

**'If it wasn't for CDEP': A case study of  
Worn Gundidj CDEP, Victoria.**

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## Foreword

In its Research Plan 2000, the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research (CAEPR) identified the Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) scheme as a key area for research. This focus was driven by two broad agendas. First, in CAEPR's negotiation of research priorities with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) late in 1999, ATSIC's then Economic Division highlighted the scheme as an important priority area. Not only is the scheme ATSIC's largest program, but it is also coming under increasing government scrutiny. This scrutiny is motivated in part by an emerging view that the scheme is predominantly about employment generation: that is, it is a labour market program. For example, the most recent definition of CDEP program objectives notes that it 'aims to provide employment opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to gain work experience in community managed activities'. Historically, since its establishment in 1977 and until the 1997 Spicer Review of the scheme, it has also been regarded as a flexible community development, income support, training, and enterprise development program. The scheme is also under some scrutiny by the Department of Finance and Administration which is assessing the efficacy of its associated administrative on-costs.

The McClure Committee's major review of the Australian welfare system, undertaken during 2000, was the second motivating factor. Because the CDEP scheme has a notional financial link with the welfare entitlements of participants, any McClure-based recommendations to reform welfare could have potential ramifications for the scheme. Furthermore, the McClure Committee's emphasis on the principle of mutual obligation for welfare recipients makes the CDEP scheme a potentially important precedent. While there are important differences between the CDEP scheme and the mainstream Work for the Dole Program, in most situations there are requirements that scheme participants work for their wages, and these are notionally linked to welfare entitlements. The CDEP scheme's 23-year history provides an important body of data for empirical research on how mutual obligation might operate in practice.

CAEPR staff undertook a great deal of research on the CDEP scheme in 2000, much of which was reported at the three-day conference 'The Indigenous Welfare Economy and the CDEP Scheme' convened at the Australian National University in early November 2000. The detailed proceedings of that conference are to be separately published in 2001. CAEPR researchers also undertook three detailed case studies dealing with the operation of the CDEP scheme in three very different contexts. These were:

- A case study undertaken by Matthew Gray and Elaine Thacker in the Port Augusta region on the Bungala CDEP organisation, reported in CAEPR Discussion Paper No. 208;
- A case study by Jon Altman and Victoria Johnson undertaken in the Maningrida region, central Arnhem Land on the Bawinanga Aboriginal Corporation (BAC) CDEP and reported in Discussion Paper No. 209; and

- A case study undertaken by Ray Madden in urban western Victoria on the operations of the Worn Gundidj CDEP organisation, reported in this Discussion Paper (No. 210).

Each of these three case studies required careful negotiations to ensure a high level of collaboration with participating CDEP organisations and an appropriate level of transparency and independence in the reporting of the research findings. To varying extents, all three differ from the standard CAEPR Discussion Paper because they address two distinct audiences: the CDEP organisations that are the subjects of the research and a wider constituency that includes other CDEP community organisations, government agencies, policy makers, and academics. Consequently, each paper reads in part like a consultancy report and in part like an academic applied research report. In all three case studies though, the authors have attempted to go beyond the specifics to more general issues for Indigenous affairs policy, while also being conscious of the enormous variation in the particular circumstances of the nearly 300 CDEP schemes Australia-wide. Indeed some of this diversity is represented in these three case studies and it is suggested that CAEPR Discussion Papers 208–10 be regarded, and read, as a set.

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### **Abbreviations and acronyms**

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ABSTUDY	Aboriginal Study Assistance Scheme
ANU	The Australian National University
ATSIC	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission
CAEPR	Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research
CDEP	Community Development Employment Project(s)
CPS	CDEP Participant Supplement
CRN	Customer reference number
TAFE	Technical and Further Education

### **Summary**

The Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) is a scheme where working-age Indigenous people forgo their welfare payments to take up employment in their local Aboriginal community organisation. The variations on this basic outline are many, ranging from the provision of full-time work fulfilling private contracts, to CDEP as an income support mechanism where participants receive the same remuneration as they would on welfare. Often these poles of CDEP participation are to be found within the one community organisation.

This case study discusses a corporate or regional CDEP scheme called Worn Gundidj. The scheme is located in Warrnambool, a rural city with a population of 28,000 people. Warrnambool has a rich agricultural hinterland and services a wide area of south-west Victoria through its light industry, retail outlets, government services, and educational facilities. Worn Gundidj has rapidly, and successfully, expanded over the last four years from a single-location CDEP scheme working out of rented premises to a corporate, multi-site CDEP scheme with its own large, well equipped central office and workshops. Worn Gundidj now also has a set of five attached 'satellite' schemes.

In the same period there has been a general decline in funding to other Aboriginal service delivery co-operatives in the region. Worn Gundidj has become an organisational hub in south-west Victoria, linking with Aboriginal service delivery co-operatives and providing them with administration staff on CDEP wages. Indeed, across Victoria, CDEP schemes are integrating with training providers and other Aboriginal service delivery co-operatives. This has ensured the survival of co-operatives that might very well have closed if it were not for the expansion of CDEP.

