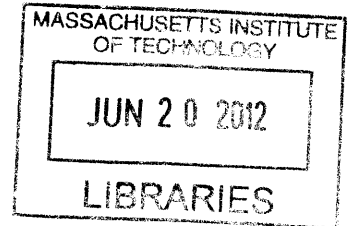


Planning Across Distance:
Remote Housing and Government Intervention
in Australia's Northern Territory

by

Matthew August Steyer

B.A. in Urban Studies
Columbia University (2004)



ARCHIVES

Submitted to the Department of Urban Studies and Planning
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master in City Planning

at the

MASSACHUSETTS INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

June 2012

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ABSTRACT

At the time of its inception in 2008, the Strategic Indigenous Housing and Infrastructure Program (SIHIP) was the largest indigenous housing program in Australia's history. SIHIP represented a \$672million investment by the Australian and Northern Territory governments to improve housing in 73 remote and widely scattered indigenous communities in the Territory. Emerging at a time when indigenous issues shot to the forefront of national politics, SIHIP was billed as a response to the widespread overcrowding, poor housing quality, and lack of job opportunities that has come to define many remote communities in the Territory. Faltering out of the gate, SIHIP quickly came under criticism and became a symbol of government excess and ineptitude. A review of the program refocused SIHIP, which has since met its housing and employment targets. However, this thesis will demonstrate that these targets do not reflect the overall impact of SIHIP on target communities.

This thesis will look at SIHIP in a new light and illustrate that, beneath a seemingly straightforward construction project, are tremendous underlying forces of distance and control. SIHIP's legacy will not be reduced overcrowding and improved housing outcomes, rather, it will be the reshaping and condensing of indigenous settlement patterns and an unprecedented increase in government control over indigenous housing. Not only is it a break with indigenous housing policy over the last 40 years, SIHIP also follows the larger historic pattern of providing housing and services as a means to control indigenous settlement.

This thesis will tell the story of SIHIP through the two lenses of distance and control and analyze the role of these forces in shaping SIHIP, its impact on the ground, and its legacy. Through reframing the debate around SIHIP, this thesis will draw broader planning lessons about the challenges of planning across distance and the complex dynamics that influence large, government-driven initiatives. Furthermore, it will illuminate key opportunities that have emerged through SIHIP, many of which have received little public attention. Through this analysis the core assumption of SIHIP is challenged, leaving the question: is housing provision the best way to improve living conditions for Australia's indigenous population?

Thesis Supervisor: Lawrence J. Vale

Title: Ford Professor of Urban Design and Planning

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INTRODUCTION

At the time of its initiation, the Strategic Indigenous Housing and Infrastructure Program (“SIHIP” or the “Program”) was the largest indigenous housing program in Australia’s history. It represented a five-year, \$672million dollar¹ joint commitment between the Australian and Territory Governments to improve housing in 73 remote and widely scattered indigenous communities in the Territory. Since its inception in 2008, much has been written about the successes and failures of SIHIP from the perspective of the government (through reviews), outside experts (additional reviews), and the media. These reports tend to analyze SIHIP in terms of its efficiency and effectiveness – how money has been spent, to what extent targets have been reached (or not reached), and the structure of the delivery model.

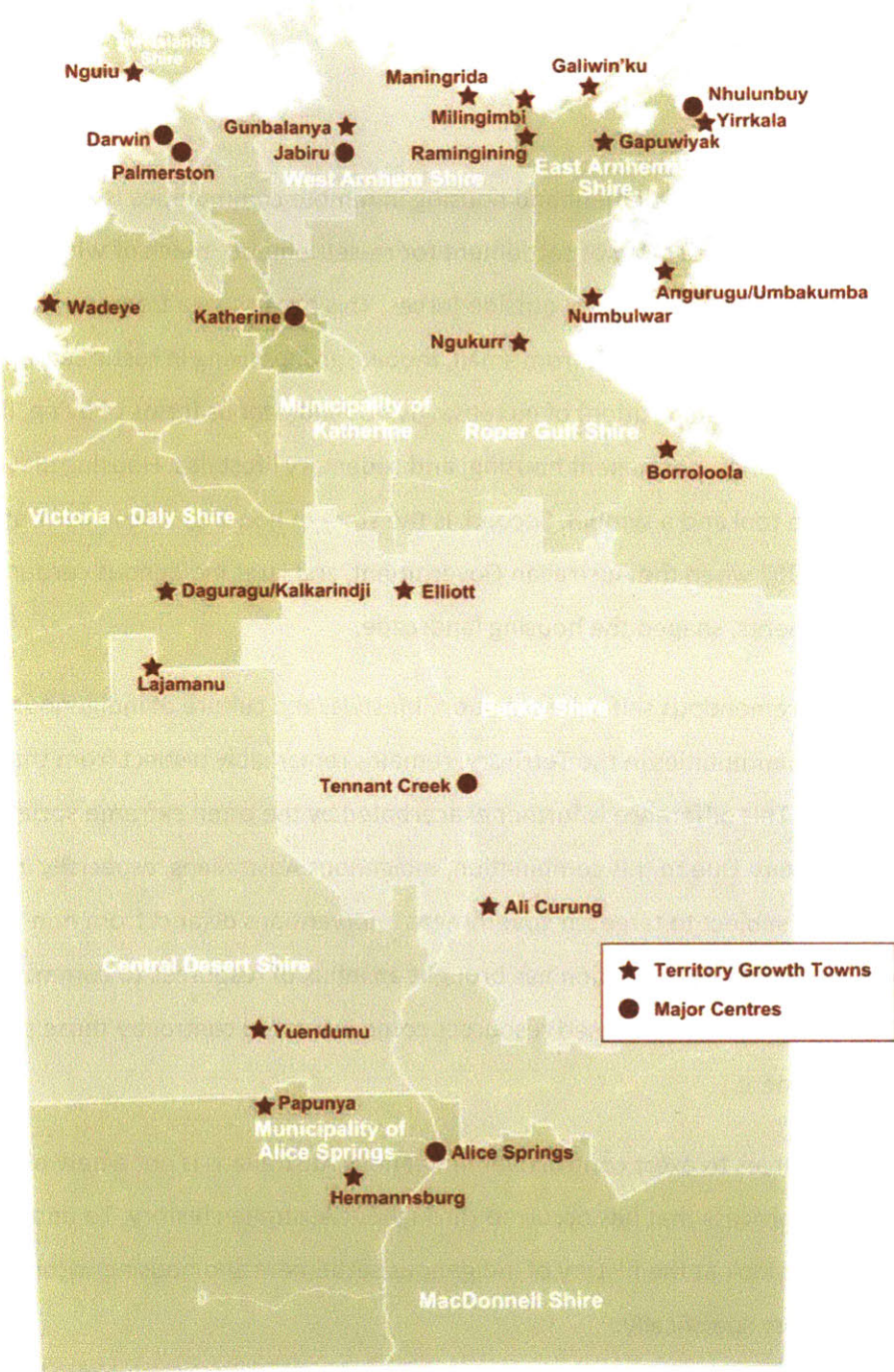
However, behind the behemoth of SIHIP are key underlying themes of distance and control that have greatly shaped the Program from its beginnings to its current form. Through analyzing these themes, one can draw broader planning lessons about the challenges of planning across distance and the complex dynamics that influence large, government-driven initiatives.

Furthermore, SIHIP is not an abstract program, but rather a collection of the efforts of many key actors from the political, public, private, social, and cultural spectrum. However, little has been written that tells the story from the perspective of these actors. By incorporating these unique points of view within the context of SIHIP’s story, this thesis aims to paint a more complete picture of the diverse forces involved in a project of SIHIP’s scale and scope and draw key conclusions demonstrating how the actions of seemingly distant or unconnected stakeholders can have a significant impact on one another.

As an outsider who was graciously welcomed in the Territory (the “Territory”) and had the unique opportunity to speak directly with a wide range of stakeholders, from the Territory Minister for Public and Affordable Housing to indigenous community members whose houses were refurbished under SIHIP, I aim to help fill in the narrative about SIHIP and illuminate the key themes that I have observed, across stakeholder groups, that might help inform the decision making process behind future projects.

¹ All dollar amounts are in Australian dollars. The average exchange rate (year to date) is AU\$1.00: US\$1.05.

Figure 1: Territory Growth Towns



Source: Territory Government 2012a

PART I: THE TERRITORY, INDIGENOUS HOUSING, AND ROLE OF GOVERNMENT INTERVENTION

INTRODUCTION

The current form of indigenous settlement and housing in remote communities is best understood in two phases. The first phase is the story of settlement (or re-settlement), much of which was shaped through the first half of the 20th century by outside forces. This phase saw a tremendous shift both spatially and in terms of lifestyle – a shift from small, mobile, groups living in rustic semi-permanent structures to the adoption (or imposition) of increasingly non-indigenous forms of living, including concentrated social groupings, permanent housing, and sedentary lifestyles. Housing played a key role in this transition, as both a tool and a symbol. Second, is the story of housing, whose current form stems from the period post-1967 when the Australian Government, and later indigenous corporations and state and local governments, shaped the housing landscape.

However, despite this tremendous shift, the situation, lifestyle, and culture of indigenous Australians, particularly in remote communities in the Territory, remains remarkably distinct from that non-indigenous Australians. This difference is further exacerbated by the often extreme social disadvantage experienced in these areas. Due to this combination, indigenous Australians, especially in remote communities, are often subject to targeted government interventions distinct from non-indigenous Australians. Recently, this special attention has brought an influx of resources to communities long ignored. On the other hand, with increased resources come increased control by those providing the resources – the government.

This story of using resources to exert control over indigenous Australians is not a new phenomenon, but rather a repetition of a process that has occurred throughout Australian history. To understand this process, it is essential to look at the history of indigenous settlement and housing within Australia as a whole and in the Territory specifically.

In the end, it is a story of two worlds colliding – two worlds that have become inextricably linked and mixed together. Finding a balance remains an essential, complex, and evolving challenge.

DEFINING 'REMOTE INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES'

Throughout this thesis, the phrase 'remote indigenous communities' will be regularly used. Therefore, before proceeding, it is essential to define these terms – both for the sake of clarity and to consider how these definitions play a role in influencing SIHIP and its outcomes. As the story of SIHIP unfolds, the question arises whether these terms, and how they are defined, are appropriate in their current form to the realities in remote indigenous communities in the Territory.

Defining 'Community'

The term 'community' will be used in this report to remain consistent with the current vernacular regarding indigenous Australia used in government reports and policy documents, including those by the Australian and Territory Governments and the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). However, it is recognized that the term may not be an accurate reflection of the historic, social, political, and cultural dynamics underlying these groupings. As a result, the term 'settlement' is commonly substituted within academic literature (Memmott and Moran 2001; Read 2000, ix). What might be considered a community by the government, may typically feature multiple clan groups and varying levels of political and social unity (Memmott and Moran 2001). Furthermore, these 'communities' were often not formed organically, but rather imposed artificially by outside forces (Memmott and Moran 2001; Troy 2000, v). Finally, the term 'community' ignores differences in ownership and power. Kim Hill, from the Northern Land Council, put forward a definition of community, noting that "the word community is used very loosely in Australia:"

"The definition of community here is you have traditional owners, owners from that area where the community was established. You've got other Aboriginal traditional owners who aren't from that area. They've moved into that community merely on the basis of lack of government services and infrastructure... and government policies where they've rounded up people and put them into a community. And then you've got a third group of people; they're the new arrivals, [comprised of a mix of] non-Aboriginal people and [traditional owners from other areas] who've actually married into that community... [or an] Aboriginal traditional owner from another area [currently] residing in that community" (Hill 2011).

Defining 'Remote'

The Australian government uses the Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia (ARIA)² to classify a localities' remoteness. The classification helps the government make key policy decisions with regards to service provision (ABS 2012b). ARIA is the official guideline used under the National Partnership Agreement for Remote Indigenous Housing (the "National Partnership"), which incorporates SIHIP (COAG 2009, 4). Accessibility/Remoteness is determined by the road distance from a location to its closest 'service centers,' which are divided into five categories³ as defined by population:

"Populated localities with populations of greater than 1000 persons are considered to contain at least some basic level of services (for example health, education, or retail), and as such these towns and localities are regarded as Service Centres. Those Service Centres with larger populations are assumed to contain a greater level of service provision" (University of Adelaide 2012).

Based on their ARIA score, localities are divided into five categories, ranging from 'highly accessible' to 'very remote.' A very remote area, for example, is defined as having "very little accessibility of goods, services, and opportunities for social interaction" (ABS 2001, 19). It is important to note that ARIA is a national standard applied to both indigenous and non-indigenous communities alike. As a result, it does not take into account the unique characteristics of each locality (e.g. social, economic, and cultural) that can vary substantially across regions, cultures, and communities.

Defining 'Indigenous'

The ABS defines 'indigenous' as, "People who identified themselves, or were identified by another household member, as being of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander origin" (ABS 2009). While seemingly straightforward, this classification has posed problematic over time for a variety of reasons, including the fact that indigenous Australians do not always self-identify as 'indigenous.'⁴ This commonly results in the undercounting of the population (Memmott and Moran 2001).

² Also known as ARIA+.

³ Categories range from 1000-4999 to 250,000 or more (University of Adelaide 2012).

⁴ The ABS recognizes this limitation and is adjusting its accounting method accordingly. While methods have increased in accuracy, accounting of indigenous Australians remains a complex, evolving issue. As a result,

OVERVIEW OF INDIGENOUS AUSTRALIANS IN THE TERRITORY

The Territory

Despite being the least populous territory in Australia with 230,369 residents, the Territory is the 3rd largest in terms of land mass (ABS 2012a; Geoscience Australia 2012). If the Territory were a country, its 1,349,129 square kilometers of land area (including islands) would place it as the 20th largest country in the world (CIA 2012). Furthermore, 68% of the Territory's population is concentrated in the two main urban centers of the Darwin (the capital) metropolitan area and Alice Springs, leaving the remainder of the population spread out over a tremendous area and in increasingly remote communities (ABS 2012a).⁵

Indigenous Population in the Territory

Despite its small overall population, the Territory has the 4th largest percentage of indigenous population in the country (12.9%). More importantly, the indigenous population comprises an outsized percentage of the Territory's total population (31.6%) relative to other Australian states and territories, with Western Australia falling second at a distant 3.8%. As a result, indigenous issues play a much more prominent role in the Territory than they do elsewhere in the country (ABS 2010, 16).

Furthermore, 79% of indigenous residents in the Territory (52,560 out of 66,592) live in 'remote' and 'very remote' areas, as defined by the Australian government (ABS 2010, 18). These areas are typically characterized by limited road access and are far removed from major service centers. There are 641 'discrete indigenous communities'⁶ in the Territory, with all but 9 being classified as remote (73 or 11.4%) or very remote (559 or 87.2%) (ABS 2007). While a community technically qualifies as 'indigenous' if its population is over 50% indigenous, most of the communities are over 90% indigenous

indigenous population data, particularly on the local level, is best viewed as an estimate and often varies between ABS and non-ABS sources. Extra caution is necessary when comparing numbers across censuses.

⁵ 56% of the Territory's population is located in the Darwin metropolitan area (including Darwin, Palmerston, and Litchfield), with 12% of the population located in Alice Springs (ABS 2012a).

⁶ The Australian Bureau of Statistics defines 'discrete indigenous communities' as: "A geographic location, bounded by physical or cadastral (legal) boundaries, and inhabited or intended to be inhabited predominantly (i.e. greater than 50% of usual residents) by Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander peoples, with housing or infrastructure that is managed on a community basis [no longer applicable]." It is important to note the ABS recognizes a level of subjectivity in making these determinations due to the temporary or seasonal usage of some of the communities (ABS 2007).

(ABS 2007). The 641 discrete indigenous communities can range from 'outstations' of small family/clan clusters living in rustic dwellings with no access to services to larger communities of up to over 2,500 people with multiple clans, developed infrastructure, and access to a range of services (e.g. grocery/general store, school, health clinic, athletic facilities, roads, sewerage, water, electricity). SIHIP's focus is on the 73 largest communities, with populations ranging from approximately 100 to over 2,500 (NTER Review Board 2008; ABS 2012a).⁷

Current Situation in Territory Remote Indigenous Communities

Indigenous Australians face significant social, economic, health, education, and housing disadvantage relative to non-indigenous Australians, including (ABS 2010):

- Reduced life expectancy, increased infant mortality, and poor physical and mental health
 - Estimated 11.5 year (males) and 9.7 year (females) lower life expectancy for those born between 2005-2007
 - 3 times higher infant mortality
 - 2 times as likely to report fair/poor health or high levels of stress
- High unemployment
 - Unemployment rate two times as high as non-indigenous Australians
- Low quality housing, high occupancy rates (overcrowding), and low rates of homeownership
- Increased levels of violence, alcoholism, and abuse
- Lower levels of education
 - Half as likely to complete Year 12
- Lower income levels and higher reliance on government welfare

These disadvantages are particularly acute in remote communities, which lack many of the resources and opportunities available in urban settings. Furthermore, the indigenous population is both considerably younger and faster growing than non-indigenous Australians (ABS 2010):

- In 2006, the median age was 21 for indigenous and 37 for non-indigenous Australians, with 38% of the indigenous population 15 or under (versus 19% for non-indigenous)

⁷ Under the *National Emergency Response Bill 2007*, which covered over 500 indigenous communities in the Territory, "73 of the larger settlements were targeted for intense application of NTER measures" (NTER Review Board 2008). SIHIP's focus is on these communities.

- The fertility rate was 2.57 for indigenous and versus 1.89 nationwide

With such a high (and growing) concentration of remote residents, the Territory's indigenous population is arguably the most distressed in Australia. While this situation has developed over a period decades, it has largely gone unnoticed on a national stage until recently. However, in 2007 the dire situation in the Territory specifically was brought to the forefront of national politics, forcing the Australian government to respond.

