

**Decentralisation, population mobility
and the CDEP scheme in central
Cape York Peninsula**

B.R. Smith

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Benjamin Smith is an Australian Research Council Post-Doctoral Fellow at the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, The Australian National University and the School of Australian Environmental Studies, Griffith University.

Foreword

In November 2000 CAEPR, in conjunction with the Reshaping Australian Institutions project of the Australian National University's Research School of Social Sciences, organised a conference 'The Indigenous Welfare Economy and the CDEP Scheme: Autonomy, Dependence, Self Determination and Mutual Obligation'. The proceedings of the conference were published last year as CAEPR Research Monograph No. 20.

At the time of the conference, Benjamin Smith was in the process of writing up his doctoral thesis, based on an extended period of anthropological fieldwork in the Coen region central Cape York Peninsula, at the London School of Economics and Politics in the United Kingdom. Ben enthusiastically prepared a paper for the conference, but did not have the opportunity to visit Australia to participate in it.

Ben has now moved to Australia and has been located at CAEPR, since late July this year, as an Australian Research Council Post-Doctoral Fellow. When I became aware that he had a draft conference paper prepared, I encouraged him to recast it slightly and have it reviewed as a potential CAEPR Discussion Paper. I thought that this paper would make a valuable contribution to the literature for two main reasons. First, it focused on a region—central Cape York—that had received little coverage at the 2001 conference. Clearly, however, Cape York Indigenous policy issues are currently receiving considerable media coverage. Second, Ben's paper deals with a number of issues that are of vital interest both to the operations of the CDEP scheme and current policy debates. These issues include decentralisation, mobility, organisational governance, and the potentialities of the scheme to facilitate a transition to full-time employment in situations where mainstream labour market opportunities are extremely circumscribed.

At present, there is a growing policy view that the diversity of Indigenous circumstances may make the efficacy of the CDEP scheme in a one-scheme-fits-all manifestation difficult to sustain. This view has already seen some changes incorporated in the *Australians Working Together* policy package of last year that moved to differentiate situations with 'viable' labour markets from others mainly in regional and remote Australia. This paper addresses a number of important administrative and program management issues that might usefully inform any proposed changes to the CDEP scheme in remote regions such as central Cape York.

Professor Jon Altman
Director, CAEPR
October 2002

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Abbreviations and acronyms

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ANU	Australian National University
ATSIC	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission
CAEPR	Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research
CAT	Centre for Appropriate Technology
CD	collection district
CDEP	Community Development Employment Projects
CRAC	Coen Regional Aboriginal Corporation
DATSIP	Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy
DEETYA	Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs
DEWR	Department of Employment and Workplace Relations
DOGIT	Deed of Grant in Trust
HACC	Health and Community Care
HREOC	Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission
ILC	Indigenous Land Corporation
OATSIA	Office of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs

Summary

This paper presents a case study of the Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) scheme in the Coen region of Cape York Peninsula from January 1996 to May 1997, prior to implementation of the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) and Spicer Reports on CDEP. During this time the inter-relationship between contemporary patterns of population mobility, Aboriginal aspirations, and the CDEP scheme provided a foundation for local social and economic development.

Since 1993, the Coen Regional Aboriginal Corporation (CRAC) has run a CDEP scheme in the township of Coen and at a number of outstations across the region, which were serviced from the township. The local CDEP scheme has been a key factor in the establishment and development of these outstations and has facilitated the decentralisation associated with them. However, rather than marking a return to a 'traditional lifestyle', the region's outstation movement has been closely tied to local Aboriginal aspirations for development and a more productive engagement with the contemporary 'hybrid' economy.

At the time of the case study, although the local CDEP scheme had facilitated regional decentralisation and aided the resumption of high levels of Aboriginal population mobility (which previously characterised both 'pre-contact' and colonial Aboriginal lifestyles before a period of sedentarisation associated with the

granting of award wages and the resulting decline of Aboriginal employment in the region's pastoral industry), CDEP's relationship to contemporary patterns of population mobility was ambiguous. The development of outstations, access to vehicles and the CDEP scheme supported 'circular' mobility within the administrative region. However CRAC's administrators and the implementation of the local CDEP scheme acted to restrict other forms of population mobility, particularly mobility between administrative regions on Cape York Peninsula.

Whilst CRAC successfully designed employment projects to cope with seasonal shifts in the location of the region's Aboriginal population in the period with which this study is concerned, it followed earlier forms of colonial administration in viewing forms of mobility incompatible with the regulation of work programs as undesirable. By implementing a 'no work, no pay' policy and only limited flexibility where CDEP participants moved inter-regionally, the corporation sought to exclude 'undesirable' workers and encourage productivity among those who remained on the scheme. This inclination of CRAC's administrators was apparent in their design of a traineeship scheme which sought to shift CDEP workers from outstations, where work was not seen as properly supervised and regulated, to white-run pastoral leases.

It is suggested that, despite its successes, the administration of the CDEP scheme in the Coen region in 1996 and 1997 often tended towards 'welfare colonialism'. It met with resistance from younger participants and suspicion from more senior Aboriginal people in its limited successes in producing meaningful employment opportunities, in supporting local Aboriginal aspirations and in creating a more motivated and skilled younger population which might better meet the challenges facing the region's Aboriginal people. The concurrent successes of CDEP administration in the Coen region during this period lay in:

- the provision of foundations for greater self-determination and appropriate governance structures;
- having non-Aboriginal administrators aware of and responsive to the particularities of the social and cultural context of CDEP schemes;
- possessing the flexibility to deal with regional population mobility and attempting, albeit with limited success, to produce projects that met the development needs of the regional economy, that is the need for improved human capital among the local Aboriginal population; and
- the requirement that these be founded in socially and economically sustainable projects which could retain the support of Aboriginal participants.

Acknowledgments

The fieldwork on which the paper is based took place mostly in and around Coen, Far North Queensland between 1996 and 1997, and was supported by a Study Abroad Studentship from the Leverhulme Trust, a Research Grant from the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, the Emslie

Horniman Fund of the Royal Anthropological Institute and the University of London Research Fund. I have also drawn from further applied and academic research in the central Cape York Region over the past three years, including work undertaken on behalf of the Cape York Land Council and Balkanu Cape York Aboriginal Development Corporation. The production of the final version of the paper was undertaken as part of an ARC Postdoctoral Fellowship on 'Aboriginal Outcomes from Land Claims, Transfers and Purchases in Central Cape York Peninsula'.

I am grateful to Jon Altman, Maria Kaustrater, Will Sanders, John Taylor and Shu Yang for their comments. As ever, my greatest debt is to the Aboriginal people of the Coen region for their willingness to share their knowledge with me and their patience with my more than occasional lack of understanding. In particular, Phillip Port, Sunlight Bassani and Vera Claudie have helped me to come to grips with this paper's subject matter and the Board of Directors of the Coen Regional Aboriginal Corporation has continued to support my research. The paper also draws on conversations and interviews with Caroline MacDonald, Annalies Voorthius and Chris Bradley at the Coen Regional Aboriginal Corporation. Responsibility for what is written here rests with myself. Finally, thanks to Hilary Bek and Wendy Forster for editorial and layout assistance.