Worn Gundidj's central office has also become strongly linked to Technical and Further Education (TAFE) accredited trade and craft courses, and is in part

reliant on ABSTUDY as a form of top-up money for participants who undertake these courses. The overall picture shows a complex set of organisational and funding interdependencies being developed over south-west Victoria.

The work programs undertaken by Worn Gundidj include three horticultural programs which offer opportunities for participants to undertake a TAFE-accredited horticulture course (Level II) or a horticulture apprenticeship. There is also a carpentry program that takes on private contracts, and maintenance around Worn Gundidj. This program offers participants either a place to undertake a carpentry apprenticeship, or basic training in building skills. Worn Gundidj has a textiles program and this stream of work can, like the horticulture, be combined with TAFE study in an accredited textiles and screenprinting course. The final Worn Gundidj work program is a garden maintenance program which offers rubbish collection, and gardening work in the local area.

Worn Gundidj's satellites are located throughout south-west Victoria, and their relationship to the central office is important to understanding the overall picture. The satellites are pre-existing Aboriginal co-operatives or trusts which have used CDEP wages to fund their own administrative functions and maintenance work. There is flexibility of staff movement between the satellites, when the need arises, and the localised autonomy over the day-to-day work as exercised by the satellites is an advantageous structure. In this way Worn Gundidj and its satellites can accommodate the need for short bursts of intensive labour on some jobs, while maintaining pre-existing political and territorial boundaries.

The participant interviews conducted as part of the research for this paper give the impression that there were a variety of reasons that CDEP was considered important. These range from flexible work hours to the ability of some work programs to provide full-time work using 'top-up' money. For most participants, the most important aspect of Worn Gundidj was its role as a place where people could acquire new skills for the future (further work will need to be done to ascertain if the training being provided matches job opportunities in the area). The view that Worn Gundidj was an education and training facility (with access to ABSTUDY) as much as it was a work place, was the salient issue in the data collected through participant interviews.

The management and directors at Worn Gundidj, like the participants, see the organisation as a training and education institution, as well as a place of employment. The textiles work program is popular because participants can access ABSTUDY after coming into that work program, and gain a TAFE accredited certificate. What is true of the textiles is also true of the horticulture streams—the access to ABSTUDY dollars has made these programs very popular. In sum, CDEP in these three work programs is closely linked to third-party education and training providers, and is partly dependent on ABSTUDY dollars as a form of top up.

This paper concludes that a corporate CDEP scheme like Worn Gundidj, which has the ability to marshal resources, staff, and work opportunities over a region, is in an advantageous position compared to four years ago, when it was a stand-

alone, single-location operation. However, the regional and organisational interlinking has exposed Worn Gundidj to a set of funding interdependencies that make the scheme vulnerable to changes in policy in regard to such things as ABSTUDY, training, and definitions of CDEP work. Policy makers should recognise that the Aboriginal labour market landscape is now peopled by heterogeneous CDEP schemes with ‘socio-economic diversity’ undertaking various activities, from work to education, in pursuit of improved quality of life for CDEP participants.

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## **Introduction**

The Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) is a scheme where working-age Indigenous people forgo their welfare payments to take up employment in their local Aboriginal community organisation. The variations on this basic outline are many, ranging from the provision of full-time work fulfilling private contracts, to CDEP as a kind of income support mechanism where participants receive the same remuneration as they would on welfare. Often these poles of CDEP participation are to be found within the one community organisation. It is worth adding that most CDEP schemes have a policy of 'no work, no pay'. There are now around 34,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people working in approximately 270 community-based CDEP schemes around Australia (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) 2000: 22), and it has been estimated that up to 45,000 people have utilised or passed through the scheme. CDEP is ATSIC's biggest program, and has expanded to the point where few areas of Aboriginal Australia have not felt its influence in one way or another. Altman and Gray (2000: 19) have found (via the analysis of data from the 1996 census), that CDEP participation has a positive socio-economic impact for participants when compared with subsistence on welfare alone.

This paper focuses on Worn Gundidj CDEP scheme, which has moved, over the course of the last four years, from a stand-alone, single-location operation to a corporate, multi-site operation which services the region of south-west Victoria. The ensuing discussion details the organisational interrelationships between Worn Gundidj, TAFE, and Aboriginal service delivery co-operatives that have arisen as a consequence of this expansion. Expansion, or regionalisation, has meant that Worn Gundidj has to deal with a much more complex planning framework and a different political environment.

The Worn Gundidj expansion process has come at a time of diminished funding to other Aboriginal organisations in the region. As a result, some Aboriginal organisations, such as service-provider co-operatives, are becoming reliant on CDEP wages in order to maintain previous levels of staff and services. Furthermore, CDEP schemes are linked with training institutions in ways that make some aspects of the schemes dependent for their viability on training dollars.<sup>1</sup> These points taken together suggest a series of funding links between CDEP, TAFE accredited training, and Aboriginal service delivery organisations. Therefore, policy on CDEP needs to be aware of the potential impact of changes on this series of links.