The government's response was unprecedented. On a policy level, laws were passed, funding was allocated, and initiatives were rolled out at a tremendous scale, scope, and speed. On a local level, after experiencing an initial wave of military and police presence, indigenous communities were subject to a steady stream of government workers, consultants, and contractors hired to develop and implement the initiatives, many of which will extend long into the future. One of the first of these major initiatives, and largest of its kind, was the Strategic Indigenous Housing and Infrastructure Program.

SIHIP was developed to address three key issues – overcrowding, housing quality, and employment – that were seen to lie at the root of much of the dysfunction in indigenous communities. However, before looking at SIHIP, it is necessary to understand the pattern of indigenous settlement in the Territory that led to the current housing situation.

INDIGENOUS SETTLEMENT, HOUSING, AND GOVERNMENT INVOLVEMENT IN THE TERRITORY

Early Indigenous Settlement and Housing

Prior to colonization, the Australian continent contained an estimated 300,000 indigenous inhabitants spread throughout the mainland and adjacent islands, with higher concentrations in areas with greater resources. There were an estimated 260 languages and 500 dialects. Indigenous Australians lived a semi-nomadic, hunter-gatherer lifestyle, travelling in small family/clan groups, each within a defined territory. This highly mobile lifestyle followed seasonal patterns, which vary significantly across Australia (Dudgeon et al. 2010, 26).

The Territory is characterized by three climate zones, a tropical North, semi-arid center, and arid, desert South. The northern portion of the Territory experiences two very distinct seasons, a hotter 'wet season' (October through April) and cooler 'dry season' (May through September). The wet season is characterized by substantial rainfall resulting in widespread flooding that greatly alters the landscape.

The central and southern portions of the Territory experience less variability, with a hot dry summer (with very limited rainfall) and mild to cooler winter (Bureau of Meteorology 2012).

Due to their highly mobile lifestyle, indigenous Australians traditionally lived in semi-permanent structures or slept in the open air. In the Territory and its islands, these structures, typically made from sticks, bark, and foliage, took many forms. Varying by season and location, these structures included elevated platforms, enclosed domes, shaded open aired structures, and exposed windbreaks. At camp sites, domicile arrangements were typically determined by family and gender, with a single family unit, single men, and widows/single women sleeping separately (Memmott 2000, 15-33).

At the core of indigenous settlement was a very distinct relationship with the 'home' and land than that of non-indigenous Australians:

“Customary houses or shelters were used like tools to make everyday life more comfortable from inclement weather... Their lifespan seldom exceeded a season and was more often several weeks or less...They were not a 'home' in the Western sense of being a permanent structure... to which is also attached personal decorations, colors, and symbols...[and] the multitude of memories of past experiences and daydreams in its spaces that stretch back through one's time of occupancy as far as childhood. For Aboriginal people, memories and experiences were associated with campsites and other places in the landscape, not with specific shelters, which were too many, too similar and too impermanent to provide such a wealth of stable links with the past. The artifactual, behavioral, and sensory properties of the Western construct 'house' are best construed in the Aboriginal context to be embedded in and between the domiciliary space and the camp rather than in the shelter per se” (Memmott 2000, 33).

Over time, the physical structures and spatial patterns of indigenous settlement have changed due in a large part to non-indigenous influence. However, the underlying relationships with 'home' and land continue to shape and distinguish indigenous settlement and lifestyles in its current (2012) form.

Indigenous Re-Settlement

On a national level, indigenous culture, settlement, and housing has been greatly influenced by outside forces and has little resemblance to its 'pre-contact' form:

“Colonization and successive governments brought widespread population decimation, displacement from land, forced migrations, concentration into specially established reserves, and imposed institutional changes upon indigenous people” (Memmott and Moran 2001).

However, the degree of influence varies greatly from state to state and is often best understood through an analysis on a regional level:

“Throughout Indigenous Australia, distinctive regional settlement patterns are discernable... These patterns can be largely explained by local process of cultural change arising from various historically imposed forces emanating from either the local, regional, State, or Federal levels” (Memmott and Moran 2001).

In the Territory, through the first half of the 20th century, these forces included the government, church missions, and private landowners. Playing a central role, was government policy that has been characterized as one of 'protectionism' – protectionism through resettlement (Howard-Wagner and Kelly 2011, 102). Through various *Aboriginal Acts* and *Ordinances*, including defining authority over indigenous residents and setting aside land (“Aboriginal Reserves”), the government:

“Provided for the forced removal of Aboriginal peoples of the Territory from their homelands and their containment in reserves and government settlements from the 1910's through to the 1950's” (Howard-Wagner and Kelly 2011, 102).

The locations of the reserves were often influenced by private land interests, including mines and cattle stations (ranches). On one hand the reserves restricted outside access, therefore protecting traditional lifestyles in the Territory to a greater degree than in other parts of Australia. However, they did permit missionaries to access the land. The missions set up settlements and attracted indigenous residents through the provision of services, including housing. In addition to government and mission settlements, indigenous residents also began to concentrate around cattle stations, towns, and mines (Ross 2000, 3-7).

These forces had a tremendous impact on shifting settlement patterns in the Territory, with the provision of housing as a key mechanism. This early housing took various forms, including tin sheds (provided by some stations) and more permanent mission housing. Furthermore, this occurred within the backdrop of a broader national policy of assimilation (and Christianization for the missions). The policy was particularly strong in the 1950's and 1960's. In the Territory, this resulted in the proposal of 'transitional housing,' described as a "very basic one-to-three roomed structure" that was intended to transition indigenous residents from traditional housing to European housing (Ross 2000, 3-7). Overall, however, this period reflected a deeper use of housing as mechanism of control:

"From the earliest post-invasion time, Aboriginal housing was not an end in itself, but secondary to the aims of resocialization and acculturation. A cottage inhabited by an Aboriginal family was less a shelter than an instrument of management, education and control. It is not until, broadly, the entry of the Commonwealth government after the 1967 referendum that Aboriginal housing assumes its more recognizable form of providing shelter, a hearth, a refuge of affection and an armour of security. Many of the subsequent battles were fought over who, in the end, was to control Aboriginal accommodation and shelter" (Read 2000, ix).

1967 marked a key turning point, as a national referendum changed the Constitution allowing the Australian Government to legislate on behalf of indigenous Australians, previously under the jurisdiction of the States.⁸ This allowed for indigenous-specific policies, which were deemed necessary to address the growing disadvantage. Furthermore, it allowed for indigenous Australians to be counted by the Census Bureau (Memmott 1988, 34; Creative Spirits 2012).

With regards to housing, this period was one of top-down, government-driven housing on a large scale. Through Commonwealth State Housing Agreements, increased funding was committed to housing due to address the perceived, substantial need. Housing design typically resembled that of non-indigenous housing. The 1970's saw the creation of Aboriginal Housing Boards, Associations, and Organizations that began to exert increasing autonomy over housing provision, construction, and management (primarily

⁸ The Australian Government governed the Northern Territory between 1911 and 1978 and therefore already had jurisdiction.

funded by the government). Furthermore, it saw the establishment of local indigenous councils that provided local government-type services (Ross 2000, 8-10; Long 2000, 104; Sanders 2006, 3).

Overall, from the 1970's to the mid 2000's, housing in the Territory was provided through a combination of Territory Government programs and Indigenous Community Housing Organizations (the "ICHO's") – the ICHO's would subsequently manage all housing. Funding to both was typically provided by the Australian Government (Ross 2000, 8; Elvin et al. 2010, 5). This was the case prior to SIHIP with the Community Housing and Infrastructure Program (CHIP) (ANAO 2011, 18). Virtually all housing in indigenous communities today has been built post-1967 and resembles non-indigenous housing.

In 1976, the groundbreaking *Aboriginal Land Rights (Territory) Act 1976* ("Land Rights") returned a significant portion of land in the Territory back to indigenous traditional owners and set up Land Councils to manage the land. This tremendous shift in control prompted an outstation and homelands movement, which saw many indigenous Australians returning to traditional lands and (more) traditional living arrangements (Creative Spirits 2012). Spatially this resulted in greater dispersion.

Sparked by Land Rights, the 1970's and 1980's saw an unprecedented political shift toward Aboriginal self-determination and autonomy in the Territory, merging into a period of self-management and formalized political involvement characterized by the establishment (and later disbandment due to allegations of corruption) of the national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island Commission (ATSIC: 1990-2005) (Creative Spirits 2012). By 2007, it seemed as if the relationship between indigenous Australians and the government was reaching a balance – a mix of autonomy and collaboration. SIHIP changed all of this.

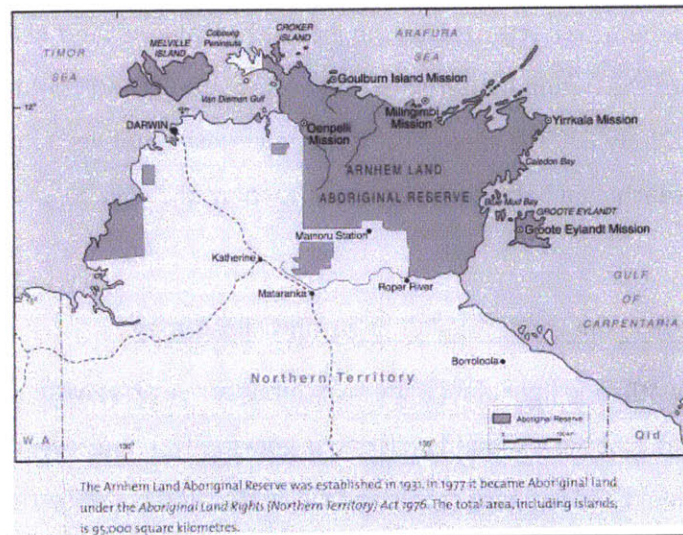
Regional Analysis: Eastern Arnhem Land, Ypakurlangu, and Alice Springs

Eastern Arnhem Land (Miwatji) and Ypakulangu are two important regions within the Territory whose history illustrates the forces that have shaped indigenous geography in the area and the resulting settlement patterns. Arnhem Land is a geographic and cultural region in the Territory's northeast, with the majority of the population concentrated in settlements along its vast coastline. These settlements are increasingly remote, with limited access during the wet season. Designated an Aboriginal Reserve in 1931, the region's settlement was heavily influenced by six primary mission settlements that attracted indigenous residents from the surrounding areas through the provision of services and amenities. Despite the geographic shifts, indigenous culture has remained strong, typified by a strong outstation and homelands movement in 1970's and 1980's (Memmott and Moran 2001).

Yapakurlangu, in contrast with coastal Arnhem Land, is a primarily pastoral area of rural, inland settlements. The area is a mix of Aboriginal Reserves, private land, and reclaimed land from the Land Rights movement. Rather than the missionaries, the government was a key driver in settlement pattern, moving many indigenous residents to reserves in the mid 20th century. In addition, private landowners played a significant role, as indigenous residents would settle in and around working stations, where they would find employment, until the 1960's.⁹ This region also contains family outstations on reclaimed land and concentrated settlement in and around the town of Tennant Creek, which is the region's main service center (Memmott and Moran 2001).

A third geographic region within the Territory is the desert communities in the Alice Springs area. While this area represents an important part of the Territory's indigenous population, its distinct climate, geography, and settlement patterns pose a set of challenges different from those of the Central and Northern regions, regions that tend to have more in common. To develop an understanding of the unique challenges of this third region requires a specialized knowledge and first-hand experience beyond the scope of my research.

Figure 2: Arnhem Land Aboriginal Reserve (1931)



Source: Thomson 2003, 23

⁹ Until new laws required, among other things, fair compensation for indigenous workers, who had been working at a fraction of the cost of a non-indigenous worker. As result, demand for indigenous work decreased (Anthony 2004).

Designated an Aboriginal Reserve in 1931, Arnhem Land has maintained a strong indigenous culture. However, an influx of missionaries (and the establishment of missions) drastically altered settlement and living patterns.

Conclusion

While there are many variations of indigenous settlement in the Territory, what remains consistent is the rapid shift, in the course of less than 100 years, from small, mobile clan groups living in the bush to increased clustering of residents in communities due to a variety of outside forces. This artificial settlement often depended on support from outsiders for services, including the missions, landowners, and the government. While Land Rights opened up a greater possibility to return to outstations, homelands, and a more a traditional lifestyle, by this time many indigenous residents had become accustomed to the greater level of services and opportunities available in the settlements, which had become home. However, with the disappearance of the station work in the 60's (and aside from a few mining operations), these areas offer extremely limited economic opportunities (Anthony 2004). As a result, government support comprises the majority of the local economy.

Despite the heavy influence of outside forces on indigenous settlement, indigenous spatial and social patterns, particularly in remote areas, continue to vary significantly from those of non-indigenous Australians. One key difference is a high level of mobility by the population, who will not only move from one household to another within a community, but also between communities. As a result, it is important to view modern day indigenous settlement in the Territory in a regional context – regions defined by kinship networks that provide individuals with economic and social support (Memmott and Moran 2001).

PART II: THE STRATEGIC INDIGENOUS HOUSING AND INFRASTRUCTURE PROGRAM (SIHIP) AND ITS CRITICS

INTRODUCTION

The Strategic Indigenous Housing and Infrastructure Program (“SIHIP” or the “Program”) is a \$672million joint initiative by the Australian and Territory Governments to improve housing in remote indigenous communities throughout the Territory. Between 2008 and 2013, SIHIP aims to provide 750 new houses, 230 rebuilds of existing houses, and 2,500 refurbishments across 73 distinct communities. In 2009, SIHIP was incorporated under a larger, national program, the National Partnership for Remote Indigenous Housing (the “National Partnership”), which has committed \$1.7billion to housing and infrastructure to the Territory. While the National Partnership has broadened the scope of SIHIP through additional funding and programming, SIHIP remains at the core of the National Partnership, its housing strategy, program structure, and underlying thinking.

At the time of its inception, SIHIP was the largest indigenous housing project in Australia’s history and marked a substantial shift in the government’s strategy toward housing in indigenous communities in the Territory. While “housing-related essential service infrastructures” was a key initial component, an early realignment of the Program took the infrastructure aspect out of SIHIP (transferring it to the National Partnership) before any significant investment could be made, subsequently turning SIHIP into a housing-focused program (FaHCSIA 2009, 8).

More than just a housing project, however, SIHIP was developed in response to the substantial social disadvantage experienced by indigenous Australians living in remote communities throughout the Territory. At the time of the Program’s development (2007-2008), the extent and severity of the situation in the Territory had garnered national attention, prompting increased public pressure on the government to act decisively. The government identified housing conditions as a key underlying factor of a number of the most pressing social issues, including health and education:

“Overcrowding and disrepair of houses in remote communities is rife, contributing to significant health and education problems. We must improve housing standards if we are to close the gap¹⁰ on Indigenous disadvantage” (Macklin, Henderson, and Snowdon 2008).

SIHIP has 7 key goals, summarized below (FaHCSIA 2009, 11):

1. Reducing overcrowding in the communities
2. Improving the quality of housing
3. Developing employment and training opportunities
4. Completing the Program within five years
5. Reducing costs of construction and maintenance
6. Improving housing delivery through a new approach and framework
7. Fostering positive relationships, openness, transparency and understanding local needs

Due to its size and scope, SIHIP is a complex program with profound implications not only for housing but also for the future of indigenous Territorians. To understand these implications, it is necessary to analyze both the Program itself and, more importantly, the broader context from which it emerged and continues to evolve. This requires looking closely at the forces and people that shaped SIHIP, its impact on the ground, and its long-term ramifications.

Through such an analysis, this thesis will demonstrate that underlying the story of SIHIP are powerful dynamics of distance and control, both with regards to the government’s struggle in reconciling the two forces and their impact on indigenous Australians in the Territory and beyond. In addition, SIHIP represents a tremendous shift in the relationship between the government and indigenous communities that will have lasting impacts for generations to come.

PROGRAM ORIGINS & EARLY CONTEXT

Before analyzing the structure and results of the Program, it is important to look at SIHIP’s origins and early context in order to frame its evolution and its impact.

¹⁰ The term “close the gap” is commonly used, more often in the official context of the Council of Australian Government’s (COAG) Closing the Gap: National Indigenous Reform Agreement (“Closing the Gap”) – a broad agenda to reduce indigenous disadvantage in areas such as education, housing and health. This includes the National Partnership Agreements and Closing the Gap in the Territory, among others (FaHCSIA 2012a).

Community Housing and Infrastructure Program (CHIP)

Prior to SIHIP, Community Housing and Infrastructure Program (CHIP) was the primary program that provided housing, housing related essential service infrastructure (e.g. water, power, sewerage, transport access), and service delivery in indigenous communities across Australia, including those on “former Aboriginal reserves, missions, [and] traditional land” (PWC 2007, 16). Its focus was on “meet[ing] the housing needs of Indigenous people unable to access the mainstream public housing programmes, the private rental market, or purchase their own home (PWC 2007, 16).” CHIP funds were “channeled through a complex mix of state government departments, state housing authorities, private contractors and Indigenous Community Housing Organizations” (PWC 2007, 16).

However, prompted by the recommendations of a review by the firm PricewaterhouseCoopers entitled *Living in the Sunburnt Country* (2007) (the “CHIP Review”), CHIP was disbanded due to ineffectiveness and inefficiency. Despite this fact, CHIP and, more importantly, the CHIP Review substantially impacted the direction of indigenous housing:

“The CIHIP review outlines proposals to significantly reshape the Commonwealth Government’s Indigenous housing programme” (Long, Memmott, and Selig 2007, 3).