Introduction

The mobility of the Aboriginal people of the Coen region of Cape York Peninsula has been inseparable from their history. From pre-colonial semi-nomadism, through the impacts of white settlement and incorporation into the pastoral industry to the present emergence of a post-colonial era, population mobility and its constraint have been fundamental aspects of Indigenous lives. This paper presents a case study of the Coen region, where the inter-relationship between contemporary patterns of mobility, Aboriginal aspirations, and the Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) scheme have provided a basis for local social and economic development.

The township of Coen is situated in east-central Cape York Peninsula. Its associated population numbers approximately 300 people, of whom I estimate around 70% to be Aboriginal.¹ Initially established as a mining town, it rapidly became the service centre for the region's pastoral and mining industry and the location of a centralised reserve of an Aboriginal population from which labour was drawn by surrounding cattle stations. With the decline of pastoral employment at the beginning of the 1970s this Aboriginal population became predominantly centralised and sedentarised in the township. In this period Aboriginal people experienced the rapid development of social problems associated with removal from country, lack of control over their own lives and endemic boredom combined with increased access to social security payments and alcohol.

In the 1990s national and regional developments, notably in the areas of land rights and policies of self-management and self-determination (see Brennan 1992; Holden 1992; McKeown 1992) led to the emergence of a series of local Aboriginal corporations. For Coen, which is a township rather than an 'Aboriginal community' per se,² these corporations were the first instance of an Aboriginal-controlled administrative and representative organisation in the town. Factional politics led to the existence of two competing corporations, a situation met with some concern by extra-local Aboriginal organisations. This situation was brought to a head when these corporations sought to establish a CDEP scheme in the township. The newly formed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) insisted that they would only support a local CDEP scheme if a single local Corporation was formed to administrate it. As a result of this insistence, the Coen Regional Aboriginal Corporation (CRAC) was incorporated on 8 February 1993 to represent all Aboriginal people living in Coen and with traditional territories in the township's hinterland (CRAC 1993: 23; Jolly 1997: 256).

This paper presents a case study of the CDEP scheme in the Coen region from January 1996 to May 1997, prior to implementation of the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) and Spicer Reports on CDEP (see Sanders 2001a). The paper outlines the successes and limitations of CRAC's CDEP scheme in supporting the development of the region's 'outstation movement' and the associated Aboriginal development aspirations which underlay CRAC's incorporation and dealing with the continuing mobility of the region's

Aboriginal population. The local CDEP scheme has been a key factor in the establishment, use and development of the region's outstations and the aims of senior men and women to initiate a more productive engagement with the contemporary 'hybrid' economy. However the administration of the scheme during this period restricted other forms of population mobility, particularly mobility between administrative regions on Cape York Peninsula.

Although CRAC's administrators successfully designed employment projects to cope with seasonal shifts in the location of the region's Aboriginal population, they followed earlier colonial administrators in viewing forms of mobility incompatible with the regulation of work programs as undesirable. By implementing a 'no work, no pay' policy and only limited flexibility where CDEP participants moved inter-regionally, the corporation sought to exclude 'undesirable' workers and ensure their productivity of those who remained on the scheme. This inclination is made apparent in the design of a traineeship scheme, based partly on CDEP wages, which sought to shift CDEP workers from outstations, where work was not seen as properly supervised and regulated, to white-run pastoral leases.

By reviewing the impact of the Coen region's CDEP scheme on population mobility across and beyond the region and local Aboriginal responses to the scheme, this paper seeks to identify both strengths and weaknesses in the ways the Coen CDEP scheme has been administered. In particular the paper focuses on the ways in which it has disappointed senior Aboriginal people in its apparent reproduction of colonial structures, its failure to support Aboriginal aspirations for self-determination and meaningful and sustainable development, and its exclusion of many of those who might have benefited most from CDEP had the scheme been administered and supported differently.

CDEP in the Coen region

The CDEP scheme began operating in Coen in June 1993, far later than for other communities and townships on Cape York Peninsula (Sanders 1993: 8–9) due to Coen's 'non-community' status and competition between two previous corporations. Initially employing 47 participants, numbers grew rapidly to around 90. Those eligible to join the scheme were Aboriginal adults of working age, as well as non-Aboriginal partners. Participants worked for two days a week for the basic equivalent of unemployment benefit, except those with partners who choose not to participate. In this case the participating partner could work for four days, an option that was common in stable marriages, with husbands typically working four days a week and wives working at home or in non-CDEP positions. Bernardi (1997: 37, 42) notes such gender discrepancies in the administration of welfare schemes and whilst I would not be confident in suggesting that Aboriginal women (or men) saw the local administration of Coen's CDEP scheme as discriminatory, it certainly reflected 'community' and administrative expectations of the realm of waged labour as predominantly male.

From the outset it was apparent that Coen's Aboriginal population saw CRAC and the establishment of CDEP as the means to re-establish a day-to-day presence on their traditional lands. The first community development plan produced by CRAC emphasised that CDEP was to be established 'for the benefit of the Coen community and outstations' (CRAC 1993: 15). Within and beyond its administration of the local CDEP scheme, CRAC thus became a resource or 'umbrella' agency for the region's outstation movement, the re-incorporation of hinterland areas of territorial and cultural significance to Aboriginal people through the establishment and use of perennial or seasonal camps and settlements (see Commonwealth of Australia 1987; Davis and Arthur 1998; Smith forthcoming). The pattern of decentralisation in the Coen region became analogous to that elsewhere, with outstations serviced and administered from a larger population centre with which core outstation residents had strong social and residential ties.

Rather than being a return to a traditional lifestyle in a narrow sense, the region's outstation movement was seen by both administrators and many Aboriginal people as a means for Aboriginal people to establish a future for themselves based on their own land, but through a continuing engagement with the 'mainstream' Australian state and economy that encapsulated them. CRAC's first Chairman spoke of the importance of CDEP and CRAC for Aboriginal self-determination, combining incorporation within the monetary economy with the maintenance of other aspects of Aboriginal existence:

Well, by making a plan for the future ... getting the CDEP here ... to help the people get their land... and by doing that, you have to think a lot. By getting the things put up in the town, like the Cafe, the butchershop ... get it so money can work around ... it will come back. And also for something for the younger people, like the mechanical shop. And also, not forgetting the older people, like making woomera, basket ... but also for younger people. Already now, hardly younger people talk Language ... that's all gone (Phillip Port in CRAC 1993: 5).

The other members of CRAC's Aboriginal Board of Directors, which consisted of seven men and women each representing different 'tribal' groups based in the town, placed a similar emphasis on the need for training for younger people and stressed the need for providing local development. The current chairman of the corporation also noted the continuing importance of hunting and gathering in Aboriginal aspirations for self-sufficiency:

I like to see this place in ten years time ... we've got our own workshop ... we have our own garage, get our own petrol, diesel whatever and young fella's [sic] knowing how and what to do. And its all run by black people. People can go out and do their own fishing and be self sufficient. Having their own shop ... making money for the community and for ourselves too (Allan Creek, in CRAC 1993: 5).