## **Methodology**

The research for this paper was carried out over a two-week period in May 2000 at the Warrnambool-based section of Worn Gundidj's operations (the central office). Both participants and management were interviewed during this time, and the researcher also engaged in some participant observation by accompanying

one of Worn Gundidj's crews to work on a revegetation contract. The participants were each asked a series of 23 questions which were designed to gather background information on them, to elucidate their opinions on CDEP (in general, and in respect to their place in it), and to explore their attitudes to their interactions with Centrelink. Some of the questions to the participants were targeted towards their life histories. These questions sought evidence of change in quality of life since being recruited to CDEP. Other questions were targeted at what the participants would do to improve the scheme, and what they saw as its weaknesses.

In addition to the participants, management and supervisors at Worn Gundidj's central office were interviewed at length. These interviews were of an open-ended nature, and were designed to gather data on the structure of the organisation; business plans and strategies; the management of the administrative workload (a very important issue in CDEPs everywhere); the training and skills acquisition plans of the organisation; and administrative relations with the local Centrelink office. The management and participants of Worn Gundidj generously agreed to speak during work hours.

The Warrnambool office of Centrelink was visited and two Centrelink officers who were working closely with Worn Gundidj were interviewed, as was the local Aboriginal liaison officer. These interviews were short and informal and designed to quickly cross-check information already received from Worn Gundidj.

## **CDEP in Victoria**

When Sanders (1993) examined the distribution of CDEP schemes across the country, there were only two in Victoria, both based in Gippsland in the east of the State. Since that time the scheme has expanded rapidly, and now has over 750 participants involved in about 12 CDEP schemes across the State. The overall picture in Victoria appears to be one in which CDEP schemes are becoming involved in Aboriginal service delivery as well as engaging in Aboriginal labour market and training matters. CDEP schemes would appear to have meshed successfully with pre-existing Aboriginal organisations across the State, so that CDEP is a vital part of the landscape in Aboriginal Victoria.<sup>2</sup> The degree to which Aboriginal service delivery and CDEP are interdependent is a matter that will be addressed in the following discussion.

## **Worn Gundidj CDEP**

The Worn Gundidj CDEP scheme, which began in 1995, is located in Warrnambool, a rural city with a population of 28,000 people. Warrnambool has a rich agricultural hinterland and services a wide area of south-west Victoria with its light industry, retail outlets, government services, and educational facilities. Warrnambool has two Aboriginal co-operatives: Worn Gundidj (CDEP); and Gunditjmara Aboriginal co-operative (which is concerned with Aboriginal service delivery including cultural heritage). The Warrnambool Aboriginal community has

strong links to the Framlingham community located about 15 km to the north-east. Indeed the bulk of Warrnambool's Aboriginal population either came from Framlingham, or had ancestors who came from the Framlingham Aboriginal station.

Worn Gundidj is what is often referred to as a 'corporate' CDEP. It is corporate in the sense that it has a central office that services its own work programs in addition to a number of 'satellite' schemes. The central office is the grantee and has the responsibility for administering the scheme's wages, on-costs, and specialised software program ('CDEPManager'). With this program Worn Gundidj central office tracks the numbers of participants and their CDEP wages component, and monitors individuals' daily participation in the scheme, exits from the scheme, recruitment of new participants, and the eligibility status of participants for its operations and the operations of the satellites. This information is shared in whole or part with the local Centrelink office in order to guarantee the eligibility of participants to receive CDEP wages. CDEP workers must first be eligible clients of Centrelink in order to be admitted to CDEP work programs. Throughout this paper the central office and its operations will be referred to as 'Worn Gundidj' and the outlying operations as the 'satellites'.