The CHIP Review underpins much of the thinking behind the government’s current approach to remote indigenous communities and its influence can be seen in the later SIHP and SIHIP programs. Five key contributions of the Review include:

1. Focusing attention on remote indigenous communities and connecting housing to social issues:

“The greatest level of need for assistance amongst Indigenous Australians for housing... continues to be for those who have remained on former reserves and missions in remote communities. Many of these are the same communities that face related problems of poverty, overcrowding, domestic violence and preventable illness and disease” (PWC 2007, 16, 23-24).

2. Calling for future housing and infrastructure to be linked with the provision of essential services, transportation, and “basic support systems such as law and order, education, training, employment and health” (PWC 2007, 16, 23-24).

3. Questioning the capacity and effectiveness of Indigenous Community Housing Organizations and the viability of community ownership of land and housing, noting the “constraints caused by community

title over land and housing,” and, in turn, calling for “increas[ing] the supply of public housing through transfer of community housing to public housing...” (PWC 2007, 16, 23-24).

4. Proposing creating incentives for indigenous Australians to move to more ‘sustainable’ locations. This included the recommendation to:

“Continue the shift away from building housing on ‘on country’ outstations and homelands and focus on building new housing where there is access to education, health, law and order and other basic services” (PWC 2007, 16, 23-24).

5. Calling for a three-year, ‘one-off’ program to add new housing and repair existing housing to deal with issues such as overcrowding and poor housing quality.

The Strategic Interventions Housing Program (SIHP)¹¹

A key result of CHIP was the emergence of the Strategic Interventions Housing Program (SIHP) in 2007.¹² SIHP marks the acknowledgement by both the Territory and Australian governments of the specific need for a large-scale investment in remote indigenous housing. SIHP committed \$193million of joint Territory and Australian Government funding for the construction, refurbishment, land servicing, and infrastructure in remote indigenous communities. This was a clear departure from the previous approach under CHIP, where funding was provided by the Australian government to the States (and Territories) and indigenous communities to be distributed, as needed, across the range of indigenous housing needs. These initiatives were typically smaller scale and completed on a community-by-community level (ANAO 2011, 42; Davidson et. al. 2011, 20).

SIHP, spurred by the CHIP Review, marked the beginning of an important shift in indigenous housing in the Territory. First, it was a recognition by both the Territory and Federal governments that the situation in *remote* indigenous communities warranted special attention and funding. Second, it was a recognition that addressing the issue would require an increased level of partnership between the two governments.

¹¹ The program has been referred to both as SIHP and SIP (Strategic Interventions Program) (ANAO 2011, 44; Davidson et al. 2011, 76).

Furthermore, SIHP marked a shift in the approach to housing delivery in remote communities, through a new 'Strategic Alliances' contracting model. The model was proposed by an outside consulting firm who had been hired to prepare a 'Program Delivery Strategy' document for SIHP (Davidson et al. 2011, 17). Rather than use traditional lump sum contracting, typically done on a project-by-project basis with an individual contractor chosen competitive bidding process, the alliance model utilizes contracting consortiums that compete for construction packages and work collaboratively during the life of the project (Davidson et al. 2011, 17-18). This highly centralized model is a clear response to the complexity of CHIP, criticized in the CHIP Review. However, for the alliance model to work, it required a project of a size and scale far beyond previous remote housing efforts in the Territory – a project like SIHP. However, before SIHP could get off the ground, the political climate in the NT shifted tremendously.

LITTLE CHILDREN ARE SACRED AND THE 'INTERVENTION'

Little Children are Sacred

On June 15, 2007, the Northern Territory Board of Inquiry into the Protection of Aboriginal Children from Sexual Abuse ("NT Board of Inquiry") released the *Ampe Akelyernemane Meke Mekarle "Little Children are Sacred"* ("*Little Children are Sacred*") report, a 320-page document detailing the severe problem of child sexual abuse occurring in indigenous communities in the Territory. The report highlighted many factors contributing to the dire situation, including housing:

"Child sexual abuse is serious, widespread and often unreported... Much of the violence and sexual abuse occurring in Territory communities is a reflection of past, current and continuing social problems that have developed over many decades... The combined effects of poor health, alcohol and drug abuse, unemployment, gambling, pornography, poor education and housing, and a general loss of identity and control have contributed to violence and to sexual abuse in many forms (NT Board of Inquiry 2007a)"

Highlighting the extreme urgency of the situation, the report stated that a severe housing shortage had resulted in widespread overcrowding in indigenous households. More importantly, the report noted a direct link between overcrowding and social dysfunction:

"The shortage of indigenous housing in remote, regional, and urban parts of the Territory is nothing short of disastrous and desperate. The present level of

overcrowding in houses has a direct impact on family and sexual violence, substance abuse and chronic illness, and results in devastating outcomes in terms of education and employment (NT Board of Inquiry 2007b, 195).”

The report painted the picture of a situation out of control and called for the government to greatly expand its efforts to provide more and better quality housing.

The ‘Intervention’

Little Children are Sacred garnered national headlines, bringing a situation that had been relatively hidden in the Territory to the national forefront. Six days later on June 21, 2007, the Australian government put forward the *National Emergency Response Bill 2007* (the “Emergency Response” or the “Intervention”), which passed in August of 2007. The Emergency Response declared a ‘national emergency’ in the Territory and allowed the Australian government to override Territory laws governing indigenous communities.¹³ While there is debate over the motivation behind the Intervention, it marked a tremendous shift in the role of the federal government in remote indigenous communities, including (HREOC 2007; Law Council of Australia 2012):

- Implementing a high level of social control by suspending the *1975 Racial Discrimination Act*, including bans on alcohol and pornography
- Wiping out 40 years of policy focused on indigenous independence and self-management by reinserting Australian Government governance in the communities
- Increasing involvement by the Australian Government in areas typically managed by the Territory Government
- Gaining tremendous control over land and housing through compulsory five-year leases

Directly, the Emergency Response greatly increased government control in Aboriginal communities. Indirectly, it brought the problems in indigenous communities to the national forefront, resulting in:

- Increased funding

¹³ The ‘Territory’ (as opposed to ‘State’) designation of the Territory allows the Australian Government a tremendous level of control: “Unlike the states, whose powers are defined through the Constitution, the powers of these territories are defined in Australian Government law which grants them the right of self-government. This also means that the Australian Government can alter or revoke these powers at will” (Australian Government 2012).

- Increased scrutiny
- Increased political urgency

While not directly related to housing, the mandatory five-year leases set the stage for the possibility for a large-scale government housing program with centralized ownership and control. Furthermore, the Intervention sent indigenous issues to the forefront of national politics in a manner that it had not over the last 10 years, as it “provided the first sign of the Howard government [in power since 1996] taking any significant interest in aboriginal affairs” (SBS World News Australia 2009).

2007 MOU: THE BONES OF SIHIP

Shortly after the Emergency Response was passed, the Australian Government and Territory Government signed a *Memorandum of Understanding on Indigenous Housing, Accommodation, and Related Services* (the “MOU”). The MOU committed \$793million in Australian Government funds¹⁴ under the (soon to be defunct) CHIP and Australian Remote Indigenous Accommodation (ARIA would replace CHIP) Programs, in addition to \$100million committed by the Territory (Australian and Territory Governments 2007, 1). The over fourfold increase in financial commitment between the MOU and SIHIP in just a few months illustrates the sudden increase in government priority, with regards to indigenous housing, that occurred post-*Little Children Are Sacred*.

Most importantly, the MOU set out much of the framework that would shape SIHIP, particularly in the Project’s early stages, including management, funding, and guiding principles, including (Australian and Territory Governments 2007, 1-6):

- Transferring the responsibility of program implementation to the Territory Government, as it stated:
 - The Australian Government will have no further responsibility for the delivery of Indigenous housing, municipal, essential and infrastructure services in the Territory from 1 July 2008
- Outlining the levels of housing intervention and cost assumptions:

¹⁴This included \$279.2million in federal funding that had already been committed under existing programs plus an additional \$513.8million in new funding. Of the new funding, \$414.2million was allocated to new construction, repairs, and upgrade (Australian and Territory Governments 2007, 1-2).

- Minor repairs: \$20,000 per house
- Major upgrades: \$63,000 per house
- Replacement: \$300,000 per house
- New house: \$300,000 plus \$60,000-\$100,000 in land servicing
- Using a strategic alliancing model
- Establishing a Joint Steering Committee (JSC) to oversee the process
- Signaling the shift from “Indigenous community-controlled housing to a public housing model,” which required a transfer of ownership of all new and existing housing to Territory Housing and a leasehold agreement on the land (up to 99 year leases for the larger communities).
- Defining different ‘levels’ of communities:
 - Main urban centers (including town camps)
 - Larger/strategically placed growth communities
 - The balance of the 73 emergency response communities
 - Other (around 500+ outstation communities)
- Outlining communities by level of ‘priority:’
 - First Order Priority: main urban centers and larger/strategically placed growth communities– repairs and upgrades of existing stock to [industry] standard and new housing to meet existing demand and future growth
 - Second Order Priority: smaller communities – repairs and upgrades to acceptable standards. New housing on a case-by-case basis as negotiated and agreed (e.g. Lease-purchase agreements)
 - Third Order Priority: other communities (including outstations/homelands). These communities will have access to Housing on Indigenous Land (HOIL) program funds. No Australian Government funding will be provided to construct housing on outstations/homelands¹⁵

The MOU has broader implications both for SIHIP and the larger narrative of distance and control. First, it transferred housing ownership, management, and delivery to the Territory Government from local indigenous corporations – both a tremendous break in post-Land Rights policy and increase in government control on-the-ground for up to 99 years (by, in essence, reducing physical distance).

¹⁵ While this policy towards outstations/homelands would later change, it was a significant statement at the time.

Second, the Australian government was distancing itself from remote housing, placing responsibility squarely in the hands of the Territory Government. All of a sudden, the Territory Government found itself in charge of an unprecedented and extremely complex task. The MOU also created the management and delivery structure – a structure built on many layers of bureaucracy, creating distance between stakeholders. This structure, along with the cost assumptions (and to a lesser degree, the housing categories), would change significantly in SIHIP’s early stages. Finally, by defining a community hierarchy and priority communities, the two governments were determining the direction of future settlement geography. In essence, by concentrating resources on larger communities, the government would be able to channel (or control) future growth toward these denser, more accessible (and more non-indigenous in form) communities and away from smaller communities or hard to access outstations (and more traditional living and spatial patterns).

Finally, and arguably most importantly, the MOU was a clear signal to indigenous communities that future housing policy decisions would be made (and imposed) by the government without community input. In short, the government would have complete control:

“Communications with Indigenous communities, and more generally with the Territory public, about the new funding being offered under ARIA, the changed delivery arrangements and the priorities for the delivery of housing in different communities, will be jointly developed and delivered by the Australian and Territory Governments” (Australian and Territory Governments 2007, 6).

KEY RELATED INITIATIVES

Shire Reform

In 2008, the Territory Government announced a widespread governmental reform that abolished nearly 60 indigenous community councils in the Territory, replacing them with eight large shires (municipalities). The shires would take over local government services, and – through an agreement with the Northern Territory Department of Housing, Local Government, and Regional Services (DHLGRS) – housing services (including repairs, maintenance, and tenancy management (Elvin et al. 2010, 3)).

The reform marked a tremendous recentralization of government control over communities that had previously operated with much greater autonomy. Furthermore, it marked a collapse of distance between the government and indigenous communities, as shire offices were opened in both regional

and local locations (offices included both indigenous and non-indigenous employees, depending on locality).

Growth Towns

A key aspect of the MOU is the designation of the “larger/strategically placed growth communities” as a ‘First Order Priority’ (Australian and Territory Governments 2007, 4). To understand the thinking behind this approach, one must consider the Territory’s ‘Growth Town’ strategy, which is part of the Working Future initiative, which falls under the broader Closing the Gap set of initiatives.

Under this strategy, the Territory Government has chosen 21 growth towns and will focus on three key elements, as stated in its *Territory Growth Towns Factsheet*:

1. Properly planned and designed towns
2. Services, buildings and facilities available as in any country town
3. Targeted investment in infrastructure

In essence, the growth town strategy is to concentrate government services and resources in centralized areas that will service the surrounding communities:

“Territory Growth Towns will provide services to all people living in that region, just like regional centres elsewhere in Australia. People from the surrounding region will access schools, police stations, courts, health services, aged care and disability facilities, the Internet and good transport options in their regional town” (Northern Territory Government 2012b).

The growth towns are a significant departure from the homeland and outstation movement of the 1970’s and 1980’s and the return to smaller, more distant, and more traditional settlements with minimal services and access.

This new approach, in combination with the 2007 MOU’s decision to stop providing Australian Government support to outstations, is a clear signal, by both governments, regarding the direction of future settlement. At the root of the growth town movement is reducing distance by controlling services. By focusing resources in the 21 towns, the government is prioritizing centralized indigenous development patterns (i.e. by implicitly encouraging indigenous Australians to move to these towns to be closer to services). In other words, it is hoping that these towns will serve as a centralized magnet,

pulling people in closer. Focusing services on more central, accessible areas reduces government distance from the population in inaccessible areas, allowing for more standardized (and less costly) service delivery and maintenance. Indirectly (or directly), however, it is using service delivery as mechanism to increase control and oversight of the indigenous population – a pattern long reinforced by past government policy.

Despite the importance of the growth town strategy, however, it is unclear that increased services and amenities *will* attract indigenous residents to the more centralized towns – residents that have not already been attracted despite the relative advantage in services and amenities that already exist in the towns.

While the growth town strategy (initiated in 2009) officially came later than the MOU and SIHIP, it fits closely in line with the strategies initiated by the CHIP Review, the MOU, and SIHIP and will have profound implications on indigenous Territorians. Not surprisingly, there is substantial overlap between SIHIP priority communities and designated growth towns.

Figure 3: SIHIP Major Works Communities and Territory Growth Towns

Communities	SIHIP Major Works	Territory Growth Towns
Angurugu	✓	✓
Galiwin'ku	✓	✓
Gapuwiyak	✓	✓
Gunbalyana	✓	✓
Hermannsburg	✓	✓
Lajamanu	✓	✓
Maningrida	✓	✓
Milingimbi	✓	✓
Nguiu	✓	✓
Ngukurr	✓	✓
Numbulwar	✓	✓
Umbakumba	✓	✓
Wadeye	✓	✓
Yirrkala	✓	✓
Milyakburra	✓	
Yuendumu	✓	✓
Ali Curung		✓
Borooloa		✓
Daguragu/Kalkarindji		✓
Elliot		✓
Papunya		✓
Ramingining		✓

Source: Adapted from Northern Territory Government 2012; FaCHSIA 2009, 36

SIHIP: 'A LANDMARK HOUSING PROJECT'

Following the MOU, in April of 2008, the Australian and Territory Governments announced a 'landmark housing project' that would commit \$647 million (later raised to \$672) to provide housing, infrastructure, and employment throughout 73 remote communities in the Territory. This program was SIHIP. Under the new program, 16 communities would receive 'major capital works' and an additional 57 to receive 'capital upgrades.' In total, SIHIP would construct 750 new houses, 'rebuild' 230, and 'refurbish' 2500. While the Australian Government would be the primary funder of SIHIP, the Territory would be charge of project management and delivery. The work would be completed over a period of five years. A final key aspect of the Program was that, in order to receive major works, communities

would be required to sign long-term leases (Macklin, Henderson, and Snowdon 2008). SIHIP was a realization of many of the key principles and guidelines outlined in the MOU and, additionally, must always be viewed within the later emerging growth town context.

Goals and Mechanisms

As noted previously, SIHIP was driven by seven key goals, which would be achieved in the following fashion (FaHCSIA 2009, 7-11, 20; FaHCSIA 2012b):

Goal 1. Reducing overcrowding by providing 750 new houses in the 16 major works communities:¹⁶ The form, size, and design would vary by community, but would follow the standards and guidelines by the detailed *National Indigenous Housing Guide*. Spatially, the distribution would vary depending on a variety of factors, including available land, flooding, cultural considerations, and quantity allotted. Wadeye, for example, was slated to receive a large new subdivision, while Ngukurr, for example, would receive primarily infill housing (and half the amount of Wadeye). Finally, depending on the community, these new homes would either add to the housing stock or replace existing homes that were demolished due to being in a condition deemed by the government as ‘beyond economic repair’ (or “BER”) (i.e. it was more cost effective to demolish the house than repair it due to a variety of structural reasons). A key aspect of the major works designation, however, was that in order to receive the funding communities would need to sign a long-term lease agreement with the government.

Goal 2. Improving quality by ‘rebuilding’ 230 homes with resolvable structural issues and ‘refurbishing’ 2500 homes: Each of the 16 major works communities were eligible for new, rebuilt,¹⁷ and refurbished homes, however the 57 capital upgrade communities were only eligible for refurbishments. Rebuilds would provide extensive renovation, restoring homes to their full, original functionality, while refurbishments would be more cosmetic, including upgrading the kitchen, wet areas (bathroom and

¹⁶ Speaking with government officials, I was commonly told that new housing was allocated to communities with the greatest need (i.e. overcrowding, lowest quality housing stock). However, these communities are typically the largest of the SIHIP communities and, as noted previously, overlap significantly with SIHIP growth towns. Furthermore, the distribution of new housing between the 16 communities varies greatly.

¹⁷ Initially, the government had intended to focus on new housing and refurbishments. However, as the Program developed it was soon realized that the outsized cost of the new housing would greatly limit the amount of new homes that could be built. In an effort to stretch their money and the existing housing further, the government determined that homes that could be repaired without being demolished would be ‘rebuilt’ (Randall 2011).

showers), and minor interior repairs and painting.¹⁸ The idea was to bring these homes up to an “appropriate standard.”

Goal 3. Developing employment and training opportunities through requiring a minimum 20% indigenous employment at work sites, providing worker training, and utilizing indigenous contractors when possible.

Goals 4, 5, and 6. Key to completing the Program in five years, reducing construction and maintenance costs, and improving delivery and management of housing in remote communities is the strategic alliance structure.

