recognised and incorporated in ocean planning and management and related policy development
- Local communities should be encouraged to participate in local industries and in management strategies and to continue to share responsibility for the management of ocean resources.\(^{95}\)

The report states that the social, cultural and economic relationships of many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples with the ocean environment mean that they have strong interests in the use, conservation and management of Australia's oceans. Access to, and use of, marine resources are essential to the social, cultural and economic well being of coastal Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.\(^{96}\)

However, while accepting that access to, and use of, marine resources are essential to the social, cultural and economic well being of coastal Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities this policy does not yet impact on NSW Aboriginal communities,\(^{97}\) but aims to develop an approach to engagement of Aboriginal people in the planning and management of saltwater country in the Northern Planning Region only.\(^{98}\) It is notable too that the National Oceans Advisory Group (NOAG) comprised predominantly of members with non-government interests, includes two Indigenous men from the Tiwi Islands and the Torres Strait, both within the Northern Planning region.\(^{99}\)

DEH has also commissioned a report on the importance of Indigenous involvement in the development of this policy: Sea Country: an Indigenous perspective – the south-east regional marine plan.\(^{100}\) The report states that to achieve the goal of ecologically sustainable oceans management it is considered important to look at all ocean uses and resources collectively rather than in isolation, and management decisions need to be informed by a sound understanding of natural systems and of the human interactions with them. This is the core of regional marine planning for Australia's oceans. There are new arrangements being put in place in some areas of the south of the continent; the Kooyang sea Country Plan in south western Victoria (Vic) and the soon to be released Ngarrindjeri Sea Country plan in south eastern South Australia (SA).

The NAILSMA report, Living on Saltwater Country, recognises that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are concerned with the conservation of the coasts and the

\(^{95}\) ibid
\(^{96}\) ib id p 40
\(^{97}\) ib id p 52
\(^{98}\) ib id p 40, p 152
oceans for several reasons, including a responsibility to look after and maintain areas with which they have a traditional affiliation and custodianship.  

The policy document does recognise that among the concerns of coastal Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are a range of tangible and intangible cultural heritage issues such as: equitable and secure access to resources; direct involvement in resource planning, management and allocation processes and decisions; formal recognition of traditional patterns of resource use and access; traditional management practices and customary law and conservation of the oceans and its resources; and access to genetic resources, intellectual property and ownership.

The report has a high level of Indigenous involvement, facilitated by specialists with extensive experience with northern Indigenous communities and is described thus in four parts:

**Part A** covers the Northern Territory and Southern Gulf of Carpentaria regions of the Northern Planning Area. This part of the report was overseen and facilitated by the Northern Land Council and Carpentaria Land Council; prepared by Dr Dermot Smyth who has a background in natural resource management with a focus on Indigenous use and management of marine and coastal resources.

**Part B** covers the western Cape York and the Kaurareg Aboriginal sea country in far northern Cape York and southern Torres Strait. This part of the report was overseen and facilitated by Balkanu Cape York Development Corporation and the Cape York Land Council; prepared by Mr Jim Monaghan who is a geographer specialising in the use of natural and cultural space and has many years experience working in both the Kowanyama and Pormpuraaw areas.

**Part C** draws together the key themes emerging from across the region and summarises documented accounts of Indigenous concerns about current marine environmental and resource management, and Indigenous needs and aspirations for the future use and management of sea country; prepared by Dr Dermot Smyth in discussion NAILSMA partners.

**Part D** summarises the main conclusions emerging from Part A, Part B and Part C and sets out some of the policy challenges and options resulting from consideration of these themes; prepared by Dr Dermot Smyth in discussion with NAILSMA partners.

The authors have a high stake in the findings of this report, they believe that this review presents a picture that amounts to more than the sum of its parts and provides a powerful argument for a fresh approach to engagement of Aboriginal people in the planning and management of saltwater country in the Northern Planning Region.

The report makes a definite statement about the importance of cultural practice and lifestyles to the natural environment, stating that it is clear that Aboriginal rights, interests and relationships regarding sea country involve much more than just the practical use of marine resources. Knowing about saltwater clan estates and moiety

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101 ib id
102 ib id p 152
affiliations, conducting ceremonies, exercising customary authority, passing on cultural knowledge, travelling to cultural sites, relating creation stories and describing Dreaming tracks are all part of Aboriginal use of sea country. Further, Marine environments were found to be managed through a variety of strategies and cultural practices, including the conduct of ceremonies (songs, dances, story telling and other rituals) with the purpose of nurturing the wellbeing of particular places, species and habitats.

The three sections of the report, dealing as they do with different areas and peoples of northern Australia are deeply concerned with Indigenous cultural heritage. For example: “It is the sea more than any other geographical feature which the Yanyuwa use as a metaphor for their existence and their identity. The most common term is Ii-Anthawirriyarral, which means ‘those people whose spiritual and cultural heritage comes from the sea’, but which in everyday English speech is rendered as ‘the people of the sea’.

"Our law is not like whitefella’s law. We do not carry it around in a book. It is in the sea. That is why things happen when you do the wrong thing. That sea, it knows. Rainbow knows as well. He is still there. His spirit is still watching today for law breakers. That is why we have to look after that sea and make sure we do the right thing. We now have to make sure whitefellas do the right thing as well. If they disobey that law they get into trouble alright.

-statement by Kenneth Jacob, Wellesley Islands Native Title claim, 1997

5. INDIGENOUS WELLBEING IN NEW SOUTH WALES GOVERNMENT POLICY CONTEXTS

5.1 Two Ways Together

The NSW Department of Aboriginal Affairs has responsibility for the carriage of the main NSW government strategy Two Ways Together - Partnerships: A new way of doing business with Aboriginal people 2003-2012. The idea of partnerships correlates with the policy of the Australian government and other states and territories. This partnership not only includes Indigenous people, but it is conceived to allow the greater cooperation of all government agencies in meeting the needs of the Indigenous community. The NSW government aim too is to remove social disadvantage but there is more of a commitment to allowing Indigenous people to have a say in the development of
programs as “experts” in the needs of their communities. This strategy was developed following close discussions with Aboriginal people that identified seven priority areas for action, one of which is “culture and heritage”.  

Further, the NSW government has a commitment to the development of Indigenous wellbeing. The two objectives of this strategy include “to improve the social, economic and cultural and emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal people in NSW”. Of the four strategies to achieve this one is “supporting and affirming Aboriginal peoples’ culture and heritage”. There is also an expression of respect for the diverse cultures of Aboriginal peoples in NSW that is meaningful in Indigenous communication contexts.

The strategy outlines new ways of doing business with Aboriginal people that includes “greater sensitivity, flexibility and responsiveness within agencies in the way that they work with and deliver services to Aboriginal people”. The areas selected for immediate focus of action include developing agency capacity to work with Aboriginal people by “developing polices, procedures and protocols that recognise Aboriginal culture, needs and aspirations”. And this includes developing the cultural competence of staff.