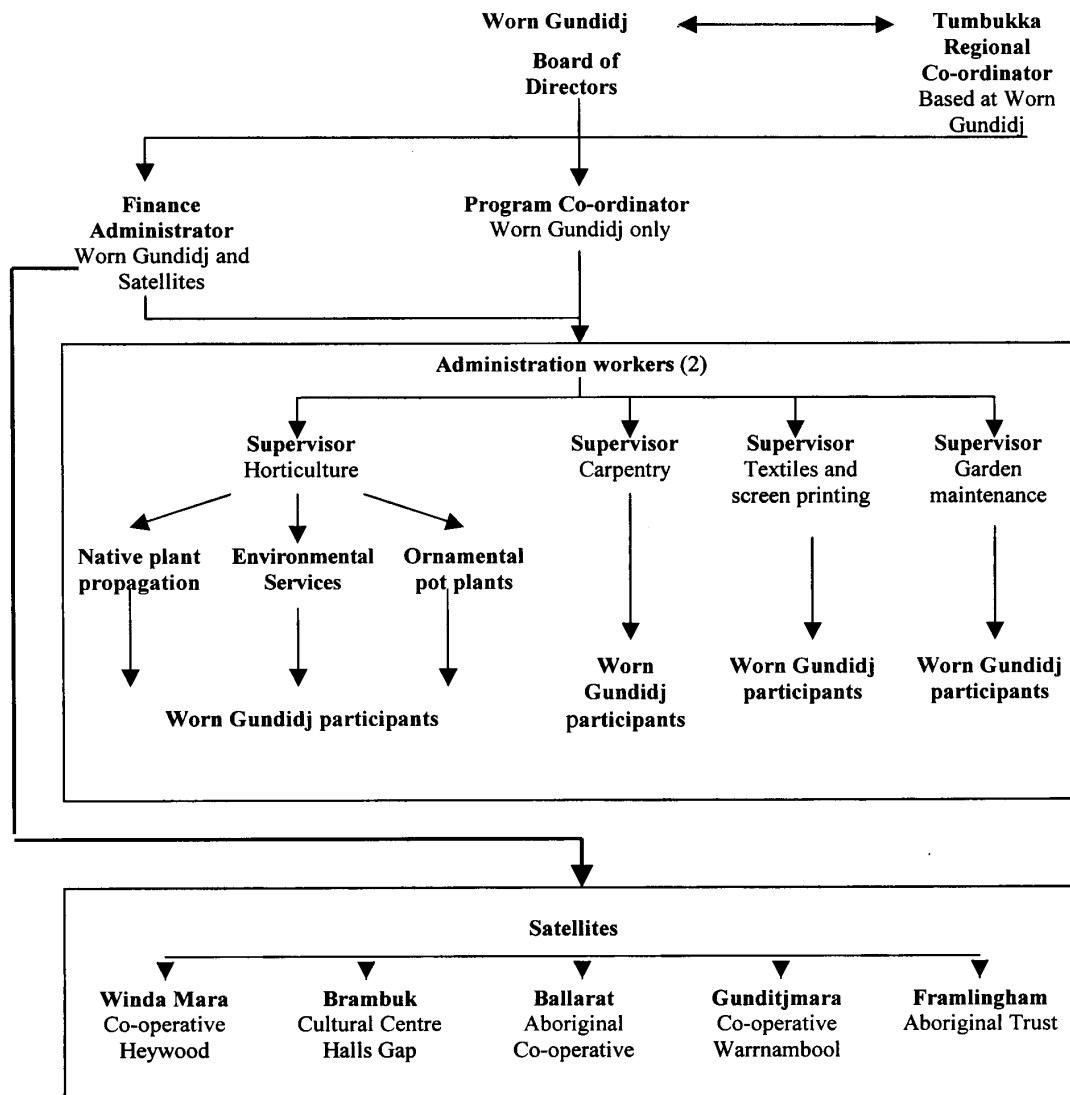
Worn Gundidj's area of responsibility falls into four Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 'Indigenous areas': Warrnambool (81701), Ballarat (81501), Western Central Highlands-Hopkins (81601), and Glenelg-Southern Grampians (81801). For the purposes of this paper these areas are referred collectively as 'south-west Victoria'.<sup>3</sup>

The unemployment rate for Indigenous people in south-west Victoria in 1996 was 26.8 per cent (see Table 1), over 2.5 times that of the non-Indigenous population.<sup>4</sup> Table 1 suggests, through the discrepancy between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal unemployment rates, that there was then a need for an Aboriginal-specific labour market program in south-west Victoria. At a State level the decade that led up to introduction of CDEP in Warrnambool was one of high unemployment for Indigenous people. Taylor and Roach (1994: 7) document an unemployment rate for Victorian Indigenous people of 24.0 per cent in 1986 and 27.4 per cent in 1991. Taylor (1998: 6) records an Aboriginal unemployment rate for Victoria of 21.2 per cent in 1996. While there has been improvement in the unemployment figures for Indigenous people in Victoria, the data nevertheless support the view that they, like Indigenous people in the rest of the country, are 'the most marginal group in Australian society' (Altman 2000: 11).

**Table 1. Unemployment in south-west Victoria, 1996**

	Male	Female	Average
Indigenous unemployment rate (%)	30.4	23.1	26.8
Non-Indigenous unemployment rate (%)	10.7	9.3	10.0

Source: 1996 Census.

**Fig. 1. Structure of Worn Gundidj corporate CDEP**

The researcher first visited Worn Gundidj in 1996 (pursuing an unrelated research project). At that time the scheme was operating in rented premises with a participant schedule of around 40 people. The jobs undertaken typically were, for the men, light industrial activities and labouring, in areas such as panel beating, building, gardening, and woodcutting. The women were primarily involved in craft work, for example screenprinting and dressmaking. The garments and materials produced in the craft section had a emphasis on Indigenous symbols and motifs, although materials were also being produced with mainstream designs. In summary, in 1996 Worn Gundidj CDEP scheme was fairly small, marginal in the sense of integration with local businesses, and

potentially susceptible to political shifts and machinations in the broader Aboriginal community. It was however peopled by an enthusiastic group of participants and managers and already showed signs of having made a positive difference to the quality of life of the participants.