Allan Creek's vision is notable not only for its combination of a monetary economy, CDEP and more 'customary' economic modes, an Indigenous view of what Altman (2001a: 4–5) has referred to as the 'hybrid' economy which now characterises remote Aboriginal contexts, but for its underlying stress on the continuing importance of mobility, emphasising garages, petrol and diesel, all

aspects of the region's vehicular culture. Working in the region for the past seven years, it has become obvious to me that Aboriginal understandings of development, alongside most aspects of Aboriginal life, remain fundamentally linked to continuing population mobility.

Mobility and decentralisation in the Coen region

Despite its fundamental and continuing importance in Aboriginal life, population mobility has received surprisingly little attention from anthropologists and others working with Indigenous people. There are some important exceptions, particularly in terms of policy relevance (e.g. Taylor 1992a, 1998; Taylor and Bell. 1994; Young 1990; Young and Doohan 1989), and some anthropological exceptions (e.g. Beckett 1965; Birdsall 1988; Hamilton 1987; Peterson 1999; Smith, forthcoming).

Taylor and Bell (1994: 2–3) have outlined four key perspectives in mobility analysis: overall propensities to move, the spatial outcomes of population movement, the linking of places or 'localities' and regions by mobility, and the experience of individual movers. Taylor likewise notes the interplay of cultural, social and economic 'push and pull factors' in determining Aboriginal mobility and a considerable spatial range of movement from inter-household shifts within the same locality to long-range intra-regional movement. Across this range, Taylor notes 'the existence of mobility regions' (Taylor 1998: 127, following Young 1990), structured regions of mobility, 'defined spatially by a mix of social and economic factors'. Lastly, Taylor has emphasised the sociocultural difference of Indigenous demography to European Australian norms, notably 'the residence pattern of many Indigenous people [which] is best described as bi-local or even multi-local' (Taylor 1998: 134, citing Young and Doohan 1989). All of these are of relevance to the administration of CDEP schemes and, conversely, to the impact of such schemes on Aboriginal populations. As Taylor and Bell (1994: 23) note,

mobility among Indigenous Australians displays cultural attributes which may limit or significantly affect the range of effective policy options. At the same time, population movement may itself be influenced by policy interventions.

The prevalence of short-term mobility patterns in Indigenous population movements has a substantial impact on the delivery of services to remote Aboriginal populations across northern and central Australia. The impact of this mobility is exacerbated by the lack of comprehensive knowledge 'about the scale, direction and pattern of such mobility, or about the characteristics of those involved'. The resulting need 'for information indicating the volume, pattern and duration of short-term population movements' (Taylor 1998: 125–6) remains apparent. Increased participation in the CDEP scheme is likely to have dampened migration rates in remote and rural areas as indicated by census-based fixed period measures (Taylor and Bell 1994: 23, after Taylor 1992b). The development of outstations, for which CDEP has provided an important foundation in the Coen region, is marked by the maintenance or increase in bi- and multi-locational

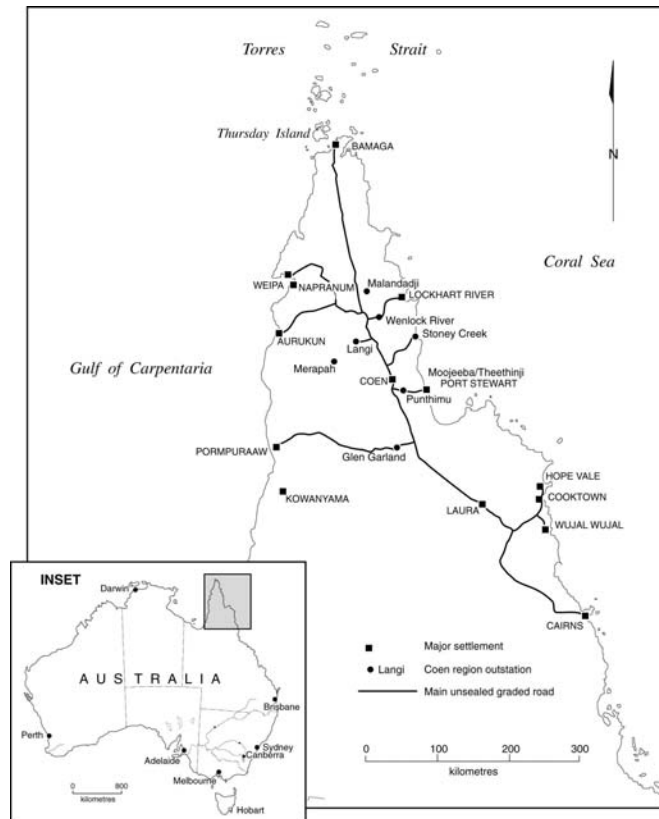
‘circular’ mobility. Occurring mostly within census collection districts (CDs), changes in such mobility is more difficult to gauge.

My own work (Smith 2000; Smith forthcoming) in remote rural Cape York Peninsula has attempted to provide a case-study based longitudinal perspective on Aboriginal mobility which might enable policy makers to distribute resources more efficiently and appropriately and to gauge the impact of resourcing policies on Indigenous people. In particular, my work has focused on contemporary patterns of circular mobility associated with Aboriginal decentralisation and a relatively recent outstation movement. There is evidence that many people in the region had long harboured hopes of establishing outstations or controlling cattle properties as Aboriginal people elsewhere had already succeeded in doing. As well as the antagonism of the State Government, problems of local factionalism, a climate of local racism and the absence of a Community Council and ‘Aboriginal land’ had limited these local aspirations. Despite this, individual families had continued to visit their land where possible.

The major step towards people returning to live and work on their own country came with the successful pursuit of title to surrounding country under State and Federal legislation and the establishment of local and regional representative organisations. Outstation development was particularly associated with CRAC and its administration of the local CDEP scheme, whilst the regaining of control and ownership of traditional land had mostly occurred through the Cape York Land Council. During the main fieldwork period there were nine established outstations in use (see Fig. 1), the majority of which were established or had their main infrastructure greatly developed through involvement with CRAC in 1993 or thereafter. Only one of these outstations was not part of the CRAC ‘umbrella’ during the fieldwork period, and was administered by the now defunct Aurukun Community Incorporated. However, the core families associated with this outstation were based in Coen and it is included in this study. It has since also become administered by CRAC.

Outstation use in the Coen region is marked by frequent, intense patterns of mobility (see Smith 2000; Smith forthcoming). Movement between outstations and the town is usually by four-wheel drive vehicles, which are typically controlled by men (and occasionally women) key to the establishment and use of outstations. Facilitation of outstation access for their extended family and relations and access to the town from outstations is key to these men and women maintaining their social position. As a consequence they demonstrate extraordinarily high frequencies of mobility, focused on movement between Coen and their outstation, but also incorporating other Aboriginal settlements on the Peninsula, as illustrated in Fig. 1.

Fig. 1. Map of Coen region outstations



In 1996 and 1997, Aboriginal dry-season mobility levels between places in the Coen region were generally high, particularly between Coen and its outstations. Most people using outstations (the majority of the adult population) spent no more than a week or two there at a time and periods of town residence were typically not much longer. In the wet season, when access to outstations was more limited and several were not used, the level of town residency was greater, although those who did visit outstations tended to stay there for longer periods. The differences in residency patterns between the two seasons can be seen in Tables 1 and 2, which compare the mobility and residence patterns of Aboriginal people at Port Stewart, a large coastal outstation complex in the region, during the period of study.