Therefore, a core strategy of the NSW government is the development of greater understandings of the cultural heritage of the Aboriginal people of NSW and the incorporation of this knowledge into the way that agencies do business with this client group.

6. INDIGENOUS WELLBEING - FOCUS GROUP

6.1 The Concept – Indigenous experts on their own wellbeing

A focus group of Indigenous experts in their own “wellbeing” was formed in May 2006 in order to test the findings of research so far; by having them identify the factors that they thought impacted the most on their wellbeing. This methodology is based on the Delphi method for structuring a group communication process that has proven to be effective in allowing a group of individuals, experts in the field, and as a whole, to deal with a complex problem and move toward consensus.

6.2 Participants

This group comprised members of the Aboriginal community, centred around the Eora College in Abercrombie Street, Chippendale, in the inner-west of Sydney. Not all members of this group live in the Redfern area, though they are all urban based.

Twenty-three people volunteered to be involved in this group, of whom 16 were female and 7 male. The group comprised a mix of gender, approximately two women to every

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108 ib id

109 ib id
one man involved, a mix of age range and community of origin. Communities of origin for the group were mainly in NSW (Kooris) but some came from Queensland and northern NSW (Murris) and at least two from Western Australia (Nyoongahs). All have been living in the inner suburbs of Sydney for lengthy periods of time.

The participants were drawn mainly from the student body of the Eora College, Sydney Institute of TAFE NSW. There were a large proportion of the focus group from the courses General and Foundation Education and Language, Literacy and Numeracy, some from the Diploma of Aboriginal Studies and some from the Cultural Arts and other courses. There were two casual teachers also involved who are graduates and two enrolled university students. Two of the Eora students were not comfortable writing their own responses and were assisted by others in the group.

Of the 7 male respondents:

1 was aged 20 – 30
4 were aged 30 – 40 and
3 were aged 40 – 50 years

Their home communities left blank on the questionnaire but those who responded said “WA, NSW, Dubbo and Guyra”

These Aboriginal men identified themselves in the following ways:

Bundjalung (2)  Nyoongah – Wajuk
Wajuk           Kamillaroi (Moree)
Daingutti       Muree – Munujahlie
Yuin            Koori
Australian Indigenous Aboriginal

The years lived that they have lived away from original community vary from one person who clearly regarded Sydney as his original community, and the others who gave 5-6 yrs (3) and four who gave more than 10 years including, 25 years 6 months (a long time but very exactly counted), 17, 16 and 11 years. In discussion it was revealed that these years away from their community are invariably spent in Sydney.

Of the 16 female respondents:

3 were younger than 20 years
5 were aged 20 – 30

5 were aged 30 - 40

3 were aged 40 - 50

Where disclosed their original communities were given as:

Moree (3)     Sydney
Griffith       Wellington
Wilcannia

This group of women identified themselves as follows:

Murri (2) – Waka Waka     Kamillaroi (5)
Koori – Dunghatti          Wiradjuri (2)
Yuin                      Koorie (6)
Aboriginal

6.3 The focus group process

The group met twice – the first time for two hours and the second time one week later for one hour. The first meeting was an information giving and sharing session developed around the PowerPoint presentation that is found at Attachment C. The focus group was then asked to complete a questionnaire. The group were asked to rank twenty factors that may impact on their wellbeing in importance from 1 – 20. The questionnaire with a full list of these items is to be found at Attachment A. The group was also asked to identify factors that impact on their wellbeing that have been left out of the questionnaire.

The results of this questionnaire were collated and presented back to the group in the second meeting one week later in a PowerPoint presentation (see attachment D) and the focus group gave their feedback on this data.

The results of this focus group activity are reported on below.

6.4 First Preferences chosen from the given list of factors that may impact on Wellbeing

The number of first preferences that these factors received, in the order they appeared on the questionnaire, appears below. These factors were expressed in general terms, for example, “a better place to live” and are designed to allow the participant to personalise a category that may relate to wellbeing, in this case HOUSING. The factors were deliberately expressed in general and descriptive terms in an attempt to bypass the usual blanket terms used to describe what it is that Aboriginal people need for their socio-economic development and get to a more meaningful, deeper understanding of what impacts on Indigenous wellbeing.
Each of the factors is listed below with the category they are designed to interrogate, in capitals next to them. Note that these categories were not included on the original questionnaire. And the numerical value given is that of the number of first preferences given this factor by the whole group. Some focus group members chose to give more than one first preference.

These factors were deliberately introduced in the following way:

Given that you have adequate housing, health, food and clothing - how important are the following to your wellbeing?

This is a most important consideration, as it is generally understood that all people need enough to survive and that wellbeing is meaningfully measured when the basic requirements of food, clothing, shelter and reasonable health are already available.

The list of factors presented to the participants and their first preference allocations, are as follows:
1. Given that you have adequate housing, health, food and clothing - how important are the following to your wellbeing? Rate the factors below from 1 – 20.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>A better place to live</td>
<td>HOUSING</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>A better job</td>
<td>EMPLOYMENT</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>A better level of education</td>
<td>EDUCATION</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>Acceptance in the white community</td>
<td>RACISM</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>Acceptance in the black community</td>
<td>SOCIAL ADJUSTMENT (SA)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>Spirituality</td>
<td>INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE (ICH)</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>Better physical fitness</td>
<td>HEALTH</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>Living on land with community</td>
<td>INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE (ICH)</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>Visiting land and special places</td>
<td>(ICH)</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.10</td>
<td>Knowing family history</td>
<td>(ICH)</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.11</td>
<td>Knowing interfamily relations and kinship</td>
<td>(ICH)</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.12</td>
<td>Being with my family, extended family</td>
<td>(ICH)</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.13</td>
<td>Being in the company of other Koori people</td>
<td>(ICH)</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.14</td>
<td>Being in the company of my friends, black or white</td>
<td>(SA)</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.15</td>
<td>Knowing about and exercising my rights as an Aboriginal person</td>
<td>HUMAN RIGHTS (ICH)</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.16</td>
<td>Being able to buy things I want</td>
<td>MATERIAL GOODS</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.17</td>
<td>Being able to buy things I need</td>
<td>MATERIAL NEEDS</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.18</td>
<td>Being able to share with my family and friends</td>
<td>(ICH)</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.19</td>
<td>Being able to give to my family and friends</td>
<td>(ICH)</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.20</td>
<td>Knowing about my peoples’ history and culture</td>
<td>(ICH)</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Thus, the options that scored the greater number of first preferences for their impact on wellbeing, for the whole group are:

1. Spirituality                       INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE  8
2. A better education                EDUCATION                     7
3. Knowing family history            INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE  7
4. Being with my family, extended family INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE  6
5. Knowing about and exercising my rights as an Aboriginal person HUMAN RIGHTS  5
6. Giving to family and friends      INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE  5
7. Knowing about Indigenous history and culture INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE  5

These results then indicate an overwhelming preference for intangible cultural heritage factors over material factors for the improvement of respondents’ wellbeing.