Goal 7. The seventh and final goal of “achiev[ing] positive relationships... with openness and transparency, and an understanding of local needs,” was one of the key aspects of SIHIP (FaHCSIA 2009, 11). To accomplish this, extensive community engagement was proposed. Furthermore, Housing Reference Groups (HRG’s) would be formed, containing leading members of each community that would work with the government on a variety of issues, including the allotment of housing and repairs (within the particular community), the design of new housing, the location of housing, and other related issues.¹⁹

Defining Overcrowding

“Most housing in remote communities has had to provide functioning facilities to cater for between 12-16 permanent occupants” (DHLGRS 2010, 23).

SIHIP’s primary goal is to reduce overcrowding. However, an analysis of how overcrowding is defined demonstrates that the current definition is both loosely applied (control) and is disconnected from the experience of indigenous Australians (distance).

While not clearly defined under SIHIP, overcrowding has been defined under the National Partnership, which defines the term by three key indicators (ANAO 2011, 73):

¹⁸ One key decision was that the outside of refurbished homes would not be repainted (Randall 2011). This soon became a major point of contention and visible (negative) symbol of SIHIP.

¹⁹ To receive a new home, community members applied to the local (shire) housing office, which then referred them to the HRG’s who would advocate on behalf of the community member to the government (Maude 2011).

- The average occupancy rate
- The incidence of homelessness
- The ABS definition of overcrowding

The average occupancy rate, a household-wide indicator, is the primary indicator used by the National Partnership. However, this indicator is a relative term, lacking a baseline standard of comparison (e.g. a household might have 10 occupants and five bedrooms or 10 occupants and two bedrooms – a tremendous difference in terms of overcrowding). The National Partnership currently estimates an occupancy rate of 10.7 persons per household across indigenous communities in the Territory, with the goal being to reduce the rate to 9.3 persons per household over the course the program (ANAO 2011, 128). However, without knowing the amount of bedrooms, it is difficult to determine whether reducing the rate from 10.7 to 9.3 qualifies as ‘reducing overcrowding’ or, rather, just reducing the crowdedness of still overcrowded households.

Due to the unclear nature of household occupancy measurement, it is necessary to look at the National Partnership’s third criteria – overcrowding on a per-bedroom basis as defined by the ABS. The ABS uses the Canadian National Occupancy Standard (CNOS) which defines household bedroom requirements as (ABS 2011):

- No more than two persons per bedroom
- Children less than 5 years of age of different sexes may reasonably share a bedroom
- Children less than 18 years of age and of the same sex may reasonably share a bedroom
- Single household members aged 18 years and over should have a separate bedroom, as should parents or couples

Based on the above criteria, the ABS determines how many additional bedrooms a house will need. Any home in need of at least one extra bedroom is deemed overcrowded (ABS 2011). The CNOS definition is a rigid definition of overcrowding with a clear baseline measurement. As a result, overcrowding cannot be defined in a relative manner – a household either *is* overcrowded or it *is not*. In short, overcrowding can only be eliminated, rather than reduced. However, through utilizing multiple criteria, focusing on household rather than bedroom occupancy, and linking the goal of reduced overcrowding to *new* homes (versus aggregate homes or additional bedrooms), the Australian and Territory Governments are creating ambiguity with regards to how ‘overcrowding’ is defined and presented to the public. This lack

of clarity allows the potential to exert a form of control over the public discourse surrounding overcrowding.

Finally, despite the more clearly defined density standards of the CNOS, it may not be directly applicable to remote indigenous households:

“The structure of Indigenous households in remote communities is different to that of non-indigenous households. It is not uncommon for each house to be occupied by 2 or 3 separate families or by sub groups of the larger extended family (DHLGRS 2010, 21 quoting Smith 2005).

In addition to their typically larger size and complexity, indigenous households are further characterized by (DHLGRS 2010, 20-26):

- High levels of spatial mobility of household members
- High and fluctuating household numbers
- Households organized around linear kinship networks rather than a ‘nuclear family’ model

In response, Memmott et al. calls for a “model of crowding that is based on the stress component of crowding rather than the density model. Household crowding stress is a culturally determined phenomenon [i.e. “perceived stressful densities” may vary], whereas a density model is determined only by numbers of inhabitants arbitrarily allotted sleeping space in certain combinations of numbers and genders” (Memmott et al. 2011, 1, 5).

At the core of crowding-related stress is the idea of spatial distance and personal control:

“Density becomes annoying or stressful when it threatens, removes, or reduces personal control and consequently the outcome of desired types of behaviours” (Memmott et al. 2011, 12-13).

Finally, perceived density does not only apply within households, but also on neighborhood, and town levels (Memmott et al., 10).

Indigenous Housing Design

Indigenous housing design was a key initial component of SIHIP. Furthermore, SIHIP provided an unprecedented opportunity to incorporate the wealth of indigenous housing research in Australia and to do so on a tremendous scale. At the core of indigenous design is the influence of distance and control. First, there is the notion of difference (or distance) between non-indigenous design and indigenous

design and the many factors influencing factors. Second, there is both distance between communities (geographical and cultural) and, more importantly, distance *within* them (clan, kinship, family, gender). Third, as noted previously with regards to overcrowding, there can often be distance between the individual and 'his (or her)' house, due to high levels of inter and intra-community mobility. At the core, however, is the concept of personal control and the influence of housing in facilitating (or harming) it.

As noted in *An Audit and Review of Australian Indigenous Housing Research*, much of Australian housing research to date has focused on remote and very remote areas, with a particular emphasis on the Territory. Key areas of emphasis have been (Long, Memmott, and Selig 2007):

- Indigenous housing design and occupation and use of housing
- Housing management, performance, and home ownership
- Linking housing to quality of life issues, with an emphasis on health outcomes

Recognizing the wealth of literature and research regarding the importance of culturally sensitive design, the Territory Government hired well-respected architect and researcher Julian Wigley, an expert in the field of indigenous housing, to help write the *Housing Design Guidelines for Remote Public Housing in the NT* (the "Design Guidelines"). This guide was meant to specifically inform design tailored to remote indigenous residents. More importantly, design input from the HRG's would play a prominent role in the new program. The key objectives of the Design Guidelines were (DHLGRS 2010, 20-44):

1. Cultural and social fit
2. Safety and security
3. Responsive to climate
4. Support for healthy living
5. Accessibility
6. Economic sustainability
7. Environmental sustainability

The first tenant of achieving a cultural and social fit is consistent with indigenous housing research and its focus on importance of housing design responding to the unique differences across various scales, as noted in the Design Guidelines (DHLGRS 2010, 20-26):

1. The difference between indigenous domestic behavior from non-indigenous:

“The major characteristic of Indigenous everyday domestic behavior is the preference for outdoor living, the practice of maintaining avoidance behaviors, the different family and household structures, preferred sleeping and food preparation arrangements and differing responses to death” (DHLGRS 2010, 20-44).

2. The unique differences between communities:

“It is necessary to understand the rules operating in a community before designing for them...” (DHLGRS 2010, 20-44).

For example, “Some communities maintain strictly controlled patterns of social interaction between groups” (DHLGRS 2010, 20-44), including skin groups, language groups, gender, and age groups. Key to this control, within the community, is maintaining distance.

3. The unique differences within the community:

“All communities in the Territory maintain land use arrangements that are determined by clan skin, estate ownership, or family groupings. The kinship system has been, and still is the principal determining factor in the patterns of spatial behavior” (DHLGRS 2010, 20-44).

Wadeye, for example, is home to 22 land owning clan groups (from the region), who speak five languages and four dialects (Australian and Territory Governments 2011a). Distance, therefore, is not only central to the household design, but also in terms of the location of the homes. As a result, the Design Guidelines call for attention to be paid to ‘Settlement Planning.’

Finally, without the ability to maintain distance, indigenous Australians can face the threat of a loss of personal control:

“Cultural and social practices and sensitivities have a significant impact on Indigenous housing. If these issues are ignored and the housing fails to provide basic levels of personal control, internally as well as externally, the house itself can be a contributing factor in increasing stress levels in the community” (DHLGRS 2010, 20-26).

Land Tenure

Beyond the core goals of SIHIP was the recurrent issue of using housing as leverage to increase control. Central to SIHIP (and as foreshadowed by the MOU) was government ownership of land. As stated by the Australian Government, “Security of tenure will be a key element in allocating this funding,” noting further that (Macklin, Henderson, and Snowdon 2008):

“A lease over community housing ensures that Government has the necessary level of access to and control over land so that new houses can be built, and existing houses can be maintained. It also enables fairer property and tenancy management arrangements to be put in place” (FaHCSIA 2010).

While all communities were required to sign five-year leases under the Emergency Response, SIHIP required that major works communities sign leases with a minimum term of 40 years in order to receive the designated funding. While 40-year leases were acceptable, the government preferred that communities sign 99-year leases, which would ensure an unprecedented level and longevity of clearly defined (and certain) government control in indigenous housing (and presence in the communities). To incentivize this process, the government created a two-tiered system.

Tier 1: The first tier were communities that signed 40-year leases, the most common form called a ‘housing precinct lease:’

“Housing precinct leases are only intended to cover existing and future areas of community housing” (FaHCSIA 2010).

These leases can either be held by the Territory Government or the Executive Director of Township Leasing, who signs and manages on behalf of the Australian Government. More importantly, the government pays no rent:

“No rent is paid for a section 19 housing precinct lease, in recognition of the significant Government investment in housing under this type of lease” (FaHCSIA 2010).

Despite this fact, the government offers the option to sign longer-term leases in exchange for rent:

“However, this lease can include a conditional rent clause so rent can be paid for a housing lease, if a whole-of-township lease is entered into within a certain period” (FaHCSIA 2010).

Tier 2: 'Whole-of-township leases,' which can last between 40-99 years, is the government's preferred option. The lease covers the entirety of the current community boundaries (as opposed to just housing-related land), including "sufficient area to accommodate new housing and business subdivisions (FaHCSIA 2010)." As noted above, to incentive this, the government offers rent payments in the following form:

"Leases concluded to date have included an upfront lease payment to cover the initial 15 years of the lease. From year 16, traditional owners are entitled to all rental income received by the EDTL for subleases in the township (less operating costs)" (FaHCSIA 2010).

Whole-township-leases are central to the government's strategy of economic development under the growth town model, as the lease opens up community land for potential outside (or local) investment. Furthermore, the long-term nature of the leases allow for greater control and security over one's investment:

"A township lease 'unlocks' the land and opens up the opportunity for individuals, families and businesses to hold long term transferable subleases over specific parcels of land. As a result, a mortgage can be obtained to buy or build houses, or start businesses" (FaHCSIA 2010).

Despite the incentives, the majority of SIHIP major works communities (10 out of 16) have chosen to sign 40-year housing precinct leases, limiting government control (in a relative sense) but still receiving the capital investment. Only four of the SIHIP communities have chosen whole of township leases, with three of those four located on Groote Eylandt (the remaining two were in negotiations as of November, 2011) (ANAO 2011, 164-165).²⁰

There are a few potential explanations for this outcome. According to Kim Hill of the Northern Land Council (NLC),²¹ whose organization represents 8 of the 10 communities that signed housing precinct leases, one reason for this difference was the differing capacity of the four Land Councils across the Territory:

²⁰ In addition to the original 16 communities, due to the increased funding provided by the National Partnership, two additional communities and three town camps have also qualified to receive major works (ANAO 2011, 164-5).

²¹ See Part III for further information about the NLC.

“The reason why some have signed for 99 years and some have only signed for 40 years is merely because the administration or the representative bodies - i.e. their Land Council's capacity to negotiate, their capacity to actually fully understand what they're actually entering into.”

Calling the signing of the 99-year leases by certain Councils a “failing,” Kim put forward an explanation why many communities passed on the whole-of-township leases [and potential payments]:

“The shorter leases are merely to enable future generations to decide” (Hill 2010).

Alternatively, however, it is possible that the other communities (and Councils) *prioritized* the financial investment over the ability to reassess the arrangement in a shorter time period. In contrast, as the arguably most powerful Land Council in Australia, the NLC may have its own priorities and an interest in maintaining control. It is possible, therefore, that the communities under the NLC lacked the capacity to negotiate *with the NLC*. While further research is required to determine the influencing/motivating factors behind the lease decisions, it is important to remember that issues of control may not only emanate from the government, but also within the indigenous community and its political structure.

Funding Allocation

The SIHIP funding allocation further demonstrates the clear prioritization toward the 16 major works communities. Under the initial allocation announced in April of 2008, \$420 million was dedicated to the 16 major works communities (average of \$26.25 million per community) while only \$124million was allotted to the 57 refurbishment communities (average of \$2.18 million per community) (Macklin, Henderson, and Snowdon 2008).²² In short, through SIHIP, the message was that community size and density equals power moving forward.

²² These figures reflect the Australian Government's original contribution. This was subsequently increased by \$25million plus \$100million from the NT Government (FaHCSIA 2009, 14). Despite this fact, one can assume the relative distribution of funding has remained similar due to the disproportionate cost of new housing versus refurbishment. Furthermore, while breakdowns of the allotments per package can be found under the Australian National Audit Office's report, *Implementation of the National Partnership Agreement on Remote Indigenous Housing in the Territory* (2011), it is difficult to obtain information about the breakdown of funding *within* each package, as often times major works and minor works communities are grouped into one package (and major works communities can also receive three levels of works). Therefore, the statistics released in April of 2008 are useful, as they show investment overwhelmingly favoring the 16 primary communities (ANAO 2011, 49).

Original Leadership Structure

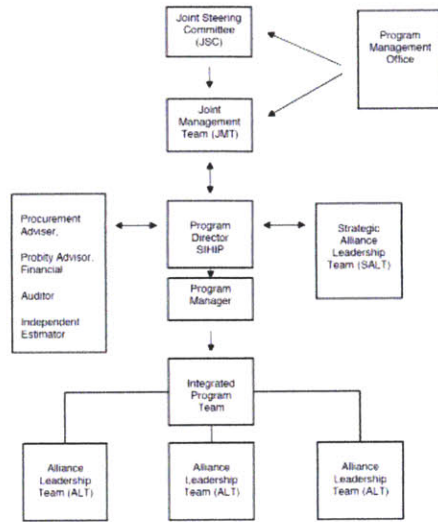
SIHIP was rolled out with a complex leadership structure with multiple layers (Figure 3). This structure would later change (Figure 4). However, a brief analysis of this is helpful as it illustrates a key force – bureaucratic distance – that would greatly impact the crucial early stages of the Program.

At the head of SIHIP was a Joint Steering Committee (JSC), comprised of seven total members of both the Territory (4) and Australian (3) governments across a variety of departments. The primary role of the JSC was to choose the contractors and allocate packages of works.

Directly below the JSC, was a Joint Management team with an additional seven Northern Territory Government members and three Australian government members. Below them was the SIHP Program Director, then Program Manager, then Integrated Project Team, then Alliance Leadership Team. Alongside these layers were three distinct review and advisory bodies of varying levels of independence, including one of mixed NT and Australian government and outside contractors.

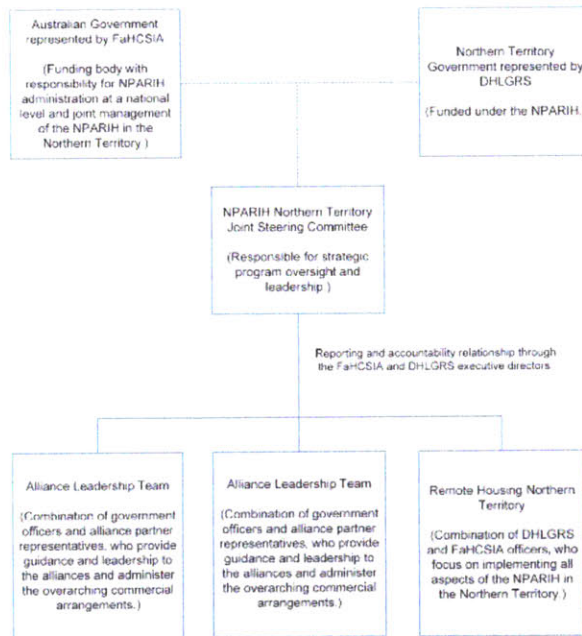
All told, there were six layers of decision makers, multiple bodies made up of NT and Australian government employees, and a myriad of advisors and oversight all at the leadership level and all based out of Darwin or Canberra (the national capital).

Figure 3: Original SIHIP Governance and Advisory Structure



Source: FaHCSIA 2009, 24

Figure 4: Revised SIHIP Governance and Advisory Structure



Source: ANAO 2011, 61

Outside Consultants

It is important to note that the Northern Territory Government hired a number of outside consultants to perform a wide range of essential duties in the early stages of SIHIP. This decision would later come under scrutiny.

SIHIP Construction Contracting

When announced, SIHIP was called a “new era for delivering housing in the bush” and that “for the first time, Government, industry and communities will work in partnership to ensure that benefits are delivered where they're needed the most” (Macklin, Henderson, and Snowdon 2008). Key to this new model was the strategic alliancing structure. This structure was possible due to the unprecedented centralization of control and scale of works of SIHIP. Key benefits of this were thought to be (FaHCSIA 2009, 12):

- Sharing of cost risks and no singling out for fault/blame
- Performance incentives, benchmarking/measurement, shared knowledge, continuous improvement
- Economies of scale

Rather than bid on each community separately, alliance ‘teams’ would bid on larger construction packages, each containing work in multiple communities. Package estimates were based on the scope of works within a package region and included all work and overhead, representing millions of dollars.

In October 2008, the JSC chose three teams, New Futures Alliance, Territory Alliance and Earth Connect Alliance (or collectively, the “Alliances”). However, Earth Connect Alliance was removed in the early stages of SIHIP due to concerns over their ability to deliver houses within the required timeframe (Burns 2011).