The area under discussion—defined by a township (Coen) and a series of associated outstations—was recognisable as a ‘mobility region’ (Taylor 1998; Young 1990). Its existence as such highlighted the relationship between contemporary Aboriginal lifestyles and administration, as it was broadly definable by the extent of administrative involvement of CRAC (although this, in turn, arose from the traditional connections of Coen families to the township’s hinterland).

Rather than being a 'footprint' covering the country of the region, the predominant involvement of Coen people across this area remained 'nodal', being focused on a series of centres, in particular the township of Coen and its outstations (see Peterson 2000 for a somewhat analogous situation in central Australia). Whilst there was some mobility outside of this region (and into the bush areas around outstations), the majority of movement between places remained within the Coen region, and was predominantly circular mobility between outstations and Coen. There was thus a strong centripetal tendency at the regional level, compounded or reproduced through administrative involvement, which created a degree of regional enclosure.

Table 1. Mobility of a 'focal man' from Langi outstation (July 1996)

Date	Mobility
8th July	Drives from Coen to Langi outstation.
9th July	Drives to Coen, then drives to Lilly Vale Cattle Station (to take his older sister's son for work), then drives back to Coen, then drives to Langi outstation.
10th July	Drives to Coen, drives to Lockhart River (to pick up wife's son and another young man), drives back to Coen.
11th July	Drives to Langi outstation.
14th July	Drives to Coen.
15th July	Drives to Aurukun (to pick up older brother and older brother's wife).
16th July	Drives to Langi outstation.
17th July	Drives to Coen, drives back to Langi outstation.
19th July	Drives to Coen.
23rd July	Drives to Langi outstation.
28th July	Drives to Coen.
29th July	Drives to Aurukun (to take back older brother and older brother's wife), drives back to Coen.
30th July	Drives to Langi outstation.

Mobility between Coen and other Aboriginal settlements with which Coen families had strong kinship-based connections (notably Lockhart River, but also including Laura, Pormpuraaw, Aurukun and Bamaga) was often circular, but occasionally more open-ended. This was particularly the case for younger people, who matched Sutton's (1978) description of 'floaters', 'short-term residents ... who move frequently between residential groupings' (Martin and Taylor 1996: 24). Although Martin and Taylor's description (following Sutton) refers to mobility within the township of Aurukun, it was clear that similar mobility patterns were apparent among younger people both within the Coen region, and to and from settlements across the Peninsula.

Table 2. Dry season mobility patterns, 1996–97

	Moojeeba	Theethinji	Wenlock River	Langi
At the outstation all week	11%	17%	5%	8%
At outstation some of week, moved (between Coen and outstation) once	26%	18%	17%	18%
At outstation some of week, moved (between Coen and outstation) twice or more	23%	12%	27%	21%
In Coen all week	13%	30%	17%	22%
Moved in Coen region, but not to or from own group's outstation	18%	18%	25%	22%
Outside of Coen region all week	9%	5%	9%	9%

Table 3. Wet season mobility patterns, 1996–97

	Moojeeba	Theethinji	Wenlock River	Langi
At the outstation all week	16%	21%	0%	0%
At outstation some of week, moved (between Coen and outstation) once	22%	13%	3%	0%
At outstation some of week, moved (between Coen and outstation) twice or more	14%	3%	8%	0%
In Coen all week	34%	51%	46%	43%
Moved in Coen region, but not to or from own group's outstation	10%	12%	35%	40%
Outside of Coen region all week	4%	0%	8%	17%

It is clear that mobility regions may be structured by economic as well as social factors (Taylor 1998). Contemporary mobility regions might be partly shaped by local CDEP schemes, just as distribution of the population in pre-contact Aboriginal society was structured by seasonal availability of resources and constraints on mobility (Altman 1987; Chase and Sutton 1987). In fact, the Coen data suggests that CDEP played a particularly important role in shaping the mobility of the Aboriginal population. Conversely, Aboriginal mobility remained a key concern for the CRAC administrators.

CDEP as a facilitator of mobility

CDEP played an important role in facilitating decentralisation in the Coen region. Two factors in particular led to the generation of higher rates of population mobility following the scheme's implementation in the early 1990s. The first of these was the role of CDEP and CRAC (the local CDEP administration body) in the establishment and development of regional outstation infrastructure, the second was the provision of wages for employment and training at outstations through CDEP projects.

Most of CRAC's funding was (and remains) CDEP and outstation-based. In the mid-1990s, CRAC used these funds to support the development of infrastructure and work programs at outstations and to supply vehicles for several outstation groups through yearly contracts with QFleet, a vehicle pool run as a commercial business unit of the Queensland Government's Department of Public Works. The provision of infrastructure allowed and encouraged greater outstation use, for longer periods, by a wider segment of the population, than would otherwise have been the case due to both practical considerations (most local Aboriginal people preferred living in a house to living in a tent),³ and ideological and emotional factors (e.g. a sense of permanent residence and the symbolic importance of regaining control of traditional land) (see Port Stewart Lamalama and Centre for Appropriate Technology (CAT) 1997). It is perhaps of note that during my main period of fieldwork, Coen's outstations were far more developed than outstations administrated by neighbouring Lockhart River and demonstrated much higher rates of use and periods of residency than Lockhart outstations. There was also a high degree of mobility between Lockhart River and one Coen-administered outstation which lay within the Lockhart Deed of Grant in Trust (DOGIT) area, including the seasonal removal of petrol sniffing youths from Lockhart to this outstation, despite Lockhart River having its own CDEP scheme. Some, but not all of this mobility could be explained by the outstation's proximity to the Coen-Lockhart Road, but other visits to the outstation—whose core residents were closely associated with Coen—were by Lockhart people who also held traditional ties to the outstation area.

The provision of paid employment and training at outstations through CDEP also contributed to willingness to live 'out bush', particularly among younger people with no prior history of hinterland residence. For CRAC's white administrative staff and many older Aboriginal people, paid employment was seen as vital to the continuing viability of living 'on country' at outstations. Regular employment and a more fulfilling lifestyle significantly increased the numbers spending time at the region's outstations and moving between outstations and the township. There were also more occasional demographic changes associated with short-term building projects at outstations, during which CDEP workers were relocated from town projects and other outstations which 'loaned' workers for short periods. These loans usually involved reciprocal agreements between outstation groups and their focal men and women, based on wider social ties between groups, notably those of marriage. These were also linked with periods of residence by

senior men and women at camps on each other's countries. Training schemes run by CRAC at particular outstations also attracted younger people from Coen and from other outstations for short periods.

CDEP participation appears to have increased the rates of circular migration within the Coen region, although the rate of inter-regional mobility—that is between settlement regions on the Cape—may have been affected inversely. These effects were indicative of the effects of administration on local mobility practices (see Bernardi 1997: 41 after Altman 1987: 44) which had resulted in a contemporary mobility region that was a product of the articulation of CDEP and administration with local Aboriginal society.