The responses to the questionnaire were also analysed in a different way, in order to make meaning of the group’s preferences beyond the first preference. The number of times each of the factors listed received a score from one to ten, that is a value of one for each score anywhere between 1 and 10, was added. This gave an idea of the top ten factors over the whole group. The results from this analysis by gender and for the whole group are listed below. The score next to the factor is the number of times it scored between 1 and 10.

6.4.1. The top scoring options for the (7) men were:

1. Spirituality (ICH)  7
2. Being able to share with my family and friends (ICH)  6
3. Being able to give to my family and friends (ICH)  6
4. Knowing my peoples history and culture (ICH) 6
5. Knowing family history (ICH) 5
6. Being in the company of other Koori people (ICH) 5
7. Knowing about and exercising my rights as an Aboriginal person HUMAN RIGHTS (ICH) 5
8. A better place to live HOUSING 5
9. A better education EDUCATION 5

These results indicate that men are concerned with the traditional cultural practices of giving, sharing and reciprocity more than economic or material factors, such as “being able to buy the things I want”, housing, employment and also education, in developing their own wellbeing. Intangible cultural factors rate very highly for the male respondents.

6.4.2. The top scoring options for the (16) women were:

1. Spirituality (ICH) 15
2. Knowing about my peoples' history and culture (ICH) 13
3. Knowing about and exercising my rights as an Aboriginal person HUMAN RIGHTS (ICH) 11
4. Knowing family history (ICH) 10
5. Being with my family, extended family (ICH) 10
6. A better education EDUCATION 9
7. Being able to give to my family and friends (ICH) 9
8. Being able to share with my family and friends (ICH) 9

While for women the traditional practises of sharing, giving and reciprocity score very highly, they are more concerned with family history and culture and Indigenous rights than the male respondents.

And, education rates more highly than with the men. In discussions it became clear that most of the group saw education as a lifelong process, an informal community based process that relied heavily on elders. This seemed to be valued more highly that formal education processes found in mainstream society though many respondents recognise
the need to develop basic literacy and numeracy skills. Given this group discussion, education can be seen as an intangible cultural heritage factor as well.

### 6.4.3. The low scoring options for men, from the lowest:

1. Acceptance in the white community **RACISM** 0
2. Visiting land and special places **ICH** 0
3. Living on land with community **INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE** **ICH** 1
4. Being able to buy things I want **MATERIAL GOODS** 1
5. Better physical fitness **HEALTH** 2
6. Knowing family relations and kinship **ICH** 2
7. A better job **EMPLOYMENT** 2

### 6.4.4. The low scoring options for women, from the lowest:

1. Acceptance in the white community **RACISM** 0
2. Acceptance in the black community **SOCIAL ADJUSTMENT** 4
3. A better job **EMPLOYMENT** 4
4. Being with other Kooris **ICH** 5
5. Being able to buy things I want **MATERIAL GOODS** 5
6. Being able to buy the things I need **MATERIAL NEEDS** 5
7. Visiting land and special places **ICH** 5

It is interesting to note that the factor “visiting land and special places” scores low for both men and women and “living on land with community” scores low for men. When this was discussed during the second meeting of the focus group the respondents explained that these factors scored low because, being an urban-based group they aren’t often able to do this. So, the other factors for wellbeing rate higher but if they were more able to visit their land this would indeed add to their wellbeing.

Notable too is the low score for acceptance in the white community. This question was designed to test the impact of racism on wellbeing and needs to be rethought, as respondents did not see it this way. The group discussion revealed that this factor was
seen to represent the need for white people to accept you, rather than overt racist indications of non-acceptance. While respondents find that the latter, that is, manifestations of racism do impact on some people’s wellbeing, at the same time they do not feel the need for white acceptance. Since many government policies and programs emphasise the need for non-Aboriginal health practitioners and educators to develop understandings, sensitivities and acceptance on Aboriginal people, this is an interesting outcome of the focus group deliberations.

When the total scores are added together, the five top scoring factors affecting Indigenous wellbeing for the whole group were:

1. Spirituality \( \text{ICH} \) 22
2. Knowing about my peoples’ history and culture \( \text{ICH} \) 19
3. Knowing family history; Knowing about and exercising my rights as an Aboriginal person; Being able to give to my family and friends \( \text{RIGHTS; ICH} \) 17
4. Being able to share with my family and friends \( \text{ICH} \) 16
5. Being with my family, extended family; A better level of education \( \text{ICH; EDUCATION} \) 15

6.5 Participants’ assessment of what the survey left out

The respondents were also asked if there were any factors that this survey left out that can impact on their wellbeing. The many factors mentioned by the focus group were developed into categories that could be further developed in the second focus group meeting. The male respondents listed two:

- Abstinence form drugs and alcohol
- Balance, stability and direction.

The first can be categorised into a group of factors also raised by the women Absence of Substance Misuse. These include:

- Staying clean and sober for the rest of my life
- Too much alcohol (abstaining?)

The second factor can be included in a group also raised by the women mental health/personal development/relationships. These include:

- Violence, abuse
- Disfunctional relations
- Stress
- Love of oneself
• Peace of mind
• ? Absenteeism
• Being better at what I do
• For my ex-partner to leave me alone
• Bastards
• Sex

A female respondent also identified the fact that racism had not been mentioned and two others mention the allied factors of:
• Acceptance by whole community
• Other nationalities understanding our culture

When it was explained at the second meeting that the factor “acceptance in the white community” was designed to cover these issues, the group were satisfied that this was enough.

Female respondents also felt that some standard of living issues had not been included such as:
• Food
• Money to provide for my little family
• Housing help
• Health and safety

And, they also raised factors to do with life or childhood experience as follows:
• Your family upbringing (whether adopted or not)
• Being taken away
• History of family and health

These issues raised by the focus group were presented to them in a second meeting in which they were given the opportunity to comment further on the outcomes of the original questionnaire.

6.6 Indigenous Wellbeing focus group deliberations – second meeting

The second meeting of the focus group was for one hour only and they were presented with the findings of the questionnaire and given the opportunity to discuss it.

They were also given a series of open-ended questions designed to allow them to elaborate on the top scoring factors for their wellbeing.

They were also asked to rank the factors that they identified as being left out of the original questionnaire and to assess whether they should be included in the top ranking factors for Indigenous wellbeing.

A further questionnaire was included to give the opportunity for those who did not grow up with their natural family to be able to comment on the impact of this on their wellbeing.
Participants were asked to break into groups and develop a diagrammatic representation of the factors that impact on wellbeing. One of these I reproduced in this report at Attachment E.