EARLY SIHIP, CRITICISM, AND REVIEWS

Due to the political, social, and financial context from which it emerged, SIHIP faced high expectations from the outset. However, the Program was slow to get off the ground due to a combination of the complexity of the task, the layers of bureaucracy, and the lack of experience and capacity by the Territory Government. As a result, in July of 2009, two years after the MOU was signed and 15 months after the “landmark program” was announced, SIHIP began to face a wave of criticism that would soon

become synonymous with the Program. Furthermore, the criticism came on a national level, with *The Australian* newspaper running an article titled “Costs erode 70pc of indigenous housing fund” and the news program *Lateline* reporting that, “SIHIP hasn't delivered single house” (Robinson 2009; Bolton 2009). These reports painted a picture of government inefficiency, ineptitude, and lack of transparency, claiming, among other things, that 70 percent of SIHIP’s budget would be consumed by administration costs and, despite the elapsed time, that no new houses had yet been built under SIHIP (Robinson 2009). The fallout from the reports and mounting criticism was harsh and widespread, resulting in the firing of the SIHIP director, calls for the Federal Minister for Indigenous Affairs to resign, and threatened the stability of the Territory’s Labor government (McLaughlin 2009).

2009 Review: A Change in Direction

In response to the growing public controversy surrounding SIHIP, the Australian and Territory Governments initiated a detailed review of SIHIP carried out by a member of both governments. The *Strategic Indigenous Housing and Infrastructure Program – Review of Program Performance* (the “Review”), released in August of 2009, focused primarily on concerns over program delays, excessive bureaucracy, and bloated construction and administrative costs. More importantly, the reviewers were given the mandate that their recommendations would be implemented (FaHCSIA 2009, 9).

The review changed the direction of SIHIP significantly. One of the key results of the review was directing SIHIP’s focus to the public housing model, which it currently employs (i.e. standardized housing and greater control over spending). This was a shift away from the initial approach, where the government would allocate a housing budget for each community but allow the community (in consultation with the government) to define how the money should be spent (Executive Director 2011). One key aspect of this early approach was incorporating the community’s input into the design of potential homes. However this community-by-community approach resulted in a wide range of designs and housing sizes, which the government felt would be difficult to implement and would limit the amount of new homes and impact on the communities. In response, the government and contractors reworked the housing designs that, while smaller, would allow for greater overall numbers of houses (Executive Director 2011).

Furthermore, the Review brought into focus significant capacity issues by the Northern Territory Government, calling for “substantially greater involvement by the Australian Government...now required including strong oversight at the day to day operational level” (FaHCSIA 2009, 6). The

recommendation of increased control by the Australian government marked a significant shift away from the initial approach of the MOU and National Partnership, which had placed the Program implementation squarely in the hands of the Territory Government. However, an increase in bureaucratic involvement was not sufficient, rather the report recommended that the physical distance between the two bodies of government be collapsed, suggesting that “a senior Commonwealth officer [be] embedded in the SIHIP program management team and Commonwealth officers [be] directly involved in each Alliance Leadership Team” (FaHCSIA 2009, 6).

Central to the mismanagement was the Northern Territory Government’s use of outside consultants to handle crucial, on-the-ground responsibilities, including community engagement and employment and workforce development. Regarding community engagement, the report noted that: “While Alliance Partners have made strong efforts to engage with communities the private sector should not be required to represent Government in engagement on key policy matters” (FaHCSIA 2009, 6). By using consultants to do the on-the-ground work, the Territory Government had created tremendous physical distance between the government and the communities.

Finally, the report noted:

“It is clear that in the development of the initial packages of works an imbalance emerged between program objectives. Elements such as design and community engagement were elevated to the detriment of the unit cost required to achieve program targets, thereby skewing program outcomes. The fact that this imbalance occurred points to a lack of effective oversight at the delivery level and a need to restructure the Program governance and management arrangements” (FaHCSIA 2009, 6).

This last statement had a tremendous impact on SIHIP resulted in multiple key outcomes:

- Community input in design was greatly curtailed, subsequently limiting (or eliminating) the potential for indigenous-sensitive design and greatly reduced the role of the Housing Reference Groups
- Restructuring the management of the Program, reducing bureaucratic distance between the leadership team

- Physically embedding Australian Government staff on regional and community levels. This included the establishment of an important position, Government Business Manager, “whose role includes trying to ensure coordinated service delivery ‘on-the-ground’” (Donald and Canty-Waldron 2010, 8). Government Business Managers live in the communities full-time and act as key liaisons between the community and various levels of government
- Raising cost estimates of new homes to \$450,000
- Causing a major shakeup. Less than a year later it was observed, “Only a very small number of people have been in place since the beginning of the Program” (Donald and Canty-Waldron 2010, 8)
- Turned SIHIP into a project focused on housing, the Review:
 - “Determined that the revised program budget will focus on housing. Costs associated with housing related essential services infrastructure to support new houses and improve existing service provision will be determined in the national audit of municipal and essential services being undertaken as part of the National Partnership and sourced initially from the National Partnership and Territory Government programs” (FaHCSIA 2009, 8)

However, while the review identified a number of key areas that required improvement and concluded that the project must be “refocused,” it determined that “the overall program design is sound” (FaHCSIA 2009, 9).

Figure 5: SIHIP Targets Post-Review

SIHIP element	Target	Av. Unit cost	Total
New houses	750	\$450,000	\$337,500,000
Rebuilds	230	\$200,000	\$46,000,000
Refurbishments	2,500	\$75,000	\$187,500,000
Project management	8 % of program budget		\$53,760,000
Contingency			\$47,240,000
TOTAL			\$672,000,000

Source: Donald and Canty-Waldron 2010, 10

PART III: WHY IS SIHIP HARD TO IMPLEMENT? INTERVIEWS AND CASE STUDIES

INTRODUCTION

Despite its effort to engage the local indigenous community, SIHIP is a top-down, government-driven initiative. As a result, to better understand the Program, it is essential to look at it from the perspective of some of the key actors that have influenced SIHIP at the political, policy, and program level and the impact on-the-ground.

The narrative of SIHIP's background and context demonstrates the underlying tension of distance and control at a macro political and policy level that shaped the Program. Key overarching themes include:

- Shift in control over housing
- Geographic shift in living patterns characterized by increased centralization and reducing distance
- Struggle for control within levels of government
- Bureaucratic and physical distance

The Program's early implementation, reviews, and restructuring illustrated the unresolved nature of those forces and their evolution. To better understand SIHIP, it is essential look at the role of the individuals involved in the project, the various forces that they encountered, and how that impacted or influenced their role in the SIHIP story – from government policy makers to residents in the communities.

This analysis will focus on players in two geographic areas – Darwin, the central command of SIHIP, and three indigenous communities, Beswick, Barunga, and Ngukurr, that I spent time in.

DARWIN: A VIEW FROM THE TOP

Darwin

While SIHIP is focused on remote indigenous communities, much of the Program was developed in (and is managed from) Darwin by primarily non-indigenous policy makers. During my research, I met with a number of these key policy makers, who offered unique insights into the Program.

Remote Housing NT

The management and implementation of the Program is the responsibility of Remote Housing NT, a sub-department of the Department of Housing, Local Government and Regional Service (DHLGRS). SIHIP is run from DHLGRS's head office in downtown Darwin. Decisions are then channeled through regional offices in Nhulunbuy, Katherine, Tennant Creek, and Alice Springs. At the helm of Remote Housing NT is the Executive Director,²³ who took over the position in 2009 during the Review, after the previous Executive Director was released due to the political fallout from the Program's early missteps. The Executive Director sees his responsibility as twofold: managing a large-scale construction project and dealing with the Program's critics (Executive Director 2011). By the time of my site visits in August 2011, SIHIP had picked up considerable momentum with 326 new houses completed (and 208 underway) and 643 houses refurbished or rebuilt (and 64 underway)(Burns, 2011). However, despite the Program's advancement, the political pressure and public scrutiny that has characterized SIHIP from its inception remained. The Executive Director attributed much of the criticism to a mismatch between the expectations of the Program and its realities, recognizing that the Program may have been oversold at its inception. However, it was evident that there was a sense of frustration within the department that the public perception of the Program had not changed substantially despite the adjustments and progress made since the Review (Executive Director 2011).

This sense of frustration was even stronger in the Alliance Leadership Team Director for the New Futures Alliance (the "ALT Director"),²⁴ who manages the allocation of construction packages to New Futures. Also based out of the DHLGRS office in Darwin, the ALT Director works closely with the Executive Director and SIHIP leadership. Regarding perception, the ALT Director commented that the

²³ Name not used for privacy purposes.

²⁴ Ibid.

public (whose primary source of information is the media), is often unaware of many of the Program's successes, which were evident on the ground but difficult to measure (and therefore unreported). For example, the ALT Director noted that efforts to cluster clan groups in Wadeye had resulted in reduced conflict within the community (ALT Director 2011). Both the Executive Director and the ALT Director hoped that as the project moved forward, targets were met, and people moved into their homes, public sentiment would catch up (Executive Director 2011; ALT Director 2011).

Ultimately, the Executive Director noted, the success of SIHIP rested on its ability to implement and manage the public housing model and to sustain investment over the long term. Both the Executive Director and ALT Director acknowledged the limitations of the Program and the difficult choices that had been made. This included the Program's decision to focus resources in particular communities, placing residents in smaller communities in the position to either move to the larger communities or remain with limited resources. In addition, they noted that while two key goals of the Program are reducing overcrowding and improving housing conditions, the end results would be modest due to the poor initial condition of many of the houses, costs, and budgetary tradeoffs (Executive Director 2011; ALT Director 2011).

Northern Territory Housing Minister

While not directly involved in the day-to-day of management SIHIP, another key player in Darwin is the Northern Territory Minister for Public and Affordable Housing, Chris Burns. Similar to the Executive Director, Minister Burns assumed his role as Housing Minister during the shakeup surrounding the Review. Upon assuming responsibility, Minister Burns' primary role in SIHIP was managing the Program at a macro policy level, working with key stakeholders (including the Commonwealth government, Joint Steering Committee, Alliances, and Executive Director) to ensure that the Program moved forward. Aside from his managerial role, one key aspect of the job is acting as an advocate for SIHIP, including securing funding and defending the Program publicly. Minister Burns acknowledged criticisms of program regarding transparency, costs, and slow implementation, but noted that the Program was improving and delivering housing. He felt the future of indigenous housing depended on continued funding from the Australian Government. Minister Burns recognized the potential for alternative models, aside from the current public housing model, and the benefits of homeownership down the road (Burns 2011).

Speaking to Minister Burns, it was clear he saw SIHIP within the broader context, as he was removed from the day-to-day operations. This contrasted with the Executive Director and ALT Director who were much more focused on outputs, targets (timelines), and public perceptions.

Northern Land Council (NLC)

Underlying SIHIP is the issue of land rights and tenancy. At the heart of the land rights issue in the Territory is the Northern Land Council (NLC), an organization that helps indigenous Australians acquire and manage traditional land in the northern half of the Territory. While not directly involved in SIHIP, the NLC represents traditional owners in many of the SIHIP designated communities. Furthermore, it offers one of the few organized indigenous voices at a high political level, particularly within the Territory. Kim Hill, the NLC's CEO and Aboriginal himself, offered an alternative perspective on SIHIP and the housing strategy in the NT – a perspective that contrasted with the view from the government side:

“Government sees the delivery of service to Aboriginal people mainly as a means of providing and dealing with their social conscience. There is no economics, no environmental or cultural reasons government is providing houses. It's merely based on social conscience, where the... overcrowding of houses have gone on for too long” (Hill 2011).

Responding to the growth town strategy:

“It means assimilation. It's quite simple. The government did this back in the 1950's and 40's, where they more or less herded people into a community. Or the missionaries herded people into a community. The government is doing the same process but using different names. So they're calling these growth-towns. Back in the old days, they used to call them missions” (Hill 2011).

Speaking with Kim, the complexity of reconciling two very distinct cultures was evident. On one hand, Kim noted, that housing was not as important to indigenous Australians as non-indigenous. However, he talked about the need for greater government support. Furthermore, he talked about the need for forward-thinking town planning that took cultural considerations into account (Hill 2011).

BARUNGA, BESWICK, AND NGUKURR: A VIEW FROM THE GROUND

During my research in the Territory, I had the opportunity to spend time in three indigenous settlements in the Katherine region: Ngukurr, Barunga, and Beswick. While these settlements fall within the same geographic region, they have unique differences that highlight many of the key forces at play in SIHIP.

Barunga and Beswick: Current Situation

Barunga and Beswick (also known as Wugularr) are two indigenous communities located along the Arnhem Highway, 81 and 111 kilometers (respectively) southeast of the town of Katherine in the Territory's 'Top End.' Katherine, which lies 312 kilometers south of Darwin along the Stuart Highway (the Territory's main highway that links Darwin and Alice Springs), is the Territory's fourth largest town (2011 population 9,967) and the major urban center for the region (ABS 2012a). Katherine is surrounded by a number of smaller indigenous settlements, including Beswick and Barunga, which rely heavily on Katherine for goods and services. There is good quality road access to Beswick and Barunga from Katherine, with 52 kilometers of the trip along the Stuart Highway, and the remainder along a one-lane sealed road. As a result, the journey between the communities and Katherine is relatively short, (approximately one hour to Barunga and an additional 30 minutes to Beswick) by private automobile, daily bus service, or even taxi (at an estimated \$220.00 each way (Roper Gulf 2012a), taxi rides are very expensive, though not uncommon). However, during the wet season, access can be limited or nonexistent, as flooding can often cut off Barunga for up to a day, while Beswick can be isolated for a substantial portion of the wet season due to the flooding of the nearby Waterhouse River (Roper Gulf 2012a; Roper Gulf 2012b).

Despite their relatively close proximity to Katherine, Beswick and Barunga are very different in character. Rural in nature and with estimated populations of 282 and 391, Barunga and Beswick resemble small country towns in comparison to their more urbanized and bustling regional center (ABS 2007).²⁵ While Katherine has a primarily non-indigenous population (as of 2006, approximately 24% of Katherine residents, including adjacent Town Camp residents, are indigenous), Barunga and Beswick are almost entirely indigenous, with 91.8% and 97.2% of the communities' residents identifying as

²⁵ Estimates come from the 2006 Australian Census (ABS 2007). However, estimates by local organizations typically place the population of each community at around 500 each (from first-hand experience, Beswick is certainly larger than Barunga).

indigenous (ABS 2007). Furthermore, the communities have limited amenities, with each containing a school, shire office, health clinic, sports grounds, and small local store. While basic needs are met within the settlements, residents must go to Katherine to find a broader range of goods and services, including supermarkets, pharmacies, clothing stores, the hospital, courts, and bus transportation to elsewhere in the Territory.

Barunga and Beswick: History

Similar to indigenous communities throughout the Territory, the history of Barunga and Beswick, in their current form, is an extremely recent one – one shaped strongly by outside influences. For example, Mary and Marnie,²⁶ key community leaders both now in their 50's, were born in the bush, with Mary citing her birthplace as "Katherine River." Prior to moving to Barunga and Beswick, their families lived in the bush near cattle stations where their fathers were able to find work. It was not until the late 1960's and early 1970's that they moved to the communities in which they now live. Asked why her family moved to Barunga, Mary noted that they were encouraged to by non-indigenous settlers (Mary 2011; Marnie 2011).

Along with the recent shift in settlement patterns came a shift in housing. Marnie, for example, had never lived in a house before the 1970s. Furthermore, these early houses, built by the government were typically tin sheds, with more permanent structures coming later (Marnie 2011).

Barunga and Beswick: Housing and SIHIP

Despite being located within 30 minutes of each other (during the dry season), the recent trajectory of the two towns has varied significantly. Despite its location further from Katherine and its reduced accessibility during the wet season, Beswick has gained population (357 in 2001, 391 in 2006) while Barunga has lost residents (from 346 in 2001, to 282 in 2006) (ABS 2003; ABS 2007). While the population statistics must be considered within context, the general sentiment of Barunga's decline and Beswick's growth was echoed by community leaders (Mary 2011; Marnie 2011). According to Barunga leaders the community's current 282 residents are a stark contrast with the population during the town's heyday of the 1960's to 1980's, when, according to community leaders, the community contained up to 1000 members (Mary 2011). These leaders attribute the shift to a number of factors,

²⁶ Real names not used for privacy purposes.

including the reinstatement of Land Rights, which enabled residents to move back to their traditional lands. Furthermore, they note that Barunga has had difficulty retaining its young people, who are drawn to the more active areas of Katherine and Beswick. For example, while Barunga is a 'dry' community (i.e. no alcohol), Beswick has a social club that is allowed to sell limited quantities of alcohol, while Katherine has many liquor stores and pubs and less stringent alcohol restrictions. Barunga leaders believe that this difference attracts residents away from the settlement to Beswick and Katherine. However, despite the population shifts, both settlements face similar problems of limited housing and the resulting overcrowding that is common across most remote indigenous communities (Mary 2011; Marnie 2011).

Despite their relative proximity to Katherine (relative in the context of the Territory), Beswick and Barunga are considered 'very remote' communities by the Australian government as defined by ARIA. This is the case because Katherine itself, while large in the context of the Territory, is still considered by ARIA, which uses a national context, as 'remote' (AIFS 2011). With regards to SIHIP, the combination of very remote status, an overwhelming majority indigenous population, and a total population over 100,²⁷ Barunga and Beswick fit the selection criteria for funding.

According to Roper Gulf Shire, the housing situation in Beswick and Barunga is characterized as:²⁸

- Beswick: 60 houses are in the community, most of the homes are in need of some form of renovation, painting and/or maintenance. Houses are generally 15 – 20 years old. Some homes contain Asbestos. The older homes only have one bathroom with the newer houses under 5 – 7 years have 2 bathrooms (Roper Gulf 2012b).
- Barunga: 54 houses are in the community... Houses are generally 20-25 years old. Houses have termite and black ant problems and cockroach infestation continues to be a major problem despite pesticide spraying up to 4 times a year (Roper Gulf 2012a).