CDEP and the limitation of mobility

Aboriginal mobility presented problems for the administration of the CDEP scheme in spite of the scheme's purposeful fostering of decentralisation. Seasonal shifts in residential emphasis between the town (during the wet season) and regional outstations (during the dry season) left CRAC with a problem in finding work in town for the majority of participants during the wet and struggling to find workers for town-based projects during the dry (see CRAC 1997). Here the need to regulate the workforce, an inescapable dimension of European-Australian style administration, proved to be at odds with Aboriginal desires for mobility. Work and the local tradition of population mobility are potentially compatible, as demonstrated by the successful incorporation of the local Aboriginal population into the pastoral industry (see Smith 2002; Sutton 2001). Forms of employment which place a stress on periodic sedenterism seem to present difficulties for many living in the contemporary region.

The control of Aboriginal mobility has long been a feature of relations between whites and Aborigines in the Coen region, as elsewhere in Australia. The use of Aboriginal labour in establishing and maintaining cattle enterprises, in particular, led to the centralisation of a labour reserve in Coen and the control of the location and activities of Aboriginal people. Coen's Aboriginal reserve, like others of its ilk was 'calculated to provide both a cheap labour reserve and a place where native remnants who were an 'eyesore for everyone' [i.e. for local whites] ... could be kept' (Evans 1975: 121). These reserves were a crucial part of a system in which

white settlers continued to segregate and rigidly control Aborigines' movements ... [the reserve] removed the contaminating influence of diseased and immoral natives from the sphere of progressive white society, while leaving those Aborigines bound in white service untouched. The Queensland reserve system, therefore, did not segregate white from black so much as it separated the useless native from the useful one: the life-alternatives thereby created for the Aborigine were, quite literally, an exploited labour service or an excluded reservation sentence (Evans 1975: 121).

The impact of an initially foreign mode of production has been fundamental to the post-contact history of the region's Aboriginal population, their location and opportunities for mobility and their ambiguous incorporation—economic and otherwise—within Australian society. Aboriginal employment in the region's

pastoral industry had its historical origin in the usefulness of Aboriginal labour for the non-Aboriginal economy. When the state's approach to the Aboriginal population shifted to recognise their equal rights as Australian citizens, including access to unemployment benefits, the aspects of pastoral life valued by Aboriginal people decayed and the closure of Aboriginal population mobility was further extended (Rowse 1993; Sanders 1998). In many ways it was the collapse of pastoralism, rather than colonial encapsulation, which saw Aboriginal mobility finally transformed by state intervention. As Muecke notes, such actions by the state have resulted in the fixing of the workforce,

to make it more immobile, to regulate the movement of workers and to exploit labour recruited in particular places ... instead of organized banks of skilled workers travelling the countryside ... the state intervened to disqualify or make unskilled the great body of workers ... In this sense the workers now need the state in order to know what to do (Benterrak, Muecke and Roe 1996/1984: 246–7).

In the Coen region it could be argued that this process began with the integration of skilled hunting and gathering groups into the pastoral economy. It was further advanced not only by the collapse of pastoral employment and the centralisation of Aborigines in Coen and in other settlements on the Peninsula, but also through the development of the region's CDEP scheme. Certainly, the realities of 'self-determination' following the inception of CRAC are ambiguous. In the early stages of the corporation's existence, the decisions of its Aboriginal Board of Directors were strongly shaped by the advice of the white Project Manager who chaired Board meetings. In particular, CRAC's response to mobile and 'unproductive' members of the community raises questions about the nature of Aboriginal participation in CDEP and the decisions made by the Board of Directors on behalf of the community (Smith 2000; see also Rowse 1993). In this way, despite the collapse of explicitly racist control of Aboriginal labour (followed rapidly by profound economic difficulties for the pastoral industry in remote Australia), there is evidence that programs for regional development based on CDEP continue to control or exclude those groups or individuals for whom high mobility rates remain important.⁴ Whilst some administrative leeway was apparent in 1996–97 (dependent on forms of program flexibility that may have become impossible in the wake of the Spicer Review—see Morphy and Sanders 2001), it was clear nonetheless that administrative practice still set limits to the acceptability of Aboriginal population mobility.

Despite incentives to live at outstations, younger peoples' outstation residence was frequently interrupted by visits to town, typically either weekly or fortnightly, in order to collect pay, do shopping and throw themselves into the weekend round of parties, drinking and gambling. These visits were often followed by shorter or longer periods of residence in town. In part this behaviour marked resistance against pressure to take up a working lifestyle and removal from township life, pressure that emanated both from whites and older family members. Many older people, whose work histories were based in living out in the bush for weeks or months at a time, despaired at the inability of younger people to remain at an outstation for more than short periods. They attempted to regulate younger

people's actions to instil what they saw as more desirable behaviour. This was particularly true of those men and women who were 'bosses' or focal persons for outstation camps. On one occasion a middle aged woman complained loudly, though not to any particular person, that everyone was leaving her outstation in the middle of a building project, leaving the work unfinished, and that young people cared more about the pub than finishing their job. This typical strategy of non-confrontational 'shaming' (see McKnight 1986: 152) might bring about some short term effects, but most of the workers would be lost to town in the following days nonetheless.

At its extremes the contradiction between a work ethic drawn from European-Australian culture and the existential 'floating' of younger Aboriginal people between localities expressed itself as outright confrontation between the administration and the administrated. CRAC, even pre-Spicer, operated a 'no work, no pay' policy (see Bernardi 1997: 42, 44) and young people absent at neighbouring communities for a week or two often returned to Coen under the threat of being removed from the CDEP scheme.⁵ Others ignored these pressures and drifted back to the region at some later date. On returning they found themselves without pay, necessitating their dependence on family for both necessities and luxuries—typically food, tobacco and alcohol. Again, this pattern of behaviour incorporated the refusal of notions of responsibility for generating one's own income, embedded in desires shaped by the contemporary lifestyles of many (and especially younger) Aboriginal people and enabled by long-running practices of 'demand-sharing' (see Peterson 1993; see also Rowse 1993: 279). Although this depends on a dysfunctional variant of Aboriginal kin relations (Pearson 2000), it was also implicitly or explicitly a form of resistance to the attempts at control by the CDEP administration (Rowse 1993; see also Cowlishaw 1994/1988; Morris 1989) and an expression of personal autonomy tied to a body of cultural practice familiar in many Aboriginal contexts (Martin 1993; see also Myers 1986).⁶

Taylor (1992b) notes the administrative difficulties associated with variations in individual participation and overall participant numbers due to mobility in and out of communities participating in the CDEP scheme, questioning whether income support or employment programs are appropriate for mobile groups. In 1996–97, in the Coen region as elsewhere, CDEP was based on quarterly payments for a fixed number of participants (a situation that has since changed—see Morphy and Sanders 2001). As a result, the appearance of people keen to join the scheme in the middle of a quarter presented problems. Initially, CRAC responded to this need by using surplus funds held as a result of other participants who had left the community, or from those participants whose wages had been 'docked' for not working. This surplus was then used to employ new workers until the next quarter allowed for application for CDEP wages on their behalf. However, recent policy changes in Australia and associated political and popular concern over the administration of funds and policies in Aboriginal Australian organisations have led to a tightening of funds available and guidelines for operation of CDEP schemes (see Morphy and Sanders 2001). CRAC was

apparently able to maintain its operation of the scheme in a similar if more restricted way towards the end of my fieldwork in mid-1997. It is likely that further changes—as a result of the Spicer Review in particular—have since affected the availability of places for participants and further affected participant mobility.