Four years later, in 2000, changes in operating size, capital investment, and skills acquisition were obvious. Worn Gundidj had transformed from a single-location CDEP scheme working out of rented premises to an extended multi-site corporate CDEP scheme with its own large, well equipped central office and workshops, as well as a set of five attached 'satellite' schemes. Participant numbers were now regularly in the order of 110 people. Worn Gundidj had rapidly and successfully expanded. But what conditions does such expansion and success create in the organisation of a scheme like Worn Gundidj? This Discussion Paper reviews some of the conditions created by the regionalisation and corporatisation of this CDEP scheme and discusses how the links created in this way between CDEP organisations and other Aboriginal service organisations complicate the planning and policy framework for CDEP schemes.

The structure displayed in Fig. 1 represents the totality of Worn Gundidj's operations, as of November 2000. It is structured to have a board of directors and chair at its decision-making apex. It is also fortunate to have a regional CDEP co-ordinator based at its offices, who also sits as a board member. At the board level the scheme is dominated by Indigenous members. Yet at the executive level the picture is reversed. Two of eight executive positions of program co-ordinator, finance manager, administrative workers (including receptionists) and supervisors, are occupied by Indigenous people. Below the work supervisors come the participants: Worn Gundidj has around 110 participants on its schedule and of that total, between 45 and 50 are employed at any one time through Worn Gundidj's central office. The rest are employed through the satellites or in hosted positions elsewhere in the State.

### **The Worn Gundidj work programs**

The work programs undertaken by Worn Gundidj include three horticultural programs. The first is devoted to the germination of native trees. The second focuses on using the native trees and plants propagated on site to fill revegetation contracts—what Worn Gundidj calls 'Environmental Services'. The third concentrates on potted plants, both exotic and Indigenous ornamental species. These are used to fill contracts with supermarket and variety store outlets. These work programs offer opportunities for participants to undertake a TAFE-accredited horticulture course (Level II) or a horticulture apprenticeship. There are currently two participants undertaking horticulture apprenticeships at Worn Gundidj, and eight participants in accredited traineeships. The next work cell is a carpentry program which undertakes private contracts as well as maintenance around Worn Gundidj. This program offers participants either a place to engage in a carpentry apprenticeship, or basic training in building skills. The next section is a textiles work program and this stream of work can, as in the

horticulture programs, be combined with TAFE study. In this case it is an accredited textiles and screenprinting course, where participants can learn the basics of dyeing, printing, assembling, and designing for fabrics. This work program allows artistic skills and culturally relevant design to flourish in a work environment. Finally there is a garden maintenance program which offers rubbish collection, and gardening work in the local area.

## **The satellites**

The satellites (which were not visited during the fieldwork period) are located throughout south-west Victoria at Warrnambool, Heywood, Halls Gap, Framlingham, and Ballarat. Their relationship to the central office is important to an understanding of the overall picture of Worn Gundidj's operations. The satellites are pre-existing Aboriginal co-operatives or trusts which have used CDEP wages to fund their own administrative functions and maintenance work. However, when labour demands require it, these satellite co-operatives also send participants out onto work sites with Worn Gundidj participants.

A brief word on Victoria co-operatives is appropriate here. Across the State of Victoria there exists a regime of Aboriginal co-operatives dedicated to providing Aboriginal-specific services through health workers, drug and alcohol workers, housing programs, and cultural heritage officers. These co-operatives are funded by a mix of State government and ATSIC dollars, depending on the service in question. In recent years the co-operative system has experienced funding reductions and a rationalisation of such things, for example, as the number of cultural heritage officers and cultural heritage zones (in other words, fewer officers with bigger areas to look after). These funding reductions led to the loss of administrative positions in these co-operatives, not just in south-west Victoria, but across the State. The changes affected the ability of the co-operatives to deliver the services they are charged with providing. Some of these co-operatives went close to shutting their doors; indeed, some relied on volunteer administrators to keep operating.

The integration of a cluster of south-west Victorian Aboriginal co-operatives into the Worn Gundidj satellite system has meant that these co-operatives now rely on State, ATSIC and CDEP dollars in order to maintain previous levels of staff and services (the theme of organisational integration is revisited later in the paper).<sup>5</sup> It is also apparent that this meshing of CDEPs with other Aboriginal service delivery organisations is being repeated across the State of Victoria.<sup>6</sup>

The Worn Gundidj satellites remain, on a day-to-day working basis, independent of Worn Gundidj with respect to the tasks they undertake within their work programs. The satellites receive an on-cost component with their wages, and Worn Gundidj extracts an administration component from the overall on-costs and administration stream. This was originally worked out and negotiated at the local level between Worn Gundidj and the satellites, but now it is handled by ATSIC's State office. For example, one satellite with ten participants receives

\$18,000 per annum to administer those positions (this works out at around 20% of the wage costs). This degree of local autonomy, coupled with regional co-operation, suits both the satellites and Worn Gundidj, and accords with local political and cultural units of power and territoriality. But as all the satellites operate under the one grantee, they can provide staff for Worn Gundidj contracts without having the inconvenience of changing schemes, or notifying Centrelink. This has occurred recently with some revegetation contracts in Portland and Heywood, an hour's drive to the west of Warrnambool. In this case the contract was secured by Worn Gundidj from Warrnambool, but as it is in another mob's country, according to local reckoning of territory, they regularly use Portland or Heywood labour on these jobs. This is put forward as the culturally appropriate approach to dealing with contracts in the country of satellites. Thus labour pooling is another aspect of the relationship between the satellites and Worn Gundidj in addition to the administrative links discussed earlier.