As noted previously, under SIHIP there are 16 major works communities and 57 refurbishment communities. As refurbishment communities, Barunga and Beswick will not receive any new housing or

²⁷ Having a population over 100 people is not an official criterion of SIHIP, but is used in this case to illustrate that, despite their small size, both communities are among the 73 largest indigenous communities in the Territory (and therefore were subject to increased restrictions under the Intervention).

²⁸ While there are no dates to these assessments, my estimation is that it was done around 2008, soon after the shires were formed. This is based on the fact that the assessment (extended version) mentions SIHIP, but indicates that work has not yet started (Roper Gulf 2012a).

rebuilt under SIHIP. Construction work in Barunga and Beswick falls under the 'Ngukurr and other refurbishments package,' which includes major works (new construction, rebuilds, and refurbishments) in Ngukurr and Lajamanu as well as refurbishments in 16 additional communities (including Beswick and Barunga) (FaHCSIA 2012). As of June 2011, \$45million had been allocated to this package under the National Partnership. This work includes 53 new houses, 26 rebuilds, and 280 refurbished homes (ANAO 2011, 48). With regards to Barunga and Beswick, the packaging of construction work makes it difficult to assess actual amount of investment that each community will receive, particularly with regards to refurbishments. However, with \$30million of the package publicly committed to Ngukurr (Henderson 2010), it is evident that the remaining \$15million will be spread thin between the major works in Lajamanu and the remaining 16 refurbishment-only communities. With regards to Beswick and Barunga, it is likely that only a small portion of the 104 existing homes in the two communities will receive upgrades through SIHIP.

This disparity in funding and work allocation between communities highlights many of the issues at the core of SIHIP. While those involved in SIHIP commonly note that the Program's criteria for funding allocation was needs based, it is very much a relative distinction. For one, the issue of overcrowding is present in both Barunga and Beswick, however this issue will not be alleviated through SIHIP due to the lack of additional housing stock. For example, I met with one community leader who, in her 60's and with failing health, shared her home with 10 other family members, including her sick son, three daughters and their five children – in a three-bedroom home. With just three bedrooms, this results in multiple people family members sharing bedrooms with others sleeping in the living room. Illustrating the chaos of the situation and the sheer volume of people, when asked how many people lived in her house, the community leader didn't know right away, rather having count each person individually. This situation is not uncommon in Barunga, as she noted another of her sons shares a home with 11 other people, including his children and grandchildren, mother-in-law, and three other women who are sick. Sickness is a common theme throughout indigenous Australia, a factor that many attribute to the overcrowded and stressful living conditions in settlements that put multiple generations together in a single home or bedroom (Gladys 2011).

With such a pressing overcrowding problem in both communities, the leaders felt that both Barunga and Beswick would have benefitted from new housing under SIHIP (Mary 2011; Marnie 2011; Gladys 2011).²⁹ Instead, both were designated as a refurbishment community and grouped together with 16 other communities. As there are no publicly available assessments of each community and their needs under SIHIP, the official rationale behind the decisions for each community remain unclear. Therefore, to understand possible explanations for why Barunga and Beswick are not receiving more funding through SIHIP, one must consider them within the context of other remote communities. I will look at Barunga to illustrate this thinking.

Barunga is a small settlement and therefore must compete for government attention and SIHIP funding with the larger settlements with their increased visibility and political power. In addition, the town's long-term population decline contrasts with many other communities who are faced with growing populations. This is not lost to community leaders who note the government focusing its efforts and resources on the larger, growing communities (Mary 2011).

From the government's perspective, it may be that, while the overcrowding situation in Barunga is bad, it may not be *as bad* as the situation in other communities such as Ngukurr, for example, which has an average occupancy of 15 people per three bedroom (Roper Gulf 2012). Next, with a shrinking population, Barunga's overcrowding situation will, in theory, not increase. In contrast, population growth is such a pressing issue in many of the SIHIP communities.

While Barunga leaders recognize their disadvantaged position, it is unclear if the government has clearly communicated this strategy to residents or if this has been revealed through experience. Speaking to Mary, also a member of Barunga's Housing Reference Group, there was a sense of frustration with the government's overall lack of responsiveness to the community and its needs, noting that meetings are infrequent and only occur at the government's directive. In addition, there was the sentiment that the government had made initial promises that they have subsequently been unable to deliver (i.e. they have reduced their proposed commitment over time). She noted that residents are aware of SIHIP's focus on reducing overcrowding (Mary 2011).

²⁹ Despite the population decline in Barunga, there was little evidence of reduced overcrowding in households or abandoned housing available for potential improvement/occupancy.

While it is possible to speculate, it is important to note that, beyond putting forward a 'needs-based' rationale, the government has not stated directly why some communities received the designation of major works while others were designated as refurbishment. Looking at SIHIP's top two priorities of reducing overcrowding and providing quality housing, one might assume that the major works communities had a much greater overcrowding and housing in worse condition. However, as demonstrated in Barunga, overcrowding is both a widespread and acute issue in virtually all remote communities. Clearly tradeoffs must be made in a project such as SIHIP, but it is essential that those rationales be conveyed in a transparent and straightforward fashion.

Ngukurr

Situated along the Roper River, and with an estimated population of 916 (ABS 2007) and 1,137 including the surrounding area (Australian and Northern Territory Governments 2011b, 12), Ngukurr is one of the larger communities under SIHIP. An assessment by Roper Gulf pre-SIHIP noted the extreme overcrowding, with an average occupancy of 15 persons per three bedroom household and widespread disrepair among the 105 existing homes (Roper Gulf 2012).

Located approximately four hours outside of Katherine (during the dry season) and cut off for up to 6 months a year due to flooding, Ngukurr is substantially more isolated than Barunga and Beswick, though not as isolated as its neighbor Numbulwar, which sits on the Gulf of Carpentaria an additional 156 kilometers east.³⁰ However, despite its remoteness, Ngukurr has the feel of a bustling small town due to its size, relative density, centralized services, construction, and minor tourist activity (people passing through to visit its Arts Center). Furthermore, the community boasts an airstrip, clear cell phone service, full electricity, hot water, and waste treatment. As a designated major works community, Ngukurr is slated to receive new houses, refurbishments, and rebuilds at a total cost of approximately \$30million (ABC 2010). Of the 53 new houses, 26 will be 2-bedroom and 27 will be 3-bedroom (ANAO 2011, 49). As

³⁰ Ngukurr can be accessed via a one-lane sealed bitumen road. In addition to private automobile access, there is private bus service available twice weekly that runs from Katherine to Ngukurr (and vice versa). However, while there is good quality road access to Ngukurr, it remains necessary to complete two river crossings to access the community. In the dry season, this can be completed with a four wheel drive, however during the wet season there is excessive flooding, which can cut road access to the community off entirely for up to six months. During this period, there is barge service, which take Ngukurr residents across the flooded river to an area where bus and car access remains viable.

of my visit in July 2011, the rebuilds and refurbishments in Ngukurr were complete and the contractors were preparing for receiving the materials and preparing the infrastructure for the new homes.

Ngukurr originates from the Roper River Mission, which was established in 1908 and moved to Ngukurr's current location in 1940 (due to flooding). The mission managed the settlement until 1968, when the Australian government took control of Ngukurr for the next 20 years. As occurred throughout many indigenous settlements during the 1980's, the government transferred control of Ngukurr to the local indigenous corporation, Yugul Mangi, in 1988. Yugul Mangi managed Ngukurr for the next 20 years, until the federal government seized control once again through the Emergency Response. The Roper Gulf Shire assumed control of local government in 2008 (FaHCSIA 2011b, 12).

In November 2010, in order to receive the designated funding under major works, the local governing council signed a 40-year housing precinct lease agreement with the Northern Territory Government (ANAO 2011, 164). The 40-year agreement, gave the Northern Territory Government control over all existing and future housing and housing-related land during the lease period.

As with all of the SIHIP communities, Ngukurr has an almost entirely indigenous population (93.9% indigenous) with a small population of non-indigenous residents that work in the community, including teachers, community workers, municipal workers, and the parish priest (ABS 2007). In addition, there is a full time Community Engagement Officer from the NT government and a full-time Government Business Manager from the Australian government to oversee SIHIP and liaise between the community and the government.

In addition to its major works designation, Ngukurr is also designated as a Territory growth town, which indicates that Ngukurr will be a major government priority moving forward. Due to its relative size and isolation, Ngukurr is the service center for 9 outstations and one smaller community with a 50-kilometer radius. As a result, it is a strategic service delivery center for Roper Gulf Shire (Northern Territory Government 2011).

Distance plays a central role in the implementation to SIHIP in Ngukurr. Ngukurr's remoteness and isolation poses significant logistical challenges for the New Futures Alliance who is in charge of the Ngukurr construction package. Due to the impact of the wet season, materials must be trucked in during the dry season and stockpiled. In addition, certain functions must be developed on-site, to accommodate the substantial construction during the phase of the new housing. In addition, the Alliance must provide full time accommodation, dining, offices, and support services for the full-time

managers, workers, and staff that remain on site during construction, which in Ngukurr's case will last multiple years.

Figure 6: Bathroom Pre-refurbishment, Ngukurr, May 2010



Photo courtesy of Jason Randall

Figure 7: Bathroom Post-Refurbishment, Ngukurr, September 2010

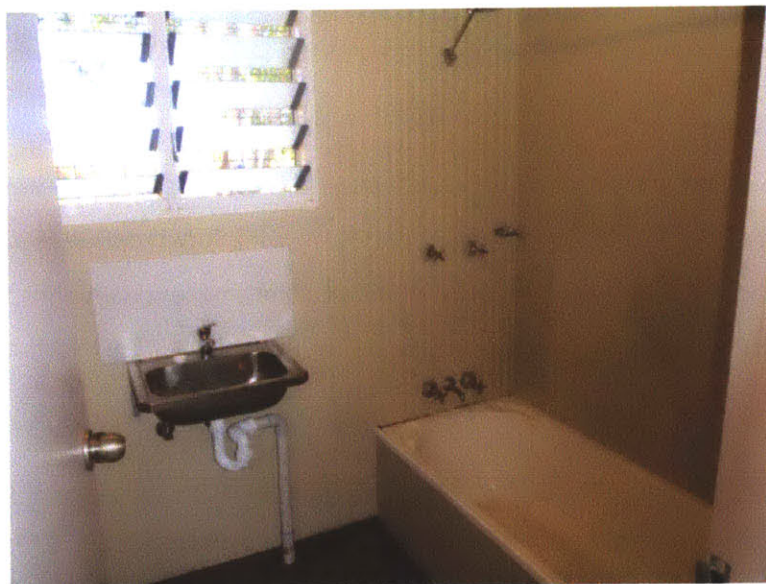


Photo courtesy of Jason Randall

Figure 8: Bathroom One Year Later, Ngukurr, August 2011



Photo courtesy of Jason Randall

Improvement of the housing stock is clearly needed. The above home received refurbishment funding under SIHIP. However, as is evident by the images, investment can quickly disappear, as many of the homes have high occupancy levels that overwhelm the 'upgraded,' infrastructure. This result is not surprising, as SIHIP did nothing to reduce occupancy in refurbishment homes nor add amenities or infrastructure to reduce the burden. This home, for example, features only one bathing area (w/ separate toilet) for 13 occupants (many of which are children). In wet areas, heavily mineralized water place an additional stress on the infrastructure (design and materials may also play a factor).

Figure 9: Family Bedroom Photo a, Ngukurr



Photo by Author

Figure 10: Family Bedroom Photo b, Ngukurr



Photo courtesy of Jason Randall

The reality of overcrowding is evident in many homes. The small bedroom above is shared by a family of five (mother, father, a newborn, and two small children). Another family of five shares a similar bedroom next door (with an additional two occupants in another bedroom and another in the living room). In such circumstances, the potential for overcrowding to cause stress is high. Loose mattresses are a common sight in many households. Often times they lean against a wall or stacked on one another to create additional space during the day. Despite the number of people, there are limited personal possessions.

Figure 6: House, Ngukurr



Photo by Author

This small Three-bedroom house fits 13 people. Houses in Ngukurr typically vary between aluminum siding and concrete block.

Figure 11: Outdoor Sleeping Areas, Beswick



Photo by Author

Overcrowding can result in the use outdoor areas for sleeping (tents under traditional shelter). Most homes have solar hot water. Access to services is strong in Beswick (note the satellite dish).

Figure 12: Concrete Block-Style Home, Beswick



Photo by Author

Older concrete block on ground slab home, one of a number of housing types in Beswick (estimated 15-20 years old).

Figure 13: Asbestos in Residential Buildings, Beswick



Photo by Author

Asbestos is present in many of the older houses built 15-20 years ago. Nevertheless, the homes remain occupied.

Figure 14: Living/Sleeping Area, Concrete Block Home, Beswick

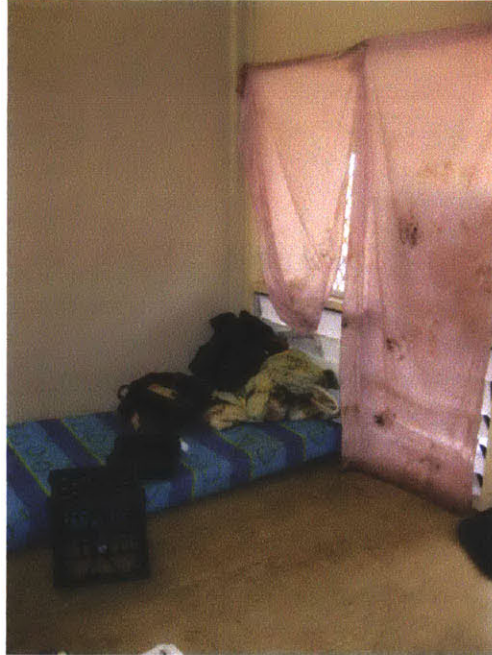


Photo by Author

High occupancy levels commonly result in household members sleeping in living room / kitchen area (front door to right, not pictured).

Figure 15: Home/office of Government Business Manager, Barunga



Photo by Author

Home/Office of Government Business Manager (GBM), Barunga. Many SIHIP communities have GBM's (who are employees of the Australian Government) living on-site, providing oversight, and serving as a liaison between the community and government.

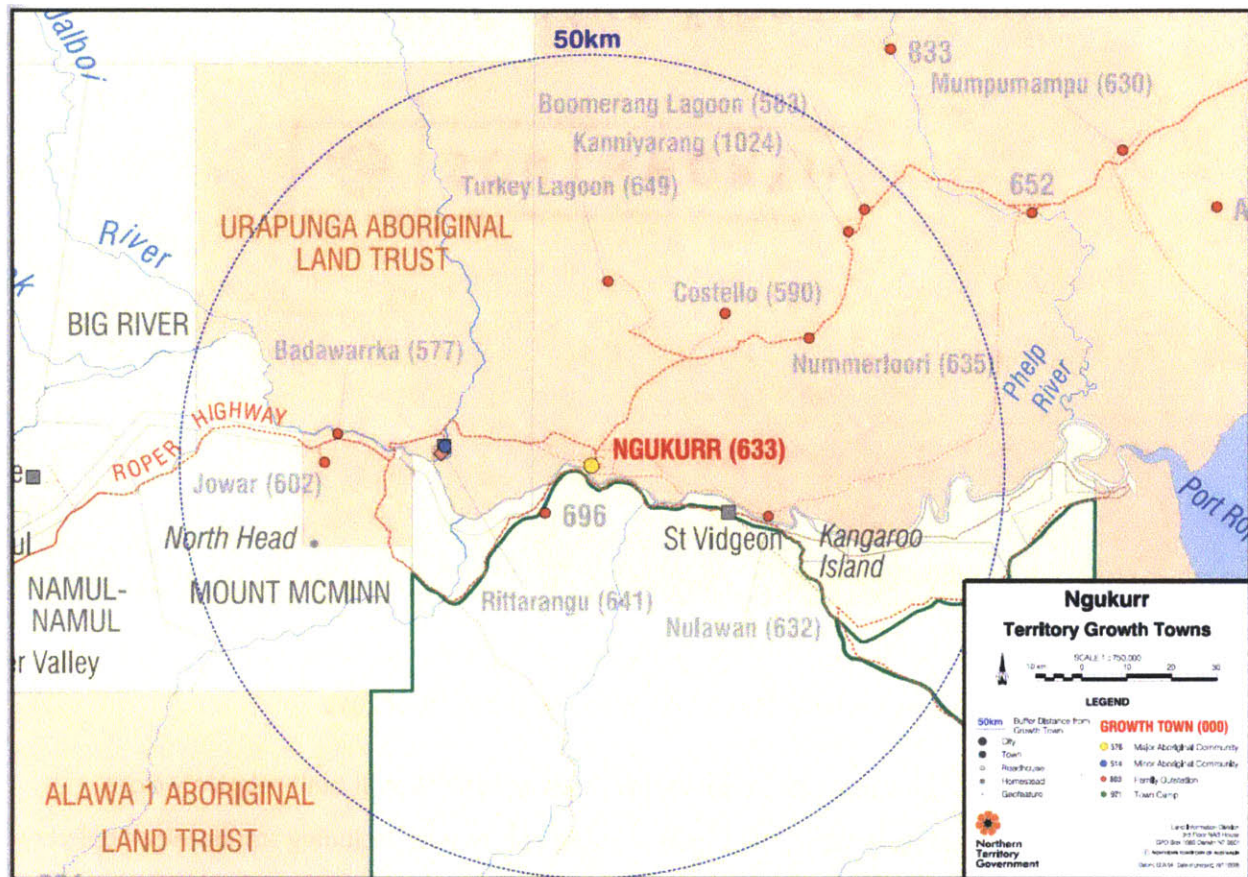
Figure 16: Alcohol Restriction Boundary



Photos by Author

Alcohol restriction signs are a common sight on the way to indigenous communities and provide a stark reminder of the Intervention (and government control). However, alcohol consumption (and alcoholism) remains a serious and present issue. The sign up ahead marks the legal boundary for alcohol consumption. Despite the distance (Barunga is an additional 30 minutes' drive and longer by walking), the boundary has become an area for drinking.