The corporation's administration and Board of Directors attempted to mitigate logistical and accounting problems associated with extra-regional population mobility by refusing participation to several people who had registered with the Coen scheme only to leave the community some time afterwards. These 'unreliable' workers found themselves administratively and economically marginalised on return to Coen and either worked at outstations whilst claiming social security in an effort to convince CRAC to put them back on the CDEP scheme, or left the area again shortly afterwards. This interim solution was itself seen as dissatisfactory by CRAC administrators who at that time maintained a policy of attempting to dissuade any local Aboriginal people from claiming unemployment benefits. It was felt that this would undermine the corporation's CDEP scheme, with younger people and drinkers in particular likely to leave the scheme and draw unemployment benefits without needing to work for two days a week.⁷

Younger people in particular demonstrated mobility and residence patterns which incorporate shifts between administrative regions—older people, at least previously, tending to be less mobile with the exception of 'focal men' (see Smith, forthcoming). The administration of the scheme—whose boundaries cross-cut networks of individual mobility—acted against, rather than in parallel with the lifestyles of at least some of the region's Aboriginal population. It can further be hypothesised, in line with Taylor's (1998) suggestion of economic and social underpinnings of mobility regions, that a significant proportion of the Coen population might have been far more mobile across administrative boundaries if the CDEP scheme had been administered differently. Beyond arguments about economies of scale, this demonstrates a clear advantage in the recent 'push towards larger, regional, multi-locational, corporate CDEPs' (Sanders 2001b), although this might require the resolution of different regional perspectives on CDEP aims and activities. If greater links between CDEP schemes across the Peninsula had been instituted, such mobility might have been better administered, if not facilitated, and the penalisation of many of those most in need of the benefits of the scheme may have been avoided.

The administration of CDEP was not the only aspect of administrative practice impacting on Aboriginal population mobility in the region. CRAC, like other regional Aboriginal organisations dealing with 'non-community' Aboriginal populations on the Peninsula, also administered funds other than those associated with the CDEP scheme supplied both via State and Commonwealth government agencies including the Queensland Office of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs (OATSIA), now Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy (DATSIP). These funds included components linked to the provision of outstation infrastructure and vehicles. In 1996 ATSIC published a

review of the organisation's outstation policy (ATSIC 1996) which drew heavily on previous work by Cooke (1994a, 1994b) on outstation development on Cape York Peninsula. In his report, Cooke included recommendations for drastic reduction in the funding of four-wheel drive vehicles, and suggested the development of alternatives such as plane services and tractor access, both of which had been used by outstation populations serviced from Aurukun in western Cape York Peninsula. These recommendations may have been primarily concerned with departmental concerns to reduce spending and address political pressures regarding vehicle provision. Unfortunately the recommendations were based in assumptions of homogeneity in outstation aspirations and Aboriginal population mobility across Australia. This was patently not the case even within the region of central Cape York Peninsula (Smith 2000). The recommendations resulted in the reduction, removal or non-implementation of grant components for the provision of vehicles by ATSIC and OATSIA which left several families without access to their outstations and affected both Aboriginal aspirations for outstation development and local Aboriginal health. Several men and women increased their alcohol consumption as a direct result of the loss of vehicles and the level of violence—including domestic violence—also increased in Coen during this period.

CDEP and 'welfare colonialism' in the Coen region

The relationship between the CDEP scheme and Aboriginal mobility in the Coen region raises wider criticism of the scheme as an example of 'welfare colonialism' (Beckett 1985; Bernardi 1997; Paine 1977; Peterson 1998; see also Pearson 2000). The Coen case study underlines the importance of these analyses, and particularly that of Bernardi, who describes the ways in which the administration of CDEP schemes has 'operated to colonise the 'Aboriginal domain' with the state's own distinctive norms and structures' (Bernardi 1997: 36). Despite a rhetoric of 'self-management' and 'self-determination', the operation of the CDEP scheme may have bureaucratised and commodified Aboriginal labour, resulting in inequity with mainstream Australian society, with such shifts potentially being 'operation(s) of subjection'.

Yet, unlike previous colonial mechanisms, the CDEP has operated to have Aboriginal people subject themselves. It is this last aspect which best characterises welfare colonialism (Bernardi 1997: 45; see also Altman 2001b).

Nonetheless, aspects of the administration of the scheme in Coen in 1996–97 problematise Bernardi's account. CRAC's administration, for example, suggests that his criticisms of the production and effects of Aboriginal 'brokerage' following the earlier work of Howard (1978, 1982; see also Dagmar 1990) need to be re-examined. Elsewhere I have described how the men and women focal to the politics of the 'Aboriginal domain' have become those people holding roles of inter-ethnic brokerage (Smith 2000). Similarly, Bernardi's description of outstations as a 'post-colonial Aboriginal domain' (1997: 40) need to be rethought in the case of Coen, where it was apparent that outstations have had a profoundly inter-ethnic underpinning and where the effects of outstation development in relation to local

factionalism have been far more ambiguous than Bernardi suggests (Smith 2000). But the situation in Coen has demonstrated clear similarities with what Bernardi, following von Sturmer (1982), describes as the embedding of 'white' practices of decision-making, self-sufficiency, accountability, resource management, prioritisation and employment within Aboriginal lives. Although aspects of these practices had already become embedded in local Aboriginal culture—for example, the work ethic of older men and women raised in the pastoral milieu—the disenfranchisement of 'floaters' by CDEP administration and the local 'no work, no pay' policy marked instances in which the Aboriginal population continued to be steered to better fit the norms and expectations of the encapsulating culture of administration. Similarly, it was clear that strategic considerations based in an environment of resource use linked to the development of a 'hybrid economy' (Altman 2001a) were ensuring that Aboriginal practice was becoming 'more and more geared to white expectations and desires' (Bernardi 1997: 40; see also Moizo 1990; Smith 2000).

A clear illustration of 'welfare colonialism' in Coen could be found in the 'rural traineeships' implemented by CRAC in 1997. These traineeships drew on the region's history of pastoral employment, and offered a chance to earn CDEP wages 'topped-up' by contributions from Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs (DEETYA) now Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR), the Commonwealth government employment and training agency, and local pastoralists, who gained affordable Aboriginal workers to whom they were to provide 'on-the-job training', board and lodging. Despite the potential of the scheme, some problems were apparent. A number of older Aboriginal people complained, away from the CRAC administration, that the scheme reinstated the local Aboriginal population as a source of cheap labour for local cattle stations, particularly as some participants had several years experience in professional pastoral work and were in no need of further training. The scheme was also felt to be undermining the aspirations of local Aboriginal people to run their own cattle enterprises by sending potential workers elsewhere. The scheme could be seen to be supporting white pastoralists whose stations had been flagging under high labour costs, which might also decrease the potential availability of stations for Aboriginal transfer or Indigenous Land Corporation (ILC) purchase. The inclusion of already skilled Aboriginal cattlemen and perceptions of the closeness of the CRAC Project Manager to local pastoralists increased the suspicion of many Aboriginal critics about the motivations of the scheme.