Flexibility of staff movement between the satellites, when the need arises, and the localised autonomy over the day-to-day work as exercised by the satellites, leads to an advantageous structure. It can accommodate the economic reality of the need for short bursts of intensive labour on some jobs, while maintaining pre-existing political and territorial boundaries.

### **Worn Gundidj participants**

Eleven of the 45 to 50 participants based at Worn Gundidj's central office were interviewed. While this is not a large sample, by any means, it is enough to gain an understanding of participants' views on CDEP. Participants from all the Worn Gundidj work programs were spoken to, with the exception of the carpentry stream (these participants and their supervisor were most often on site at private jobs and could not be easily contacted). Worn Gundidj has participants that range from the 15–19 year age-group, to the 60–64 year age-group, and most age-groups in between. On figures from March 2000, around 71 per cent of Worn Gundidj's participants were male, and 29 per cent were female, but since the research for this paper was undertaken the women's craft group has expanded and these figures may no longer accurately reflect the gender mix in the scheme.

One of the most striking observations to come out of the interview process was that for a lot of the participants the CDEP experience involves juggling contradictions they perceive in the scheme. One major conundrum is that participants are counted as employed, as far as Government statistics are concerned, yet they must be clients of Centrelink, that is to say, recipients of income support, in order to participate in the scheme. Are participants employees or welfare recipients? A Worn Gundidj participant who worked in one of the income-generating streams (and as such received weekly top-up money) clearly expressed a sense of ambivalence towards the scheme and its relationship with Centrelink. He told me that if it was not for CDEP and its regular income he would never have qualified for an ATSI loan to buy a house. He also said that CDEP participation had fostered economic stability and had made an undeniably

positive change to his quality of life. Yet, he also said that the need to be a Centrelink client, when he regarded himself as an employed, self-sufficient person, was degrading: 'It's like being back under the Mission Manager!' Indeed most participants I spoke to expressed strong support for the CDEP, but were apprehensive of the new changes that were recently introduced. Some of the changes to CDEP's relation with Centrelink (precipitated by the \$20.00 per fortnight top up paid to provide equity with the mainstream work-for-the-dole program) were seen as bureaucratic attempts to place participants under 'surveillance'. It would appear that participants at Worn Gundidj have always seen themselves as employees or trainees, not as welfare recipients.

Importantly, positive expressions about Worn Gundidj CDEP from the participants focused on its being able to offer training and facilities for people to obtain a trade certificate. The training initiatives delivered on-site (such as the textiles work program) were warmly received by participants and can be viewed as part of the process of 'Aboriginalisation of work' (Smith 1994, 1995). This approach can be extended in the Worn Gundidj setting to include the 'Aboriginalisation of training', where related Aboriginal groups whose members are well known to one another can receive training in a comfortable environment and pursue tasks in a way that accords with local cultural values.

The native revegetation contracts are seen by participants and management alike as important tasks for two main reasons—economic and cultural. These contracts are income-generating for Worn Gundidj, and they are put forward by management (and rightly so) as success stories. Indigenous participants also see these activities as important because they allow them to combine employment activity with community concerns about 'caring for country'. This is a happy marriage, in contrast to commonly occurring situations where cultural values collide with economic imperatives in CDEP settings.

The participants at Worn Gundidj were unequivocal in their opinion that the organisation should be a training provider as well as a workplace and labour market player. Participants almost uniformly said that 'if it wasn't for CDEP' they would not have paid work or training opportunities. They had little confidence in the Warrnambool region's private sector's ability, or willingness, to employ local Aboriginal people. CDEP in this situation was seen as the only avenue to obtaining work for the majority of the participant interviewees.

In summary, the participant interviews give the impression that there were a variety of reasons for which CDEP was considered important—from flexible work hours to the ability of some work programs to provide full-time work using top-up money. Most participants stressed the importance of Worn Gundidj as a place where people could acquire new skills for the future (further work will be necessary to ascertain if the training being provided matches job opportunities in the area). The view that Worn Gundidj was an education and training facility (with access to ABSTUDY) as much as it was a workplace, was the most salient issue in the data collected through participant interviews. Smith (1995), in discussing the Redfern CDEP, says that this scheme was more than just an

employment program, that it had broader social and cultural elements of community development. This is equally applicable to Worn Gundidj.