Figure 17: Ngukurr and Surrounding Communities and Outstations



Source: Northern Territory Government 2011

In profiles of individual growth towns, the NT government places a 50km buffer around each town. In 2010, the NT government estimated that 80% of outstations fall within a 50km radius of growth towns (Rebgetz 2011). Therefore, it can be assumed that the NT government sees 50km as the sphere of influence of each growth town. The outstations will rely on the growth towns for goods and services, including education and health. In the case of Ngukurr, there are 9 'Family Outstations' and one 'Minor

Aboriginal Community' (this community, Rittarangu, was designated for refurbishment work under SIHIP).

Figure 18: Aerial View of Ngukurr



Image credits: Northern Territory Government

Source: Northern Territory Government BushTel 2011

Despite of the vast spaces surrounding the community, housing in Ngukurr is built relatively close together, similar to a typical rural town. This is due to variety of reasons, including standardized delivery of services (water, sewer, etc.), flooding of the Roper River (left) during the wet season, and cultural and ceremonial reasons (restricting land use). These last two factors currently place significant boundaries on physical expansion of the town

Figure 19: Indigenous shelter, Arnhem Land, 1930's



Source: Thomson 2003, 63

Figure 20: Transitional housing, 1960's

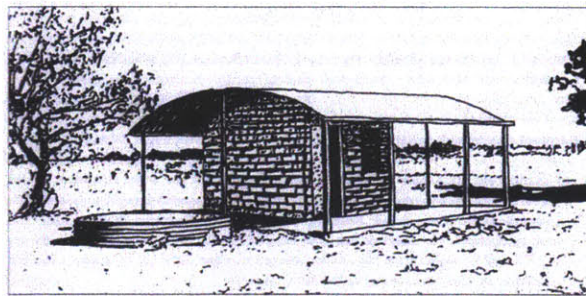


Figure 9.1 Igloo house, stage I, Yuendumu. (Courtesy Aboriginal Environments Research Centre, Photographic Archive.) The line drawings in this chapter were done by the author from the photographic originals.

Source: Keys 2000, 122

Figure 21: New housing underway, Ngukurr, March 2012



Source: Northern Territory Government 2012c

PART IV: ANALYSIS OF PROGRAM AND LESSONS OF DISTANCE AND CONTROL

SUMMARY

There are two parallel ways to analyze a large, complex program like SIHIP. First, is a traditional approach analyzing the Program's effectiveness to draw out lessons for future initiatives. More importantly, however, is looking at the layers underneath SIHIP. Through this second analysis, emerges the broader, underlying context of distance and control, their sub-themes and corresponding implications. This section will take both approaches, first analyzing SIHIP in terms of its key goals and next looking at the major themes.

GOAL-BASED ANALYSIS OF SIHIP

As SIHIP (and the broader National Partnership) is still in the process of development, this analysis will focus on four of the seven key goals that can be measured at this point in the process (both through research and on-the-ground experience), including housing outcomes and quality, social and economic outcomes, and relationships.

Goal 1: Reducing Overcrowding

As noted previously, the primary goal of SIHIP is to deliver "housing that meets residents' needs and effectively reduces overcrowding in selected communities" (FaHCSIA 2009, 11). Overcrowding was targeted by the government as it was seen as a key driver behind many of the social issues faced by indigenous community members, including poor health and hygiene, increased violence and stress, and reduced educational outcomes. More than anything, the goal of reduced overcrowding has come to define SIHIP, whether through government statements, the media, reports, and analysis.

In the end, however, it is evident that, despite meeting its housing targets, SIHIP will not address the issue of overcrowding in a lasting, meaningful manner due to the following reasons:

1. None of the 57 designated refurbishment communities will receive new housing. Therefore, no new bedrooms will be added to the existing stock (some bedrooms in poor condition may be 'reclaimed' through refurbishment and rebuilds, but additional bedrooms will not be added).

2. With the projected increase in population over the coming years per indigenous demographic trends, these communities will likely be even more overcrowded in the future.
Many of the communities receiving new housing are severely overcrowded (e.g. Ngukurr), therefore the new housing will have a minimal overall impact on the per-bedroom ratio (already substantially beyond the CNOS threshold).
3. In communities receiving new housing each new home constructed is not necessarily an addition to the overall housing stock. For its 53 new homes, Ngukurr will only gain an estimated eight bedrooms, as 39 of the new homes will be replacing existing houses that have been deemed as BER by the government and will be demolished (Henderson 2010).
1. While the 2009 Review required each package to have a minimum of 50% of three or more bedrooms (ANAO 2011, 49), the most recent numbers under the National Partnership demonstrate that most packages barely exceed this minimum.
2. Of the 587 approved new dwellings since the Review (ANAO 2011, 49):³¹
 - a. 2.7% are one-bedroom
 - b. 46.7% are two-bedroom
 - c. 50.3% are three-bedroom
 - d. 0.3% are four or more bedrooms
3. A weighted average yields an average of only 2.5 bedrooms per new home

These final statistics derived from the below table illustrate the extreme disjoint between the Program's stated objectives and its outputs. SIHIP's response to widespread overcrowding (its #1 stated goal) and the underlying social issues (the reason why overcrowding was targeted) was to allocate new homes that, at a budgeted cost of \$450,000 per home, would only yield an average of 2.5 bedrooms per home, in spite of:

- Communities such as Ngukurr that have average occupancy of 5 people *per bedroom* in a three-bedroom home (Roper Gulf 2012)
- Lack of clear mechanisms (or assumptions) that will ensure that the new homes do not absorb additional household members escaping overcrowded conditions

³¹ Excluding the Tiwi Islands.

- The Design Guidelines' #1 priority of 'achieving a cultural and social fit,' which includes, among other things, accommodating high household numbers and a growing population (DHLGRS 2010, 20)

In spite of the above, SIHIP has, post-Review, approved the construction of *two* four-bedroom homes in contrast to 274 two-bedrooms – a definitive indication that the Australian and Territory governments are willing to trade outcomes (reduced overcrowding) for outputs (greater housing numbers). It is clear SIHIP will not meaningfully impact household overcrowding.

Figure 8: Approved Packages of Works under National Partnership (November 2011)

Approved packages of works—number and type of new houses being constructed by community where scoped					
Community	Total number of new dwellings	One bedroom	Two bedrooms	Three bedrooms	Four or more bedrooms
Alice Springs Town Camps	85	–	42	43	–
Galiwinku	90	6	39	45	–
Groote Eylandt	80	–	39	41	–
Gunbalanya	62	–	31	30	1
Maningrida	110	10	45	55	–
Ngukurr	53	–	26	27	–
Tennant Creek	2	–	–	2	–
Tiwi Islands ¹	90	8	45	34	3
Wadeye	105	–	52	52	1
Total	677	24	319	329	5

Source: FaHCSIA

Note 1: All packages approved following the August 2009 review have at least 50 per cent of houses with three or more bedrooms. The Tiwi Islands package was approved prior to the review.

Source: ANAO 2011, 48

Goal 2: Improving Quality

The government saw quality of housing as a key platform – that without having this basic need met it would be difficult for indigenous families to improve their lives in other ways. Speaking to government officials, I was often referred to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, which lists human needs in five categories – from the most basic (physiological) to the highest (self-actualization). It states that the needs in the more basic categories (at the bottom) must first be met in order to realize the higher level of needs. The

two bottom rungs of the pyramid include 'sleep' and 'safety' – two areas affected by housing (Economist 2008).

In terms of quality, SIHIP's results have been mixed. Overall, the new housing has been well-received (Burns 2011) and is a substantial upgrade from the existing housing in many of the communities. While the new construction in Ngukurr had not been initiated while I was there, many of the houses that they were to replace were in virtually inhabitable condition (in one case, a household had a pet buffalo as a resident inside the house). It was evident speaking with people slated to receive new housing that it would be a very welcome improvement (Diane 2011). Despite this fact, oversight has been difficult at times and construction quality has varied. A recent report by ABC News Australia noted that "a number" of the new houses built will already require repairs due to faulty construction (Horn 2012).

More importantly, however is the issue of the 2500 refurbishments. While the refurbishments provide clearly needed (minor) repairs and interior upgrades (or return to functionality) to the heavily distressed homes across remote communities, Figures 5-7 in Part III (indicating the lifecycle within one year of a refurbished bathroom), demonstrate that these upgrades quickly begin to revert back to their original, pre-refurbishment state. Despite an allocation of \$75,000 per refurbishment, SIHIP is achieving few lasting benefits.

As noted in Figures 7-9, at the core of the issue is the fact that SIHIP refurbishments were not intended to improve the functionality of a house beyond its original capacity. As a result, homes that were clearly failing its residents were not changed in any fundamental manner, whether adding additional bedrooms or facilities to accommodate the high occupancy.

The same thing can be said for rebuilds. As noted before, through rebuilds SIHIP was able to 'reclaim' homes (and bedrooms) that might have been demolished. However, the rebuilds still only brought homes back to their original capacity (rather than adding to it). While many rebuilt were failing due to structural reasons (collapsing bathrooms in Ngukurr in one case), it can be assumed that they would face similar capacity and wear-and-tear issues as any other home one they got back 'online.'

Goal 3: Employment Opportunities

The lack of economic opportunities is a core issue in virtually all remote indigenous communities. In Ngukurr, for example, only 26% of the working age population was employed in 2010, with only 15% of eligible workers with full time positions (Australian and Northern Territory Governments 2011b, 48). As

a result, one of the key successes championed by SIHIP is surpassing its target of 20% (total) indigenous employment for construction and major refurbishment work – during 2010-2011 34% of the National Partnership construction workforce in the Territory was indigenous (ANAO 2011, 125). However it is unclear what local construction-related opportunities will be available once the SIHIP work is complete.

As noted previously, one requirement of the Alliances is that they provide training for local workers (with the goal of incorporating them into SIHIP). In Ngukurr, this program has been relatively successful, with over 15 trainees, many of which are young men who joined despite peer pressure *not* to participate (White 2011). At the same time, the New Futures Project Manager noted a significant capacity gap when the Alliance arrived (Aaron 2011). As a result, substantial training was necessary to bring the trainees up to the ability to help perform rehabilitation work. In the end, therefore, the overall level of expertise achieved by the completion of the Alliance’s time in Ngukurr may be lower than initially anticipated by SIHIP leadership.

Goal 7: Relationships, Transparency, and Understanding

As noted in the 2009 Review, the government’s initial approach to new housing was to consult with community members and design homes tailored to each community’s specific needs. However, due to significant variations in both design and cost of early homes, the government quickly backtracked, deciding to standardize housing design. This resulted in a few principal designs that would be available across all communities. The result of this sudden change eliminated the potential to utilize the either the Design Guidelines or over 40 years of indigenous housing research to inform SIHIP’s new housing. This reflects a tremendous opportunity lost and virtually guarantees standard, non-indigenous style housing in remote communities over the next 30 years (the expected life cycle of the new homes).

Furthermore, this change greatly reduced the role of the Housing Reference Groups (HRG), as their primary focus became the allotment of housing within the community. It is unclear the level of influence that the HRG’s were able to have, but there was a general sense of frustration speaking to people involved that the HRG’s, in the end, had little impact (Lansen 2011; Mary 2011). While initially championed as a “new era,” a statement in the 2009 Review sums up the extent of community input in SIHIP, “...acknowledging that while it is important that Indigenous people be given a say, the options available to them will be consistent with a public housing program” (FaHCSIA 2009, 27).

Nonetheless, the involvement of HRG’s, even in their limited capacity, has shown positive results. While there is clear frustration among community members, I was given the impression, both in talking to

community members and government employees, that there was a greater level of empowerment and confidence in dealing with the government (Randall 2012; GBM 2012). Furthermore, this was a unique opportunity for young leaders, such as a young woman named Diane who I met who was part of the HRG, to gain experience working with the government and advocating for their community (Diane 2011). These young leaders are key to the positive future of remote indigenous communities. With the government now playing such a prominent role, being able to work with them to secure resources will be an essential skill for indigenous residents moving forward.

A major shortcoming of SIHIP that has remained has been the lack of transparency regarding the allocation and costs behind the Alliance packages, which were negotiated behind closed doors and whose details and line item budgets are not publicly available. While government audits have recognized cost overruns, the consensus is that costs are more or less in line with the realities of such a complex project in remote communities (ANAO 2011, 30; FaHCSIA 2009, 23). The ANAO estimates that 70% of funding is supporting 'direct costs,' however at the same time mentions that the average amount of work going into each refurbishment is \$30,000, only 40% of the \$75,000 that SIHIP has allocated (and advertised), on average, towards refurbishments (ANAO 2011, 88, 95).

Another shortcoming of SIHIP has been the lack of transparency in the process of allotment of housing and funding to the various communities. While the government claims this was determined by need, there is little publicly available documentation outlining the allotment within each community and no documentation that describes the situation in each community and rationales behind the decision-making. This lack of transparency has led people to question the process and decisions of the government.

The poor management of expectations by the government during the early stages of the Program has had a tremendous impact on the public perception of SIHIP and the relationship with the indigenous communities it was serving. SIHIP was rolled out to great fanfare, promising to address overcrowding and the underlying social issues. However, a common theme among the community leaders I spoke with was a lack of trust in the government's ability to deliver on what it promised. There was a palpable sense of frustration from these leaders, whether in Barunga, Beswick, or Ngukurr.

However, for the most productive dialogue, it is necessary that both groups have a major stake in the housing process and its successful outcome. With the changes post-Review, this stake has decreased for indigenous residents and has been a key missed opportunity (and important lesson for the future).

With SIHIP's unprecedented scope and complexity, it was inevitable that hiccups would occur, however the government could have communicated better with HRG's and been more up-front with community leaders about the tradeoffs involved. Furthermore, the government's continual revision (and reduction) of the scope of work in many communities not only eroded trust but also created a large mismatch between initial promises and final realities (and hurt, to some degree, the potential for meaningful dialogue).

DISTANCE AND CONTROL

SIHIP, at its core, is reshaping the regional pattern of settlement. This reshaping is occurring through an underlying tension and struggle of distance and control. This tension is particularly evident when analyzing SIHIP's origins and context on a macro historic and policy level, which reveals an undulating attitude by the government toward remote settlements – whether to make them livable or, rather, to discourage their concentration. Interviews and case studies demonstrate that this tension also has substantial impact on decision makers and on-the-ground as well. As a result, analyzing these themes not only provides a greater understanding of SIHIP but also can illustrate key lessons for future planning efforts. Key to these future planning efforts will be greater dialogue between the parties.

Physical and Geographic

At the core of SIHIP is service delivery (i.e. housing). However, to justify making such a large investment like SIHIP (and arguably to have greater control over the long term outcomes), the government is requiring greater control. This is a substantial break in past policy and trends since the Land Rights movement, which saw greater autonomy and control given to indigenous communities.

This new era of control takes the form of long-term land tenure and housing ownership. To accomplish this, the government is using the potential for greater investment in certain communities (i.e. major works communities) as leverage to achieve these goals (i.e. minimum 40-year leases). However, to maximize the extent and potential of this long-term control (i.e. township leases), the government is using financial incentives (upfront payments and lease payments) as leverage. While the township leases have been met with lukewarm interest, all of the communities designated as major works have either agreed to the minimum 40-year leases or are in the process (ANAO 2011, 164-5).

SIHIP also marks a significant collapsing of distance between the government and remote indigenous communities. With the construction, inspections, maintenance, community engagement, full-time

employees (i.e. Government Business Managers) and establishment of shires, the government's physical presence in these communities has increased in an unprecedented fashion over the last five years. The byproduct of this is increased oversight (i.e. control) over the daily lives of indigenous residents and a shift in the power dynamic. Finally, pure geographic distance is central to the story, as distance and access are often cited as the primary challenges of project implementation and high costs.

Political Pressure & Accountability

Not unexpectedly, the unprecedented commitment of \$672million to remote indigenous housing in combination with the desperate situation in many of the communities led to heightened scrutiny of SIHIP by the national media and national-level politicians. However, these forces were often located far away from both the communities themselves and the policy makers in Darwin. In one sense, the contribution of the journalists who exposed the early ineptitude of SIHIP helped change its faulty course and greatly increased the accountability of those managing and implementing the Program. At the same time, the overwhelmingly negative publicity and heightened scrutiny (on a national scale) led to a bunker-like mentality of the directors of the Program. Furthermore, the pressure was not only felt by political leaders in Darwin, but also on project managers in the communities. As Aaron, the New Futures Alliance Project Manager in Ngukurr, noted, "SIHIP's been a program that, [when it started], we felt the pressure on the ground" (Aaron 2011).

As noted previously, leaders such as the Executive Director and Minister Burns were inserted into their current roles in 2009, after SIHIP had begun, due to the lack of results by their predecessors. While replacing the initial leaders of SIHIP was a successful move – in the sense that it separated the current directors from the well-publicized mistakes of the initial phase of the project, allowing them to start again with a clean slate – it has done little to alleviate the Program's initial legacy.

Speaking with leaders in the Territory Government, it was evident that political pressure was, and remains, a key influence on all involved with the Program, particularly those in leadership roles in Darwin (Executive Director 2011; ALT Director 2011). For those involved in the day-to-day management, it has turned their role into a narrow one focused on numbers – both in terms of speed (meeting targets) and volume (building houses). However, due to the tremendous social implications of a program like SIHIP, this focus on basic quantitative versus more complex qualitative measures may result in SIHIP failing to have a lasting impact in quality-of-life outcomes.