The numbers of (mostly younger) men participating in the traineeship scheme were initially high, although participation suffered a rapid and fairly high rate of attrition, as was common with many local projects. However, my data on local population mobility suggested that the overall effect of the traineeship was to redistribute an already mobile population to different places, rather than to radically increase the numbers of younger men moving away from the township and its associated social problems. Previously these were people who would have been working on CDEP wages at outstations, although the typical traineeship

involved the return and later collection of trainees to and from Coen by station owners or Aboriginal relatives every fortnight, for a weekend's break from the station, probably lessened the amount of time trainees spent in the township. The traineeship scheme also saw increased administrative control of the mobility of younger Aboriginal men. On several occasions CRAC staff telephoned local pastoralists searching for placements for young men who were seen to be in town for extended periods rather than at outstations. Similarly, those who had been in town for extended drinking bouts were typically pressured, as were their families, to remove drinkers to outstations or cattle stations.

These examples demonstrated the inclination of non-Aboriginal administrators to control Aboriginal population mobility and activity, forms of control which were based partly in a desire to remove Aboriginal people from 'undesirable' conduct in town space (see Evans 1975: 121; Merlan 1998: 182–208). Not meeting what administrators and the Board of Directors saw as suitable working patterns also fell into the category of undesirable behaviour. Part of the rationale for the establishment of the traineeship scheme was the perception that many young people at outstations were 'not really working' and that the surveillance offered by Aboriginal outstation 'supervisors' was felt by non-Aboriginal administrators to be insufficient to ensure that 'real' productive work was done at outstation-based CDEP projects (see also Morphy and Sanders 2001).

The inclination of local administration was further illustrated by the reaction of CRAC staff to the Aboriginal population of Coen's old reserve. During the fieldwork period the corporation's Project Manager informed me that the reserve buildings were unfit for human habitation and had been condemned. The reserve area was in the process of being handed over to a group of local Aboriginal people under the *Aboriginal Land Act* 1991 (Qld) and there were plans to build a community centre and old people's home on the site. This home, with the assistance of the local Health and Community Care (HACC) scheme, was to provide housing for some of the reserve's residents, a group comprising of a number of Wik people, whose country lies to the west of Coen, and others with mostly peripheral kinship ties to other Coen families. The majority of those living at the reserve chose not to live in the township's rental housing or had been evicted due to non-payment of rent. Most were regular drinkers and either pensioners or non-participants in the CDEP scheme. Later it became apparent that no housing would remain on the site and the Project Manager at CRAC informed me that the people living there could 'move in with relatives if they have them, or go elsewhere. We don't want them here'. As non-workers and drinkers, peripheral to most other Coen families and at odds with the corporation's economic culture, the reserve dwellers were seen as undesirables who the administrator would prefer Coen to be rid of. On a later visit this housing had been demolished, but the majority of reserve inhabitants had remained in the township, moving into a house occupied by a mother, who was related to some of the Wik families, and her two daughters, whose father was a Wik man from Aurukun.

Perceptions that the traineeship scheme was undermining Aboriginal aspirations for autonomous enterprise were tied to feelings that CDEP's commodification of Aboriginal labour undermined the inculcation of meaningful Indigenous self-determination. Bernardi cites Arthur's observation that community leaders in the Torres Strait had amalgamated 'traditionally' based CDEP work into a European time-scale, noting that 'formalistic administrative requirements of the scheme have acted to undermine ... distinctive feature[s] of Aboriginal culture' (Bernardi 1997: 42; Arthur 1991). In Coen, where aspirations for self-determination by older people are based on a work-ethic drawn from involvement in the pastoral industry, some older men and women considered that the local CDEP scheme undermined the willingness of their young people to undertake any work that was not part of their paid 'employment'. As Phillip Port put it,

now how can we learn them when its in town that they have CDEP? Right, they got to work for certain hours. Now after that certain hours, you can't get them to get a rake in their own house where they staying, they won't rake up. Because they know that CDEP hours, they didn't pay for that hour - you know, its just something that we have in us, that we got to have a clean house. You got to be clean. That's the way of living. You muck about, these young people no idea, nothing. How can you learn them when they're next to the pub? (Phillip Port, pers. Comm. 1998).

For these men and women, CDEP was seen as fostering dependence on and assimilation to wider Australian society instead of local, self-determined aspirations, usually envisioned at the level of family or 'countryman' groupings (see Smith 2000). They also felt that CDEP was implicated in the lack of self-respect and the complacent acceptance of meaningless work apparent among many in the local Aboriginal population. Whilst CDEP may have facilitated outstation development and supported the decentralisation aspirations of older people, it was simultaneously seen as undermining the younger generation's sense of purpose, their willingness to invest unpaid labour in pursuing their families' aspirations and thus discouraging their participation in the active shaping of their own future. The collapse of the original customary economy, and more recently of the cattle industry, both of which involved 'organised banks' of mobile, skilled workers, led to the degeneration of 'human capital' and self-motivation within the local economy. The result has been an increasingly unskilled Aboriginal workforce performing routine, mundane tasks in the local CDEP scheme. The erosion of the training and infrastructure components of the scheme in the late 1990s ensured the extension of this phenomenon, limiting training opportunities, reducing the scheme's potential for 'community development', whether of infrastructure or 'human capital' and reproducing local dependency on white administration and skilled labour (see Bernardi 1997: 44).⁸ In 1996-97, the administrative insistence on 'productive' labour linked to a per hour pay rate continued to undermine possibilities for the Aboriginal people of the region to break free from the CDEP-bound cycle of limited hours, low self-esteem, anomie and drinking to which much of the working population was (and remain) attached. For Phillip Port and like-minded senior Aboriginal people this break might still be achieved through decentralisation and the development of outstations, but in a form quite different to that offered by the scope of local

administration and by the wider governmental disenfranchisement of Aboriginal aspirations for secure land tenure and support for meaningful self-determination.

Conclusion

Despite its success in facilitating outstation development and use by the Aboriginal people of the Coen region, by the mid-late 1990s the local CDEP scheme and the administration of the CDEP-based CRAC had been only partially successful in ensuring forms of community development appropriate for both contemporary Aboriginal practice and future aspirations. However, despite the criticisms incorporated into this paper, it was clear that CRAC had nonetheless created the foundations for a dramatic improvement in Aboriginal wellbeing through facilitating the development of outstations and the provision of vehicles which allowed many to remove themselves from the stresses of town-life for shorter and longer periods, and which also provided the means to secure a better diet, decrease expenditure and improve incomes, cut down on their own drinking and that of relatives and begin to explore longer-term means to shift the trajectory of their lives and those of their families. In particular the successes of this local organisation in responding to Aboriginal mobility were considerable, despite the limitations in the organisation's responses outlined above. Similarly, only a locally based organisation would have been able to develop workable projects in consultation with Aboriginal constituents as CRAC had undoubtedly done.