### **ABSTUDY, training, and CDEP**

The management and directors at Worn Gundidj, like the participants, see the organisation as a training and education institution, as well as a place of employment. The textiles work program is an interesting example of this approach. The participants work their allotted CDEP hours per week (17.5 hours) but in addition a textiles and screenprinting course is delivered by the local TAFE college on site at Worn Gundidj. This qualifies as a full-time course since it amounts to at least 14 hours per week, and as this is an accredited full-time course the participants are eligible for ABSTUDY. Although participants are not allowed to be in receipt of ABSTUDY when they begin on the CDEP scheme (they could not be classified as clients of Centrelink if they were receiving it), there is nothing to hinder in them applying for ABSTUDY once they have become employees of Worn Gundidj. In this manner Worn Gundidj can offer textiles participants both accredited training, and top-up money (in the form of ABSTUDY). Management at Worn Gundidj see this as a strong recruitment incentive, and it gives CDEP an edge over Centrelink income support, especially for those adult participants who could receive the same income on Centrelink income support as in CDEP. This training and top-up money 'cocktail' has made the textiles a vibrant hub of the organisation. The textiles work program, then, is in partly dependent upon ABSTUDY to make it an economically viable and attractive option for adult participants.

The other incentive offered by Worn Gundidj is accredited certificates in horticulture for those participants under the horticulture work programs. Training for these participants is delivered by Wimmera and Grampians Group Training (a member of the Group Training Australia) which is based in Horsham. What is true of the textiles program is also true of the horticulture streams at Worn Gundidj: access to ABSTUDY dollars has made these programs very popular for both social and economic reasons. Thus, CDEP in these three work programs is closely linked to third-party education and training providers, and is partly dependent upon ABSTUDY dollars as a form of top up.

### **Relations with Centrelink**

Recently, the CDEP scheme has gone through a major administrative change. As of 1 March 2000, all CDEPs now have data linkage with their local Centrelink office, and all CDEP participants have to be clients of Centrelink (with a customer reference number or CRN). Previously, CDEP schemes had operated independently of Centrelink. In order to ensure parity between CDEP and mainstream work-for-the-dole schemes, and to make CDEP participants eligible for a raft of concessions available to mainstream Centrelink clients, a \$20.00 per fortnight supplement (the CDEP Participant Supplement or CPS) was made

available to CDEP participants who obtained CRNs from Centrelink. The CPS was also payable retrospectively, to 1 March 1999, to those participants who had been on CDEP during that time. These payments come in two instalments known as 'retro one' (from March 1999 to September 1999) and 'retro two' (from September 1999 to March 2000).

The period of changeover created a potentially serious administrative burden for Worn Gundidj (as it did for all CDEPs): a potentiality that was realised because of communication problems between Centrelink and Worn Gundidj. As a result Worn Gundidj was not fully aware of its responsibilities in relation to the changes until three days before the final deadline. Worn Gundidj then contacted Centrelink and began to negotiate a solution. It was pointless by this stage to try to get all the CPS claim forms and eligibility forms together in the time left—it was simply impossible to sign all its participants up with Centrelink in that time. The solution was that one of Worn Gundidj's administrative staff was seconded to Centrelink for two weeks to work on collating all the paperwork required for the transition. This person worked with the Centrelink Aboriginal Liaison officer and travelled to the satellites, gathering all the paperwork, and bringing it back to the Warrnambool Centrelink office. This response to an administrative crisis was by all accounts very effective, and perhaps occasioned less waste of time and resources than if the changes had been managed over a longer time.

Having one of Worn Gundidj's employees inside Centrelink produced an important outcome. Worn Gundidj was able to build a good relationship with two of Centrelink's officers who were charged with looking after the CDEP clients. The people involved in completing the paperwork (from both Worn Gundidj and Centrelink) got, by default, an intensive course in managing data-sharing between a Centrelink office and a CDEP scheme. Worn Gundidj now refers all its Centrelink inquiries to these two officers, and this has resulted in more effective communication than would have been possible if they had been moved from one Centrelink officer to another. Also, Worn Gundidj is not dependent on the Centrelink Aboriginal Liaison officer, who is at times absent from the office engaged in tasks unrelated to CDEP. Having two office-based, well informed Centrelink staff to communicate with has meant that data-sharing between Centrelink and Worn Gundidj is now straightforward and relatively easy, after what must have been a tumultuous initial period. Relations between Worn Gundidj and Centrelink are now described as very good, on/off notices and eligibility forms have 48-hour turn-arounds, and the system is now working as a process of ongoing management of data-sharing rather than as crisis management.

## **Conclusion**

### **Regional interdependence and inter-organisational alliances**

In south-west Victoria it is apparent that Worn Gundidj CDEP has made links with other Aboriginal co-operatives. What we are seeing in the region is the

beginnings of a form of inter-community development under the auspices of the CDEP scheme. Worn Gundidj and south-west Victorian Aboriginal co-operatives are on the verge of a regional, multi-community approach to the management of a particular stream of development dollars: those ostensibly dedicated to Aboriginal labour market programs.<sup>7</sup> Interdependence is fostered through the use by the satellites of CDEP wages to run administration positions in Aboriginal co-operatives which have, on the face of it, a number of functions unrelated to CDEP. It would not be unreasonable to suggest that the operation of these co-operatives might be severely impaired, if not imperilled, by the loss of their administrative positions funded by CDEP.