**6.6.1 Ranking of the additional factors for wellbeing identified in the open section of the first questionnaire**

As explained, in the first questionnaire respondents were given the opportunity to raise additional factors that impact on their wellbeing that were not listed in the prepared questionnaire. Male respondents identified *substance misuse* and *balance stability and direction*. The latter can be identified as a *mental health/personal development and relationships* factor along with many factors that fit into this category identified by women. Female respondents also identified *substance misuse*, *standard of living* and *racism*.

During the second focus group the respondents ranked the additional factors raised and also recommended whether they should be included amongst the highest scoring factors for Indigenous wellbeing. The results of this process revealed that for both men and women the rankings of 1 - 5 were *spread between Absence of Substance Misuse* and *Mental health/personal development/relationships* with the highest scores followed by *Absence of racism* and a *Better standard of living*.

Those that scored highest for inclusion in the top scoring options for wellbeing were *Absence of substance misuse* and *Mental health/personal development/relationships* which need to be included in the top scoring options for wellbeing.

It is recommended that all four of these variables would need to be included in any further focus group questionnaires.

**6.6.2 Growing up without your natural family and wellbeing**

It became obvious from the responses to the first questionnaire that this experience creates special conditions for wellbeing and that several people in the group had experienced removal from their natural family. The group was given the option of completing a form designed for those who did not grow up with their natural family. Four people in the 23 respondents chose to complete this form. All four identified that there are special issues for their wellbeing and all of their responses are reproduced in full below.

**1st Respondent**

“Emotional torment, living a lie till you find out who you really are and you have been lied to most of your life. Reconnecting with your natural family is basically not going to happen cause you cant catch up on what you were apart of from the beginning! IDENTITY crisis. A life time of therapy wont help or fix it!”
2nd Respondent
“Lack of feeling where you belong. Feel like you didn’t belong in the white culture or black. Low self-esteem. Not excepted (sic) by either.”

3rd Respondent
“Yes. I think not growing up with my natural family I was excluded. But my family was looking for me and I felt my wellbeing was lifted. My family did not give up on me.”

4th Respondent
“Up until I was 11-12 years old we moved around a lot so welfare wouldn’t take me off my mum. I knew who my family was and they knew me from a baby, but I didn’t live with extended family until I turned 12 years old.”

These responses cover a wide range of factors that impact to the detriment of an individual’s wellbeing when their growth and development are affected by government policies of separating children from their families. The main issues that emerge are to do with losing connectedness to family, including feelings of being excluded within the new situation and a lack of acceptance and belonging, which impacts severely on wellbeing.

6.7 Responses to questions about the high scoring factors in Indigenous wellbeing.

Respondents were given a set of open-ended questions about the factors that scored highest in the initial questionnaire. These were designed so as not to lead respondents into answers but to allow the factors they identified as important to their wellbeing to be more clearly understood. And, in the hope that there would be some indication of how these factors affect wellbeing. The responses, separated by a gap for each respondent, follow. There is also a brief summary of these that is also informed by the general discussion of the group during the second meeting.

6.7.1 What is SPIRITUALITY and how do you/ would you know when your wellbeing is increased, by SPIRITUALITY?

- Spirituality is what you feel inside
- A feeling of being whole
- Its about identity
- Spirituality is about our ancestors who created Australia for the next generations
- Being in an Aboriginal environment and understanding more
- Being around my country and family, giving a sense of belonging
- A connection to my ancestry and our traditional way of being and belonging
- Spirituality is about cleansing and feeling peace within
- Releasing of bad feelings
• Spirituality is a sense of being whole and at peace with decisions
• It is a sense of knowledge

• You feel better about yourself - the response you get from your community and environment
• It’s the connection we get when certain things, material or otherwise, give us an understanding of our cultural roots and deep wellbeing

• Spirituality to me is feeling connected in all or many aspects of life
• I do know when my wellbeing is increased by spirituality when I become more balanced and focussed on a neutral zone

• Being around your mob
• Family /culture
• Aboriginal events
• Feeling good about oneself

• Being able to have respect for self, family, culture, elders and traditional law
• Education for wellbeing strengthens spirituality
• Housing and nutrition are important in spirituality

• Communication and union with Indigenous people
• Community events
• Respect for ourself and your culture
• Oneness/contentment with yourself, nature
• Being with family

• My wellbeing is increased by spirituality when I feel one with the earth and can walk around calm and content in this world
• Feeling of comfort from being around other Aboriginal people, FAMILY most important
• Respect for our people, elders and culture
• Education of both white and Aboriginal knowledge - taking best of both to survive proudly

• Being around your own family
• Aboriginal cultural events

• Healthiness and better physical fitness
• Visiting land and special places

• Spirituality is a connectedness with deep religious belief system instilled through ones upbringing or learnt later in life
• Spirituality enhances ones wellbeing as it steers/directs one on a moral/ethical path in life

• Spirituality is a sense of calmness, acceptance and tolerance
A feeling of inner strength, when I am around my people

Thus, spirituality is a feeling, with a base in connectedness to the past, ancestors, and the values that they represent, for example, respect for elders, a moral/ethical path. It is about being in an Aboriginal cultural space, experiencing community and connectedness with land and nature including proper nutrition and shelter. Feeling good about oneself, proud of being an Aboriginal person. It is a state of being that includes knowledge, calmness, acceptance and tolerance, balance and focus, inner strength, cleansing and inner peace, feeling whole, an understanding of cultural roots and “deep wellbeing”.

6.7.2 **What is KNOWING ABOUT YOUR PEOPLES’ HISTORY AND CULTURE and how do you/ would you know when your wellbeing is increased, by it??**

- Once ones history and culture is known one can move on in life in a more positive way
- This increases wellbeing in a physical, emotional, spiritual, economically enhanced way – in all spheres of life a person can operate on a more euphoric level because ones personal life is almost totally enhanced

- Living on the land with my community
  - Being with family
  - Language
  - Law and dance
  - Schooling
  - Bush tucker
  - Elders
  - Art work
  - Knowing where you come from

- Love and culture
  - Nutrition - native food, bush tucker
  - Our survival skills gives hope
  - Our sharing - love our people
  - The land is alive, we are a part of it
  - Respecting kinship

- By being around your own people
  - Language history
  - Lore and dance
  - Education/library/books
  - Healthy diet, natural, bush foods
  - Elders stories knowledge
  - Koori art and crafts
• Sharing/trade

• Learning from elders
• Lore and dance
• Being in the bush – medicine
• Education for us to pass on to the next generation

• Being an Indigenous people
• Language
• Learning from our elders
• Art and education

• Knowing about my peoples’ culture and history is not only an intellectual activity but a physical one as well
• I know when my wellbeing is increased because I feel more grounded in life, society, routine, acceptance etc.