Bureaucratic: Intermediaries Across Distance

As noted in the 2009 Review, there was a very complex, redundant, and multilayer bureaucratic structure at the beginning of SIHIP that impacted the early performance of the Program. The structure had two important impacts. First, that the decision makers in the government were very far removed from the results on the ground. This was not only due to many layers between the Joint Steering Committee and the people on the ground in the communities, but also the fact that the government relied on outside consultants and the contractors to do much of the early scoping and community engagement, creating even greater distance from indigenous community members. Due to the lack of control and oversight by the government, early works ran excessive costs and produced mixed results.

The lack of capacity of the Territory Government in combination with the many layers of bureaucracy involved in the decision making process impacted early results in a number of key ways:

- With so many stakeholders directly involved (contractors, two governments, Alliances) budgets and housing were often revised multiple times in the early stages (Aaron, 2011). These revisions were often lower, which, in turn, was seen as negative in the eyes of the community. This resulted in a sense ‘false promises’ (Mary 2011).
- A substantial time lapse, in many instances, between the beginning of engagement with community members and the actual initiation of construction. This added to the sense of community frustration and lack of trust.
- Distance between decision makers can result in a disconnect between government leadership in Darwin and the on-the-ground realities of the wide range of SIHIP communities. Through using a centralized system run primarily out of Darwin, SIHIP’s core policies are not able to respond to the tailored needs of each community, resulting a in less nuanced, one-size-fits-all approach.

The primary safeguards against total disconnect are the government and alliance workers on the ground. Not surprisingly, their perspective tends to vary significantly from the Darwin leadership. Speaking to these employees, it was evident they could see the human impact of SIHIP (and shortcomings of SIHIP) in a much clearer way, as opposed to the more target-oriented, time-based, and politically-aware approach of the leadership in Darwin (Aaron 2011; Randall 2011). Furthermore, it was clear that their work on-the-ground more than just a job – it was a personal investment. As a result, these on-the-ground workers serve as key intermediaries across distance, both as advocates for the community and messengers of the government.

Defining Remoteness: Crowded Isolation

The concept of remoteness and how the government defines it is a central influence on the lives of indigenous Australians. At the core of the dictionary definition of 'remote' is the idea of distance: "far apart; far distant in space; situated at some distance away... out-of-the-way; secluded: a remote village" (Dictionary.com 2012). Furthermore, distance often is defined in relationship to something else. As noted previously, the Australian government, for example, defines remoteness in relation to a location's distance from services, which it defines in terms of "accessibility of goods, services, and opportunities for social interaction" (ABS 2001, 19). However, with widespread overcrowding and populations reaching over 2500, remote indigenous communities have the unique experience of 'crowded isolation.'

While limited access to goods and services is a clear characteristic of remote communities, the concept of 'social interaction' is slightly more complex. In Ngukurr, for example, there are upwards of one thousand residents (or more, depending on the source) living in very dense households. While very geographically remote, there is substantial social interaction in Ngukurr, on a daily basis, among family, kin, and neighbors – much more so (from my experience) than in typically non-indigenous households or communities. Furthermore, in comparing remote indigenous and non-indigenous communities in the Territory of relatively equal sizes and degrees of physical remoteness, there is a strong disjoint between the level of goods and services available. A remote, primarily non-indigenous community will almost certainly have substantially more access to goods and services to a comparably remote indigenous community of relatively equal size. Otherwise, the non-indigenous community will be much smaller and more dispersed (if both communities have low levels of services). Comparing the remote mining community of Jabiru, with its myriad of services amenities (including a man-made lake), with Ngukurr, is like comparing two different worlds.

Defining areas by access to services helps the government outline future policy. It also makes clear to all parties the level of future government involvement in the communities:

"The concept of remoteness is an important dimension of policy development in Australia. The provision of many government services are influenced by the typically long distances that people are required to travel outside the major metropolitan areas. The purpose of the Remoteness Structure is to provide a classification for the release of statistics that inform policy development by

classifying Australia into large regions that share common characteristics of remoteness” (ABS 2012b).

ARIA applies across all Australian communities, both indigenous and non-indigenous, and is meant to serve as a broad guide for government policy and investment. However, government policy is not always uniform when applied to particular remote communities. With regards to SIHIP, for example, by focusing on remote indigenous communities the government is targeting a particular subset of remote residents in the Territory.

Therefore, while a uniform geographical measurement (in the sense of a geographical measurement of road distance to certain a defined hierarchy of service centers), ARIA does not apply seamlessly to indigenous communities and may be more applicable to non-indigenous communities. While in non-indigenous Australia, for example, remote communities may have lower populations and densities, in indigenous Australia this is often not the case.

It is possible, therefore, that underneath the concept of social interaction (per ARIA) is either an assumption about lifestyles in small communities (rural, farming communities perhaps) that does not apply to indigenous Australians or that the Index is making a judgment in terms of the *quality* of the social interaction. The social isolation described in the measurement may, rather, be a commentary regarding isolation from the ‘mainstream’ and the ‘norm’ or from economic opportunities and ‘development.’ It is interesting to note, for example, that basic needs of food and water is not a consideration.³²

In short, the goal of the Index is to be: “comprehensive, sufficiently detailed, as simple as possible, transparent, defensible, and stable over time – and to make sense ‘on the ground’” (Department of Health and Aged Care 2001, 3). However, it is clear that the situation in remote indigenous communities often varies greatly from remote non-indigenous communities. The government recognizes this, evident by developing large-scale programs specific to remote indigenous communities. However, the definition of remote, under ARIA, does not incorporate this key distinction. Due to the essential role that ‘remoteness’ plays in government policy and decision-making, it is essential that a more nuanced measurement be developed.

³² This is more relevant to communities in the most arid climates or remote family outstations.

Distance of Objectives, Outputs, and Indicators

Throughout the narrative of SIHIP there has been a clear disconnect between objectives, outputs, and indicators. Whether reducing overcrowding by building homes that average 2.5 bedrooms or spending \$75,000 only to see a house return to a similar state in one year, SIHIP has failed to achieve its core housing outcomes despite being on its way to reach its targeted post-Review outputs for new, rebuilt, and refurbished homes (ANAO 2011, 124). Furthermore, it is unclear how the government envisions the growth town strategy – a core strategy that relies on a logic that may not be directly applicable to indigenous communities – will unfold. Moving forward, it is essential that the government scrap the output based approach that SIHIP has become (i.e. focusing on total houses built within a defined time period) and replace it with an outcomes based approach (i.e. how to reduce stress and create safe spaces both in and outside the home).

Figure 22: Snapshot of National Partnership Objectives, Outputs, and Indicators

Relationship between the NPARIH outcomes, objectives, key outputs and associated performance indicators		
Outcomes:		
Indigenous people have improved amenity and reduced overcrowding, particularly in remote and discrete communities.		
Objectives	Outputs	Performance Indicators
Significantly reducing severe overcrowding in remote Indigenous communities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supply of safe and adequate housing that will contribute to improved living standards for Indigenous people in remote communities. Construction of new houses and ongoing repair and maintenance of houses in remote Indigenous communities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Average occupancy rate. The incidence of homelessness. Number and percentage of dwellings that are overcrowded by state and territory based on the Australian Bureau of Statistics definition (currently Canadian National Occupancy Standard - CNOS).

Source: ANAO 2011, 73

Despite progressing toward its targeted outputs, SIHIP will do little, if anything, to achieve the objective of “significantly reduce severe overcrowding.” There is a clear misalignment between SIHP’s goals and means to achieve and measure those goals – a new approach is required.

The Role of Community

With the abolition of ATSIC on a national level, the seizing of indigenous housing and land through compulsory short and long-term leases, and the subordination of indigenous design considerations for increased housing output, the Australian and Territory Governments are clearly indicating that that indigenous communities have failed in their responsibilities – that in the future, control will be squarely in the hands of the government. However, this ‘experiment’ (to use my own words), may have failed from the beginning due to vast distances *within* communities – due to clan, language, and cultural reasons – communities that only exist due to the imposition of outside forces. A better understanding by the government with regards to complex community dynamics will result in improved outcomes.

Settlement Planning

Due to the role of distance in daily indigenous life, it is necessary for future planning efforts to place greater emphasis on the role of settlement planning. Reports from the ALT Director with regards to Wadeye, demonstrate the potential benefits of a spatially-based approach. It is unclear to what extent the idea to cluster people in Wadeye originated from the community or the government, however other reports demonstrate that unique spatial groupings were considered and supported within other communities (Davidson et al. 2011, 100). The benefit of community planning was echoed by Kim Hill, who noted the importance of settlement planning that “represents the cultural system within a community” (Hill, 2011). Due to the importance of distance (both separation and proximity) in indigenous life, the positive early feedback from cluster-housing efforts in Wadeye, and seemingly widespread support across groups (e.g. architects, the community, indigenous leaders, and the government) community planning – i.e. planning beyond the individual house unit – presents a key opportunity to better serve the needs of remote indigenous communities.

Distance and Control: Human Capital & Individual Outcomes

“A lot of people are over-simplifying SIHIP by saying it’s just about new houses. It is not really a housing program—housing is the by-product—development of traction [for a range of community capitals] is what it’s about. Without SIHIP you would just have houses on the ground (quote from anonymous interview, Davidson et al. 2011, 103).”

While this thesis believes that SIHIP’s most enduring legacy will be outcomes driven by distance and control, it is important not to view SIHIP from too great a distance and ignore the central role that

individuals play in the narrative. As an outsider, having travelled to various communities in the Territory and met with a wide variety of stakeholders, I believe that the greatest benefit of SIHIP, for both the government and indigenous communities, is the continual and increased interaction and exposure between the parties. This interaction is only possible through physical proximity – one thing that SIHIP has done at an unprecedented level through implanting full-time government workers and contractors. During my time in the communities, I met many smart, dedicated, and committed people from each party – the government, the contractors, and the communities. Examples include:

1. Construction training in Ngukurr, providing over 15 men with skill-building opportunities and more, importantly, building relationships and understanding between indigenous trainees and full-time non-indigenous trainers.
2. A young leader who left Ngukurr, went to university, and now is a key member of Ngukurr's Housing Reference Group. Without SIHIP and the HRG, it is unlikely that such a leadership opportunity would have arisen (Diane 2011).
3. On-the-ground government workers gaining invaluable local knowledge and expertise, allowing for better communication between the community level and the decision makers in Darwin.

At the core of these examples is the idea of human capital. Central to human capital is the idea of control. Through exposure and interaction with the government, indigenous Australians can develop the skills and expertise (i.e. human capital) to better communicate, manage, and have greater control over the level of government involvement in their community (i.e. learn and understand the 'system') over the long term. Furthermore, despite outside influence, indigenous culture remains strong in many remote communities. Speaking with leaders, many pointed to the importance of fostering indigenous culture and the empowering results. Speaking with Mary back in Barunga, she lamented the fact that the attendees at HRG meetings are often the same female elders that have always been involved with community issues, noting that the government "tires of seeing the same faces" (Mary 2011). It is clear that, moving forward, increased indigenous youth participation leadership is essential.

Finally, it is important not to forget the individual stories and victories that *have* occurred under SIHIP. For example, there is Diane in Ngukurr who was living with her husband and kids in her mother's house – a large, overcrowded, deteriorating house with multiple generations of family members. Her mother's house was designated as BER and slated for demolition. The family would be divided between two new houses, one on-site and one on a new lot (it is unclear the location of the new home and how it was chosen). Not surprisingly, Diane, who would now be living in a two-bedroom home with her husband

and two kids (for the first time on their own), was looking forward to the improvement in her quality of life that her new house would bring. Furthermore, despite her salary as an employee that the local community center, she would have never been able to afford a new (or any) home on her own, due to the low salaries and extremely high cost of housing and construction (Diane 2011).

Despite the seemingly difficult circumstances and among the frustrations, there is a clear sense of hope among residents of Ngukurr – especially the young people – that the future will be better and brighter. If SIHIP has contributed to this hope, maybe this author, looking back in 10 years, will have something different to say about its legacy.

CONCLUSION: BEYOND HOUSING

The narrative of SIHIP clearly demonstrates that despite its unprecedented size, scale, and scope, the Program will have little impact on overcrowding and improved housing quality in remote indigenous communities in the Territory. Rather, driven by underlying forces of distance and control, SIHIP's legacy will be one of shaping indigenous settlement patterns through the strategic concentration of housing and services and of increasing government control in remote communities through long-term leases. This approach is a tremendous break with the last 40 years, which had seen increased autonomy and self-management of housing in remote communities in addition to a move back to more dispersed, traditional spatial patterns. Despite its billing as a 'new era,' SIHIP is a repetition of past government intervention strategies of using housing in indigenous communities as a means of reducing distance between the government and indigenous Australians and increasing control.

Due to the profound implications of SIHIP on remote indigenous Territorians, it is essential that the debate around SIHIP move beyond housing to address core issues, including:

1. The 'community' – how it is defined; how it functions; and its role in decision-making
2. The future form of indigenous settlement patterns on the regional, community, and neighborhood levels
3. The role of distance and spatial relationships within indigenous communities and the link between quality-of-life outcomes
4. The role of the government with regards to control over indigenous housing, land, and governance
5. The role of human (and community) capital in increasing indigenous control
6. Rethinking assumptions about the links between outcomes, outputs, and indicators as they relate to improving the lives remote indigenous Australians

However, for this conversation to be fruitful, it is essential that those involved be frank and forthcoming. This thesis has revealed the underlying forces of distance and control driving SIHIP, but a question remains:

Were these outcomes the intention all along – was SIHIP being used as a tool to implicitly drive policies that the government was unwilling to say publicly?

The answer to this question is beyond the scope of this thesis. However, if a program like SIHIP – a \$672million housing program – clearly fails to achieve its *primary housing goal*, a final question lingers:

Is housing provision the best way to improve living conditions for remote indigenous Australians?

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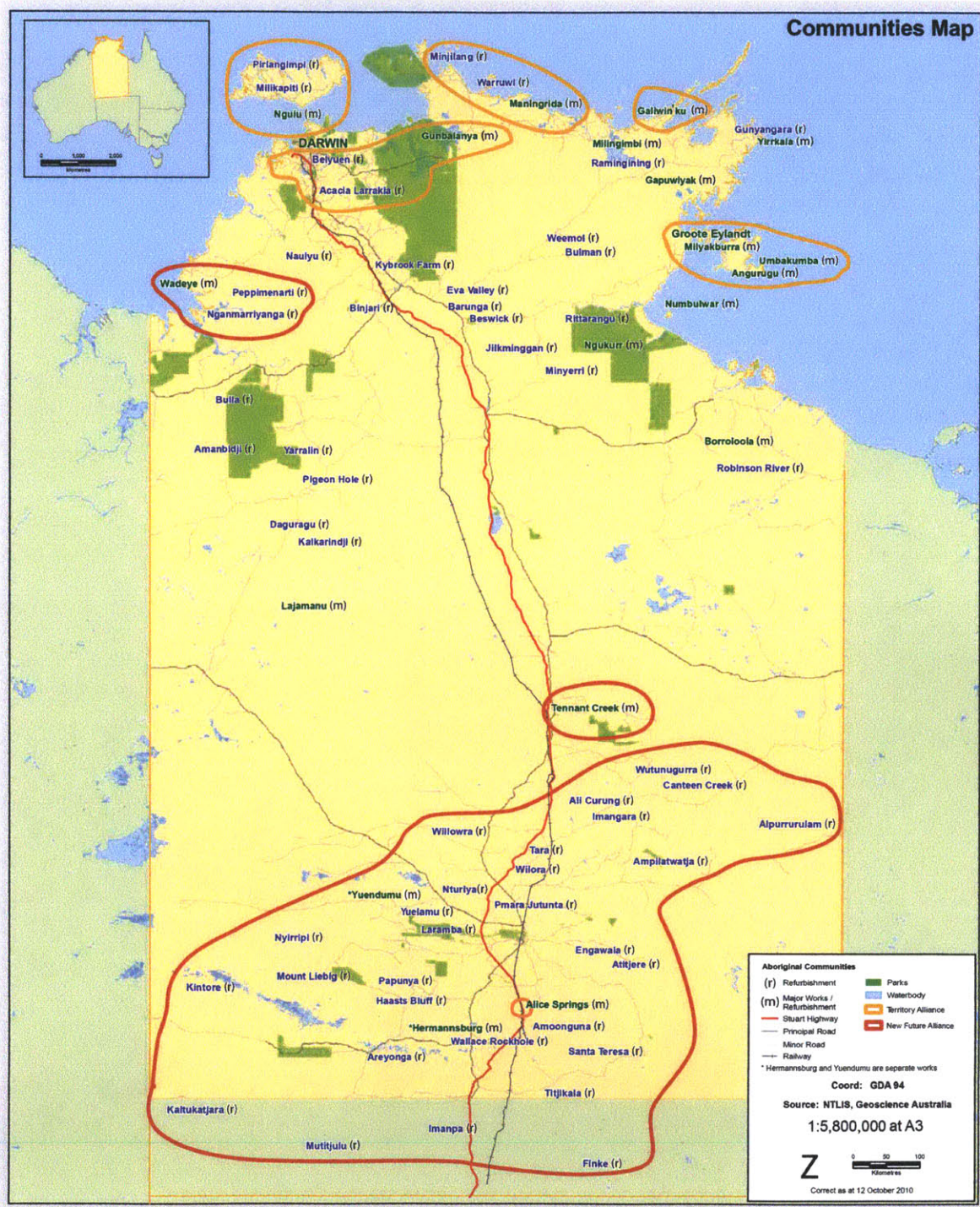
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APPENDIX 1.

Figure 23: SIHIP Communities (2010)



Source: Northern Territory Government 2010