Another important alliance is the one between ABSTUDY-supported TAFE courses and some of the work programs in Worn Gundidj. If the link between ABSTUDY and CDEP wages was ever to be broken by any form of prohibition on taking up ABSTUDY after being in receipt of CDEP wages, some of Worn Gundidj's core operations would be under threat (they would survive, but in a diminished form). As there appears to be a series of funding and function interdependencies in Aboriginal organisations across south-west Victoria then a threat to Worn Gundidj's operations may also pose a threat to the operations of Aboriginal service delivery co-operatives, and a number of Aboriginal specific training schemes. That is, Aboriginal organisation sets are interlocked in a regional funding framework. If any element of the framework were to be withdrawn, there could be serious ramifications for Aboriginal self-management.

Being enmeshed in a series of funding interdependencies means that Worn Gundidj has in effect created its own labour market within a pre-existing Aboriginal bureaucracy (i.e. the Victorian Aboriginal co-operative system, which was, before the advent of CDEP, the major employer of Aboriginal people in the region). One is left to wonder what would have happened to the Victorian Aboriginal co-operative system if CDEP had not come along when it did. The relationship between CDEP and Aboriginal co-operatives also raises the question: would CDEP in south-west Victoria have been able to expand to the regional force that it now is if it were not for the reduction in funding to the Aboriginal service delivery co-operatives? This Discussion Paper does not seek to answer these questions, but thinking along these lines demonstrates that the success of CDEP in south-west Victoria is based upon it being able to respond to changes in Aboriginal-specific funding on a regional level. Worn Gundidj CDEP, by being able to interlink with, indeed become involved in symbiotic relationships with, other organisations, has survived in the increasingly difficult arena of employment creation and training delivery.

The popularity of Worn Gundidj CDEP scheme, from the point of view of the participants, stems from its being able to deliver training and education opportunities as well as employment. This places pressure on Worn Gundidj to be all things to all people. It has to be recognised that part of CDEP's success has been its flexibility in the way it structures work and associated activities within the various affiliated community organisations. This flexibility, however, leads Worn Gundidj into sets of organisational interdependencies which complicate the

planning and funding framework. CDEP policy will need to accurately reflect the intricacies of what is taking place on the ground in CDEPs such as Worn Gundidj if they are to prosper and expand in the future.

### **Policy implications**

There are several policy implications emanating from CDEP schemes' interconnections with other Aboriginal organisations at a regional level. The challenge for policy makers is to understand the extent to which a decision regarding one stream of funding for Aboriginal development (e.g. training), may affect another (e.g. labour market outcomes). A change in the rules for ABSTUDY eligibility that precluded CDEP participants from being in receipt of ABSTUDY could have serious consequences for the operating size and viability of the Worn Gundidj enterprise. Because of the use of CDEP wages to fund administrative positions in other Aboriginal organisations in the region, any consequences of policy changes to CDEP would be felt across the region, above and beyond the constituency of CDEP participants. This is not to suggest that policy makers need to make extra-CDEP decisions, or to go beyond the scope of what they see as their charter in formulating policy for CDEP. Rather, they must recognise that the CDEP scheme is more than an employment program, and that it has impacts beyond the income and labour force participation of individuals (see Smith (1995) and Altman & Hunter (1996: 18) for further discussion of this view).

Furthermore, those who value CDEP need to be aware of its relationship to other Aboriginal endeavours, and must be prepared to have input into the construction of policy for such things as training and education. This would suggest we need to rethink the view that CDEP is simply a labour market program (Spicer 1997), and recognise what is obviously before us—heterogeneous CDEP schemes with 'socio-economic diversity' (Smith 1996: 16), undertaking manifold activities, from work to education, in pursuit of improved quality of life for CDEP participants. The policy picture is complex indeed.

### **Notes**

1. 'Viable' in the sense that some work programs need to recruit a certain number of participants to be able to run training classes on site. The attraction of ABSTUDY as top-up money makes such work programs popular enough to attract the requisite number of participants. This might not be the case if ABSTUDY were not available for these programs.
2. This comment is based on what Victorian delegates to CAEPR's conference 'The Indigenous Welfare Economy and the CDEP Scheme' said during the conference, which was held at the Australian National University in Canberra, in November 2000.
3. See Altman and Gray (2000: 19n.) for an explanation of the origin and make up of the 'Indigenous areas'.
4. The 1996 Census figures for these four Indigenous areas only recognised three people as CDEP participants, when at that time there would have been at least 50 in the areas mentioned. See Gray and Auld (2000) for further discussion of this slippage.

5. Obviously, CDEP funding comes through ATSIC, but for present purposes this paper distinguishes between ATSIC's non-CDEP funding and its CDEP dollars.
6. See note 2.
7. This paper has not attempted to consider what the possible impacts of inter-organisational alliances across south-west Victoria would mean for other non-Aboriginal specific labour market programs such as the mainstream 'work-for-the-dole' scheme.

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