• A place of belonging and knowing where you come from and what that means gives enlightenment

• The empowerment, the proud feeling that you have when it is yours

• Knowing about my history and culture gives me a sense of belonging, knowing who I am and where I am from

• Connecting to the knowledge of our ancestors reinforces identity

• Knowledge of my history and culture helps me to understand the people that I grew up with, especially my parents
• I can pass the Aboriginal cultural history down to my children, family and friends

• The more that you learn about where you are from it makes you feel proud

• The finality of knowing who you are and where you belong
• Its like a breath of fresh air – weight off the shoulders – a light at the end of the tunnel

• Knowing about my people’s history and culture gives me strength and pride

Thus, knowing about your peoples’ history and culture enhances identity, gives strength and pride, a sense of belonging, it gives more grounding in life, a connection to the knowledge of ancestors and cultural activity including language, art, law/lore and dance. It allows a way of sharing, connection to land, survival, bush tucker and medicines. It also allows empowerment, for a person to move on in life in a positive way, it increases all aspects of ones wellbeing as it enhances their life in every way - physical, emotional, spiritual, economic.
6.7.3 What is BEING ABLE TO GIVE TO MY FAMILY AND FRIENDS and how do you/would you know when your wellbeing is increased by it?

- If you did not have that, you would feel that life is not worth living
- You feel a sense of pride when you are able to give to your family what they need
- It is about showing your family especially your children how important they are to you
- This is an important expression of our traditional lifestyle and a natural way for Aboriginal people to be
- A feeling of contentment from knowing my family’s wellbeing is OK
- Knowing that my family can rely on me gives me a sense of achievement
- It’s a great feeling; its providing for what you believe is important
- It does not mean that you should let yourself be used
- When I know that I am able to give to my family and friends when they are in need increases my wellbeing by a sense of independence and happiness
- The feelings of being happy, content – together
- If your family and friends start taking advantage of you then your wellbeing turns into stress
- Being able to give to my family and friends is something money cannot buy - there is no price, it is a mutual understanding and acceptance
- When a barter arrangement is a positive and mutual respected transaction that is acceptable to all involved
- I feel love, support and respect
- Gifts
- Kinship and family brings wellbeing
- Love, support and respect (nurturing)
- Quality of life
- Kinship and family commitment
- Creating a better life path for the next generation
- It’s a good feeling to help people who need it and appreciate it
- Love of others makes us feel we belong
- Feeling good with myself increases my all around health
- It means being there socially, financially, economically, physically in times of need (stress, bereavement, fun times, good/bad times)
• It gives a feeling of psychological wellbeing – knowing you have been there to help those closest to you in their hour of need

Thus, being able to give to family and friends is important for wellbeing as it is an expression of Aboriginal cultural values and connectedness through reciprocity. It gives a feeling of satisfaction in knowing that you express your love and support of family, relations and community. It gives a sense of achievement, independence and happiness. It also means that a person is respected. It indicates a certain quality of life that money cannot buy, it is not about materialism but a mutual understanding and acceptance. It is a very important part of “making life worth living”.

6.7.4 What is KNOWING ABOUT AND EXERCISING MY RIGHTS AS AN INDIGENOUS PERSON and how do you/ would you know when your wellbeing is increased by it?

• Being without rights is like being a nothing person
• Understanding that we have rights is important for our basic humanity

• My wellbeing is increased as it connects me to a collective experience
• It is also increased by oral histories of Aboriginal rights campaigns

• It allows a sense of pride in being Aboriginal

• You get a sense of achievement
• You get to improve on things
• My rights as an Indigenous person are very important but I believe that we all carry shame and it is hard to execute the moments when we need to exercise our rights

• My wellbeing is increased when I learn about my rights as I am empowered

• You feel happy and confident

• It is the way that I am able to share my experiences, to oneself and others
• When others understand, relate and show you a part of themselves, no barriers, no bars, just trust, respect and peace

• This creates a better path for future generations

• Awareness of law/lore and social skills
• Access to support systems

• I’m as good as anyone else, my self-esteem increases when the law should be on my side also
• Seeing brothers and sisters (Aboriginal) being supported by legal, medical and education facilities, also housing
• Knowing ones rights allows a new level operating in life - happy, optimistic
• Able to confront the world without any fear or apprehension of a world of legalistic, jargonistic language

Thus, an understanding of rights contributes to a sense of humanity, of not being a “nothing person”. It is a connection to a collective Aboriginal experience and a way of overcoming “shame”. It is a way of sharing personal experiences with others and to closely relate with no barriers and with mutual respect. It allows confidence and happiness and an opportunity to improve quality of life. It can create a better path for future generations, better social skills and access to support systems that increases community wellbeing. It can allow a new level of operating in life, more optimistic and without apprehension.

6.7.5 What is KNOWING FAMILY HISTORY and how do you/ would you know when your wellbeing is increased by it?

• It is becoming whole
• Feeling fulfilled

• I have come to understand where both sides of my family are from and have developed relationships with both sides of my family
• Having a strong sense of your family history connects you to the community

• To know what my family has endured in the past and what they have achieved and been recognised for gives me a great sense of achievement

• Now that I know things it s great to be able to talk about my family’s knowledge – I believe that I am the keeper of that information and I want to do more with it – it is also a commitment

• Knowing family history is knowing where we come from culturally and geographically, knowing who they really are and how things used to be like
• I am empowered by this knowledge and this increases my wellbeing

• Important! – a sense of belonging

• Self-esteem and belonging make happiness

• Knowing family history is a big part of my existence; it connects me deep to the ground, the air and the water; it shows me everything spiritually, emotionally, physically and mentally
• When positive things like work, life, living skills etc start to gel with one another

• Knowing your bloodline
• Connection to the land
• Breaking down of kinship
• Not marrying wrong skin, knowing bloodlines
• Breaking down of kinship (missions)
• Connection to land

• Looking back to know the importance of my family, this is who I am also
• They’re blood, their physical features, skin, diseases are a part of me also
• Pride – my people are strong survivors – my mothers and auntys have been raped, my uncles and fathers murdered and beaten

• Knowing your land that was stolen
• Knowing the broken family, where members were sent away

• Grandparents and elders talking about culture

• Allows you to know your roots, where you come from, who you are related to and a sense of your own mob/country/territory
• Wellbeing is increased by a sense of belonging, closeness, safety, security and identification with family

Thus, knowing family history is important to wellbeing as it allows for proper marriage by knowing the bloodlines, who you are related to. It can stop the breaking down of kinship, knowing connection to land and family who were sent away. It allows fulfilment through knowledge of one’s “roots”, the experiences of ancestors and their stories of survival against the odds and so engenders a sense of understanding and of pride. It is an important part of existence that allows a grounding, self-esteem and belonging and so allow positive things like work, living skills to develop. It is also an important cultural commitment. “Looking back to know the importance of my family, this is who I am also”.