Based on my experience of CDEP in Coen in 1996–97, the key to the successful administration of CDEP-based community projects appeared to be four-fold:

- Implementation of the region's CDEP scheme through a local organisation with a Board of Directors drawn from, and representative of, all major local groups.
- Local administrators who remained in their positions (e.g. the Project Manager at the Coen Regional Aboriginal Corporation) for long periods, ensuring both administrative familiarity with the Board of Directors and the wider regional Aboriginal population and the familiarity of administrators to the Directors and Aboriginal people living in and around Coen.
- The ability of the corporation to ensure the provision of recurrent project funding, including 'refresher' courses for trainees.
- Being able to develop projects and programs for Aboriginal development that met and supported the growth of aspirations among the Aboriginal population in a way that was both sustainable and appropriate. For example, CRAC's ability to develop a flexible program of town and outstation-based projects in response to seasonal and occasional shifts in the residence of the region's Aboriginal population, including a local market garden that grew foodstuffs which local Aboriginal people wanted to eat and which were saleable to local stores and the wider regional population and the ability of CRAC's Project Managers to support economically-viable projects for outstation development but convincingly explain to the corporation's Board

of Directors why some aspirations were not presently viable and the risks that would be run in undertaking them.

In 1997–97, the greatest difficulties faced in Coen's CDEP-based projects rested with the last of these factors, partly as a result of the conditions inherent in the program and partly stemming from administrative decisions. Administrative engagement with Aboriginal communities is a process fraught with difficulties, particularly when this involves non-local and non-Aboriginal staff. Given the problems apparent elsewhere, it is clear that CRAC's successes were considerable. However, such achievements generate a momentum that needs to be maintained despite the loss of key staff and plateaus which must be superseded to avoid embedding new forms of welfare colonialism that fail aims for meaningful self-determination.

Moran (1994: 14), discussing the need for beneficiary participation in outstation development, has emphasised that development needs to be responsive to the complex and changing local dynamics of remote Aboriginal communities to avoid inappropriate outcomes and entrenching dependency:

To Non-Aboriginal service providers, this complex ever-changing diversity is very difficult to grasp. The general Non-Aboriginal bureaucratic perspective of rationality and accountability is rooted in strictly functional terms, and the classification, calculation and manipulation of variables. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander affairs has increasingly become "control-oriented" in a futile effort by Government to reduce the level of uncertainty that accompanies any infrastructure project. This disenfranchises people... and further increases the dependency on outside government support. It is futile because increased control-orientation leads inevitably to a denial of reality and greater, not lesser uncertainty.

In 1996–1997 CRAC showed that considerable success could be achieved through this kind of localised administration, but also demonstrated the ways in which an administration led by non-Aboriginal staff could fail to engage with local Aboriginal lifestyles, particularly in the case of population mobility. A considerable degree of cultural sensitivity is necessary for the development of successful local projects in Aboriginal communities, to mitigate the negative effects of policy and programs on Aboriginal futures and to maximise the development of projects which reflect Aboriginal priorities and develop meaningful 'self-determination'. If CDEP is to continue to be a successful basis for self-determination, CDEP schemes must be carefully implemented, and responsive to local and regional changes and development.⁹ Otherwise CDEP schemes will continue to fail the need for meaningful Indigenous employment and opportunities, and further entrench the disparities between Aboriginal society and 'mainstream' Australia.

Notes

1. These figures, based on household surveys and population counts during research for my PhD thesis (Smith 2000), are somewhat higher than other counts, e.g. ATSIC (1995: 7) which lists a '1994 community estimate' as 250 people and the 1991 ABS census figure as 119 people, and Taylor (1997) who gives the regional population as 114 Aboriginal people out of 417 people counted in two Coen census collection districts (CDs). As Martin and Taylor (1996) note, census counts tend to underestimate the Aboriginal population of a region. Likewise, my fieldwork confirms Taylor's supposition that a number of the non-Aborigines enumerated in the region at this time were tourists or other non-usual residents (Taylor 1997: 2). The population of Coen outstations during August 1996 was included in the census, although I am unsure whether all Coen regional outstations are incorporated in the two Collection Districts (CDs) Taylor bases his estimates on. Further, a substantial proportion of the town's associated Aboriginal population are elsewhere in August—at boarding schools in Cairns for the majority of those aged 13–18, and at other settlements on Cape York peninsula, e.g. Lockhart River. My own previous estimates (e.g. Smith 2000) probably under-count the white pastoralists in the region. Nonetheless, I would be fairly confident in asserting an Aboriginal population of at least 250 people for the region, and that this population outnumbers permanent white residents of the region.
2. That is, it is not an 'Aboriginal Community' established under the *Community Services (Aborigines) Act 1991* (Qld) and similar earlier legislation, where a Community Council forms the local government on an area of former Aboriginal reserve land, overseen by the Queensland State Government.
3. Langi, an outstation located in a national park in the Coen region, had been unable to develop housing even of the 'shed' variety that typifies most Coen-associated outstations. The population of this outstation was comprised mainly of older men and women in their sixties who have spent nearly the whole of each dry season living there in army-style tents. It is presumed that a combination of stronger attachment to bush life and a history of 'roughing it' from a lifetime of cattle work underlay their willingness to occupy these makeshift facilities. Even then, they were keen to develop housing and other infrastructure at the first opportunity.

The stress placed on 'proper' housing here stands in stark contrast to problems faced by Aboriginal people—both elsewhere and within the Coen region—living in European-style housing (see Reser 1979). It is apparent that the paradox of the insistence on 'proper' (i.e., European-style.) housing and the problems associated with residence there (at least from a white perspective) says much about the post-colonial situation of the region's Aboriginal people (see also Cowlishaw 1994/1988: 102).
4. Analogous processes are apparent elsewhere. As Abram (1998: 10) notes, the continued persecution of travellers and Romanies throughout Europe 'should leave us in no doubt that 'modernisation' still implies the settling of nomads and their incorporation into Western consumer capitalism'.
5. Post-Spicer, there appear to have been a small number of younger people who have shifted onto social security payments rather than remain with the CDEP scheme, a shift which may also be partly explained by the local Corporation 'going flat' as a result of a series of problems faced around 1999–2000. I intend to take up these issues in a forthcoming paper and in further research in the region.

6. As with the kin-relationships these younger people draw on to sustain their lifestyle, such assertion of autonomy is an important and long-running aspect of Aboriginal culture. In contradiction to Morris (1989) and in line with Rowse's observations about developing dynamics within Aboriginal 'communities' (1993: 284), the forms of 'resistance' demonstrated by 'floaters' may assert specificities of Aboriginal existence, but through the actions of individuals and commonly in opposition to other Aboriginal people as well as, or *as members of* administrative institutions.
7. Again, it is unclear to me what effects the post-HREOC Review and Spicer Review separation of unemployment and the CDEP scheme (see Sanders 2001a) have had on this situation in the Coen region.
8. It may be that the post-Spicer emphasis on 'the provision of 'work' and skill acquisition' (Whitby 2001) may now have provided a welcome reversal here.
9. In providing training for Directors and simultaneously seeking instruction from them for Corporation policy, CRAC has demonstrated the viability of this process, the problems raised in this paper notwithstanding.

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