6.7.6 What is BEING ABLE TO SHARE and how do you/ would you know when your wellbeing is increased by it?

• It is very different to being white; white people are very closed like that
• No-one should go without a feed
• Money should not be the most important thing
• It is very fulfilling, being able to give

• It is important to know that everyone has enough
• That they are well and healthy

• Being able to share of my time, money etc anything that I can give to others which makes me feel like I’m contributing to another’s wellbeing, therefore increases my wellbeing

• Being able to share contributes to my character as a person
• Knowing that you are a caring person with understanding gives a sense of reliability
• Its wonderful and feels good – a good emotion
• Being able to share is when you know you have very little but still will give everything you have
• My wellbeing is increased when I do this
• Togetherness
• To know nobody goes without
• When other people are happy so am I
• Being able to share is a big part of culture
• When people are happy to receive and when people walk up say 20 years later and share with you the little that they have to give, that’s what is Aboriginal culture and identity to me, that is:
• NO GREED
• Sharing and caring with relations, listening to elders, helping women and children
• Settling social boundaries
• Knowledge of dreamtime aspects
• Listening to elders
• Unconditional giving
• Setting social boundaries
• I feel good inside
• To share means to give when you have enough to share, it always comes back
• Sharing things and food with students, they always remember me when eating
• This is based on an unspoken reciprocal system; unconditional giving/sharing without any “conditions” about paying back
• Your mindset is not based on “waiting” for repayment of some sort

Thus, being able to share is an important cultural activity and expression of reciprocity and rejection of materialism which is the basis of Aboriginal culture. It is also an important rejection of what are perceived as “white values” including greed. There is not a demand for “giving back” but an understanding that it will come back because others share the same cultural value. There is an understanding that everyone should have enough (to eat), that the wellbeing of the group is also the wellbeing of the individual.

6.7.7 What is A BETTER LEVEL OF EDUCATION and how do you/ would you know when your wellbeing is increased by it?
• You never stop learning about your culture and life
• Its very fulfilling

• Education is important to get out of the same old routine that’s been controlling Aboriginal lives for hundreds of year because of the Europeans

• A better standard of white education is based on a hierarchy of knowledge that has been denied to Aboriginal people – being able to succeed in this value of knowledge is also important

• A better standard of education instills values and morals for the family
• A sense of stability, knowing you can cope and deal with life

• Its being educated in from an Aboriginal and a western point of view
• Its believing that you are good enough and that you deserve an education
• And also reinforcing that to our Aboriginal community, that its good to be well-educated

• A better level of education is a higher level to a standard level
• My wellbeing is increased by this through levels of knowledge

• A level of at least knowing what people are talking about and to be able to spell and write when asked to

• When you get a good job and wages it increases your wellbeing

• It is when you share and take something away (information) that somebody gives to you freely, no strings attached
• When an open communication is established and we are able to take in and give back in that moment, that presence

• Achievement of educational skills, helping each other out, working together – teacher praises your work

• Achievement of educational skills
• Helping each other with work
• Moral support
• Listening skills
• Patience

• Good job allows me to be who I am, Aboriginal and humorous (sic)
• Education has allowed me to work in a responsible role in the Redfern community

• When teachers and students work together

• This equates with personal, life experiences traditional or mainstream education, work experience
• It gives a better understanding and a higher level of participation in the world

Thus, a better level of education increases wellbeing by allowing fulfilment, by being able to understand what is going on around you and being able to operate well within society, including getting employment. There is recognition of different methodologies in teaching in “white” and Aboriginal cultures and also an indication that people within the group feel inadequate to deal with and succeed in the former. A better level of education is achieved through the building on of life experiences and through a shared learning experience with teachers/elders and others around you, working together with an open communication. A better level of education includes those aspects of knowledge that are important in Aboriginal culture including values and morals and that this occurs outside of formal education contexts. There is a sense of the importance of lifelong learning.

6.7.8 What is BEING WITH MY FAMILY, EXTENDED FAMILY and how do you/ would you know when your wellbeing is increased by it?

• When you are able to help them out in any way and when they are there for you when you need them
• It makes your life full

• Knowing that we care and support each other

• This reinforces a connection to a traditional way of being
• This increases my wellbeing

• It’s a feeling of security

• Its mostly wonderful but sometimes its stressful because I feel like I’m on a different personal/spiritual journey to most of them
• Getting clean and sober has given me a different dynamic in the community

• Being close to my family and being able to see them and speak to them often
• I know that my wellbeing is increased because I am happy when I am around them

• Everything! Happiness of being together

• When you are in a comfortable, happy environment

• Being with my extended family is being alive, being something, human
• When love, peace, feeling is freely shared and channelled to everyone

• Being welcomed by relations when you go to another town
• The atmosphere with mob
• Going out with mob (means you are safer)
• Peace of mind
• Increased welcoming
• Atmosphere with mob
• Quality of life
• Remaining independent

• Love, support, hugs, food, gathering, laughter
• Content with myself
• I fit in society better because of the love of my family and friends

• The atmosphere of being with family
• Just being together

• This means that I am closely connected with my parents /siblings /adopted members /relatives /friends
• My wellbeing is increased by the feelings of closeness – one never seems to be alone because of the connectiveness of everyone
• This increases ones social and emotional wellbeing

Thus, being with my family, extended family is an important factor in wellbeing as it gives a sense of being welcomed, content, a feeling of closeness, connectedness, being comfortable, happy, laughter, fitting in society better because of their love, being able to help them out and then having them there when you need them. There is an atmosphere in just being together that gives an increased quality of life and “a connection to traditional way of being”. There is a greater peace of mind in their company. Being with family is mostly wonderful. “Everything! Happiness of being together”.

6.7.9 What is A BETTER PLACE TO LIVE and how do you/ would you know when your wellbeing is increased by it?

• Helps your peace of mind
• So long as it would help my friends and family

• Is knowing that you are safe within the environment
• That your children have the security that they need
• You feel more at ease

• Being in a place that compliments my living standards

• Being able to create an environment of security for my family
• This shows that I am a capable parent

• I was homeless and lived in the most horrible situations for my wellbeing

• I have been in a house for four years and my life changes in that time has all been to improve my wellbeing
• My wellbeing would be increased if I was in better housing

• Example: living a childhood in Redfern and Waterloo to the north coast of NSW to Coogee – from being a street kid to a beach lifestyle as an adult – being near the water increases my wellbeing

• Health – feeling comfortable

• For me it is a spiritual connection with no worries, no cares
• When I am at peace form deep within

• Having your own home
• Living in the community

• A regular place to sleep
• Having your own home
• Living in community with family and friends

• A better country
• Acknowledgement of land rights

• Security, to feel safe
• Trees and nature nearby
• Comfortable
• Nice neighbours
• THE LAND

• It depends on how one equates the past living conditions with today’s and ones acceptance of moving between the two time periods and from one area to another
• Sometimes we yearn for the “old” days and now it is an acceptance of where we are now

Thus, a better place to live is better housing and also a place that offers security and safety for children and family, a regular place to sleep, having a house, being comfortable, being more at ease. Several respondents have been or are “homeless” which “has horrible implications for (my) wellbeing”. A better place to live would “show that I am a capable parent” so it indicates responsibility and caring. It is also a spiritual connection, having peace “from deep within”. There is a yearning to be on one’s own country and an acknowledgement of land rights but there is also an understanding of needing to find wellbeing from “an acceptance of where we are now”. Wellbeing would also be increased by having trees and a natural environment (the beach) nearby and having “nice neighbours”, living in the community.
6.7.10 What is BETTER PHYSICAL FITNESS and how do you/ would you know when your wellbeing is increased by it?

- Your body is in good shape
- You feel good
- To be able to care for yourself and your family
- A certain standard of health, fitness to a normal level
- Healthy body, healthy mind and self-esteem
- I have been fit in the past and I know the difference
- My wellbeing would be increased with greater physical fitness and if I was healthier as I would have more energy
- An accident has left me with a chronic injury – I have some sense of normality but restricted, affecting my wellbeing
- Feeling healthy and happy
- Better physical fitness to me is an extension of mental fitness, emotional fitness and SPIRITUAL fitness
- Playing tennis and winning
- Being healthy and training
- Stable diet
- Regular exercise
- Self-motivation
- I have diabetes and have an ultimatum to get rid of weight
- Sugar and carbohydrates to be taken from diet
- Do not like being physically weak
- Physical fitness helps me to have a good attitude and outlook
- Better mobility – being able to walk, run, do household work, duties etc
- Being independent, not reliant on other people to physically assist you in your daily activities

Thus, better physical fitness is recognised as an important part of wellbeing that could be developed by many people in this group. This is related to an urban, restricted lifestyle where people feel very confined and not able to participate in the broader community activities and on low incomes that impact on nutrition. Some members have chronic health problems that cause a certain level of restrictions to physical mobility.
“Better physical fitness to me is an extension of mental fitness, emotional fitness and SPIRITUAL fitness”.

6.7.11 **What is KNOWING INTERFAMILY RELATIONS AND KINSHIP and how do you/ would you know when your wellbeing is increased by it?**

- This is a very important part of life
- It is very important to Aboriginal communities

- Kinship is about understanding how your family expands to different regions
- Wellbeing comes from knowing that everyone gets along well

- Knowing that you are part of an extended family gives a sense of pride
- The responsibility of representing your mother and father

- You just do, its knowing who your related to and what’s happened
- Its knowing your personal history

- Knowing who your people are is empowering and makes me feel proud

- Can be good and bad but it teaches you a lot about life

- You know your place and you belong!

- Knowing interfamily relations and kinship is a map, an anchor an existence
- When I see my mob everywhere I know that my wellbeing is increased

- My family is very close and connects with most families in our tribe and outside our tribe

- Knowing who your family is so that you are respected by family
- And so that social boundaries are not broken

- Being respected by your family
- Social behaviour/ boundaries not being impeded upon by family members

- Being able to relate to family in the appropriate manner:
  - Elders
  - Young people
  - How I should be touched by family members
  - Leads to contentment

- It is important to know who is related so that you do not form an intimate relationship with the wrong person - this can lead to shame, mental illness and suicide

- Knowing your identity
• Knowing who to relate to and interact with socially – without being ostracised by certain members of these groups
• One must find a happy medium to interact with them to not only satisfy them, but also to interact or walk away from any given situation, knowing one is psychologically/ emotionally / spiritually self satisfied

Thus, knowing interfamily relations and kinship are seen to be crucial to wellbeing for cultural reasons; it is “a map, an anchor an existence”. This knowledge allows for marriage and sexual relations with the right people in kinship terms so that one does not “form an intimate relationship with the wrong person - this can lead to shame, mental illness and suicide”. It is important to know other social boundaries as well, to have the right protocols and relationships within your kin and with other groups, to “find a happy medium to interact with them to not only satisfy them, but also to interact or walk away from any given situation, knowing one is psychologically/ emotionally / spiritually self satisfied”. In this there is a responsibility, that you are representing your mother and father and also the extended family and that “wellbeing comes from knowing that everyone gets along well”.

Overall, these explanations of the factors that improve Indigenous wellbeing amongst the focus group are testimony to the continuation of Indigenous culture in this very urbanised group of Indigenous men and women, and the importance of tangible and intangible cultural heritage in their wellbeing.

7. SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Aboriginal wellbeing and government policy

The need for an understanding and agreement about what constitutes Indigenous wellbeing in government interaction with Indigenous people emerges as a stark reality in the findings of this research. That this concept is missing totally from the major Aboriginal education policy programs, for example, is deserving of some deep consideration. Important too is that when it is included in policy, it is a nebulous, indeterminate and hard to grasp concept. As it is, it is too easily imbued with various understandings according to the individuals or groups involved at the time and even because of the government policy context in which it is raised.

There is a real danger that Aboriginal understandings of this term can be lost in the imperatives of government policy and program development and even in the inequities of communication, including Indigenous language loss. The proclivity of governments to deal with Indigenous “gate keepers” in meetings rather than rely on more hard-nosed

research can also be a factor in obscuring Indigenous peoples and communities communication of the factors that contribute to their own wellbeing.

The development of better understandings of how Indigenous people perceive their own wellbeing has enormous implications for the development of successful government policy. That employment and private home ownership are the priorities of the current Commonwealth government, when they register low on the scale of factors impacting on wellbeing for an urban Indigenous group, is perhaps a warning that such policies are not likely to bring about the changes in Indigenous wellbeing that are hoped for.

Recognition of the need for governments to better understand Indigenous cultural heritage and Indigenous peoples’ aspirations out of this epistemological base, are often rare but not new. Ralph Folds, a school teacher, working with the Pintupi in Central Australia since 1988 has recognised what he calls a lack of connection, “crossed purposes”, between the government aims in policy and programs and the Pintupi’s understanding of why these initiatives exist. Further, the policy makers seem to have little understanding that while they are working to “help” these people change to achieve certain goals, the Pintupi are actually shaping their own lives in accordance with their own cultural basis and understanding of what constitutes a “good life”. The Pintupi hold to the concept of “walytja” that means kin, obligatory reciprocal relationships, and is played out in the primacy of relationships over material goods. What Folds has documented about the crossed purposes of government policy and the Pintupi world view is mirrored, albeit in a different way, amongst the inner-city, urban dwelling Aboriginal people of the focus group.

**The persistence of Aboriginal cultural values in NSW and government policy**

I am reminded of Fold’s reporting of the persistence of cultural values amongst the Pintupi, when I recognise my own astonishment at the research findings from the focus group. It became clear that these people as a group are driven by some core values that are very different, even antithetical to the values of the modern western society in which they are located, even submerged or embedded, as a minority group. And their identity is at least in part shaped in opposition to what they see as the lesser western values of not being able to share, for example. I had a sense of these values existing, having known many of the group individually for some time, living and mixing with urban Aboriginal people for the last eight months or so, and subscribing to these values myself over my lifetime. However, these cultural values are not often articulated by individuals, they are just “lived” rather than be thought about or discussed; they are not often expressed in the concentrated and incontrovertible form that they appear in the focus group results.

Similar focus groups, developed in diverse settings with Indigenous people who live in other areas of the state, would yield further information about Indigenous wellbeing and its connection to cultural heritage. This was a small sample located in a unique inner city environment. Other communities, for example, those in other urban locations such

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112 Folds R Crossed Purposes: the Pintupi and Australia’s Indigenous policy University of NSW Press, Sydney, 2001
as the western suburbs of Sydney, the Central Coast, and a selection of large and small regional centres, on the coast and inland – such as Dubbo, Moree, Taree, Grafton, Nowra, Eden, Wilcannia, Bourke, Walgett, Wagga and/or Griffith – are worth exploring to be able to compare and contrast findings. This is important too, to test and document the diversity that exists in Aboriginal communities in this state that is recognised in NSW government policy. Such research would inform the development of appropriate initiatives to meet the needs of these communities.

Hopefully the focus group process can introduce the potential gains of survey research methods into Aboriginal consultations and negotiations. It is also important to refine the process of conducting the focus groups as the Redfern focus group was something of a trial. The methodology can be improved, as indicated in the report, beginning with the implementation of the feedback from the Redfern focus group in the second meeting.

There is no doubt that, if applied judiciously, Indigenous wellbeing is a concept that could hold the key to policy and program success. It is important to note that six of the seven priority areas for Aboriginal communities and government agencies in the NSW Two Ways Together Plan are mentioned by the Redfern focus group as important for their wellbeing. That is, when these priority areas have an Aboriginal cultural understanding articulated about them, they would be recognised as suitable areas to become engaged in. These include, (with the items raised by the Redfern focus group in the brackets following):

- health (physical fitness, mobility, diet),
- education (within Indigenous methodology, pedagogy and epistemology),
- justice (knowing your rights),
- families and young people (being with my extended family, caring and nurturing, taking responsibility as a parent),
- cultural heritage (cultural heritage factors are the most important for the Redfern focus groups' wellbeing, for example),
- housing and infrastructure (having safe, secure accommodation, close to nature).

The seventh priority area, economic development, did not figure highly in the focus group results. However greater economic independence could be reached through programs that concentrate on the other factors, such as cultural heritage, housing or health, and that are also designed to lead to economic development and/or independence.

Since cultural heritage and wellbeing are so closely interlinked, innovations around cultural heritage in NSW Aboriginal communities are perhaps the key to many different

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114 Some places in the developed world have offered economically disadvantaged groups the opportunity to build their own affordable housing, to be involved in the design, and work with an overseer to assist with on the job training; cultural heritage can bring about greater economic independence with the development of traditional skills, knowledge for teaching or tours etc; the adoption of a healthy lifestyle can lead to further skill development and possible employment.
developments for communities and individuals. Interest in cultural heritage can be translated into education programs for example. Education and training programs currently offer Aboriginal Studies as a way of learning about one’s history and culture and this operates as a basic survey course, without the opportunity to explore local, regional and family histories, for example, and to develop the skills for further research. In this I am of course referring to adult education. The focus in Aboriginal education initiatives is currently around children. Results of this survey show that Aboriginal people are most interested to learn from their elders. Education programs for Aboriginal adults are likely to produce real changes within the family, in terms of readiness and attitudes to the education process. The key to enabling the education of children is through educating the adults and changing attitudes to education in the home.

Further, the introduction of Aboriginal adults to Aboriginal cultural heritage education programs, including Aboriginal language studies, is likely to produce a new wave of Aboriginal innovation and change just has have occurred within the arts, dance, photography and art, in the past. However, more than this, since cultural heritage is so closely interlinked with wellbeing, the outcomes of such programs are likely to have positive impacts on all areas of Aboriginal life and interaction with the broader community.
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INDIGENOUS WELLBEING

You will not be identified individually in the responses to this survey

please circle your response below

I am: Male Female

Age: <20 20-30 30-40 40-50 >50

My family’s original community:

I identify as:

I have lived away from my original community for:

years months

I have lived in Sydney for:

years months
Please be sure to read the whole document before you answer any questions:

1. Given that you have adequate housing, health, food and clothing - how important are the following to your wellbeing? Rate the factors below from 1 – 20.

1.1 A better place to live
1.2 A better job
1.3 A better level of education
1.4 Acceptance in the white community
1.5 Acceptance in the black community
1.6 Spirituality
1.7 Better physical fitness
1.8 Living on land with community
1.9 Visiting land and special places
1.10 Knowing family history
1.11 Knowing interfamily relations and kinship
1.12 Being with my family, extended family
1.13 Being in the company of other Koori people
1.14 Being in the company of my friends, black or white
1.15 Knowing about and exercising my rights as an Aboriginal person
1.16 Being able to buy things I want
1.17 Being able to buy things I need
1.18 Being able to share with my family and friends
1.19 Being able to give to my family and friends
1.20 Knowing about my peoples' history and culture

2. Are there other factors that have been left out that may affect your wellbeing? Please give details below.
What is SPIRITUALITY and how do you/ would you know when your wellbeing is increased, by SPIRITUALITY?

_______________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________

What is KNOWING ABOUT YOUR PEOPLES’ HISTORY AND CULTURE and how do you/ would you know when your wellbeing is increased, by it??

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_______________________________________________________________________
What is BEING ABLE TO GIVE TO MY FAMILY AND FRIENDS and how do you/ would you know when your wellbeing is increased by it?

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What is KNOWING ABOUT AND EXERCISING MY RIGHTS AS AN INDIGENOUS PERSON and how do you/ would you know when your wellbeing is increased by it?

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What is KNOWING FAMILY HISTORY and how do you/ would you know when your wellbeing is increased by it?

What is BEING ABLE TO SHARE and how do you/ would you know when your wellbeing is increased by it?
What is A BETTER LEVEL OF EDUCATION and how do you/ would you know when your wellbeing is increased by it?

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What is BEING WITH MY FAMILY, EXTENDED FAMILY and how do you/ would you know when your wellbeing is increased by it?

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What is a Better Place to Live and how do you/would you know when your well-being is increased by it?

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What is Better Physical Fitness and how do you/would you know when your well-being is increased by it?

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What is KNOWING INTERFAMILY RELATIONS AND KINSHIP and how do you/ would you know when your wellbeing is increased by it?
QuickTime™ and a TIFF (LZW) decompressor are needed to see this picture.