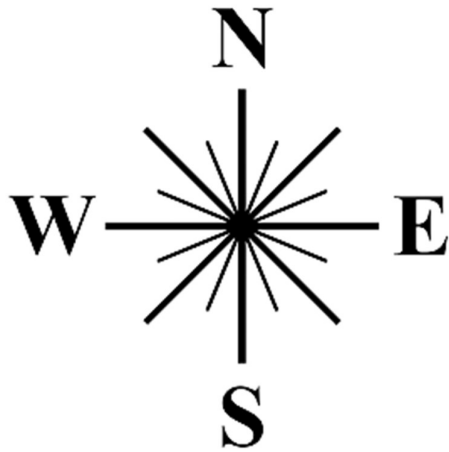


**Submission to the NSW**  
**Regional Housing Taskforce**

by

**Central Darling Shire Council**

August 2021



## **Executive Summary**

Far Western Regional NSW faces unique housing challenges particularly for Aboriginal housing, linked to diverse economic, environmental, and social pressures, and a complex Policy context.

Growth is projected for the Aboriginal population in all age cohorts: children, working age population, the retired age and there is an urgent need to address the issue of housing.

Councils' submission will focus on the issue as it pertains Central Darling in particular our settlements that have a large Aboriginal population of Wilcannia, Menindee, and Ivanhoe.

It is well recognised over many years that the quality and timely supply of Aboriginal housing has led to significant overcrowding with multigenerational persons living in a dwelling. Overcrowding is simply when the dwelling size is too small for the size and composition of people living in it.

This situation contributes to poor health and social outcomes to an already at-risk population.

This issue has again been brought to the forefront in the current COVID-19 Pandemic outbreak in Wilcannia, where the task of isolating infected patients is near impossible, and this has left to emergency management scrambling to find solutions to a long-term legacy issue.

This represents a massive failure of Government over many years to address the basic human right of shelter despite the warning signs contained in various reports and submissions.

Council is pleased to contribute to the evidence base identifying housing challenges to inform future Government Housing Initiatives.

## **Recommendations**

**Council recommends:**

- 1. That the Minister of Planning and Public Places prepare a Strategic Planning Document addressing Aboriginal Housing in Far West NSW.**
- 2. That the provision and supply of Aboriginal Housing be listed as a Priority in the Housing 2041 – Strategy and Action Plan.**
- 3. That an Action Plan be prepared in consultation to fund and deliver Aboriginal Housing in rural and remote communities in the Far West NSW as a matter of urgency.**

## **Background**

Central Darling Shire encompasses an area of over 53,000 square kilometres and is the largest Local Government Area (LGA) in New South Wales. Despite this vast land area, the Shire's population is only around 2000 people, one of the lowest of any Local Government Area in Australia. Aboriginal people comprise around 50 percent of the Central Darling population.

There are four (4) main communities within the Shire including Ivanhoe, Menindee, Wilcannia, and White Cliffs. In addition, there are several smaller rural localities which include Darnick, Mossgiel, Sunset Strip and Tilpa. All of these communities differ greatly in their demographics, local economies, and Aboriginal and European cultures.

The Shire is bisected by the Darling/Baaka River and the important wetlands encompassing the Menindee Lakes system. The local economy is based on a mixture of pastoral, horticultural, agricultural, mining and tourism activities. Rural grazing properties represent the largest land use within the Shire, accounting for ninety-seven percent (97%) of the entire area. The Council shares its borders with neighbouring Shires including Bourke, Cobar, Carrathool, Balranald, Wentworth, and the Unincorporated Area. Broken Hill is the major service centre for the region, with the surrounding towns using the city for its wide range of facilities and services.

The challenges faced by communities within this vast area are significant. Towns and villages are remote, separated by considerable distances and many of the connecting roads are unsealed and impassable following large amounts of rain. In addition, the loss of sustainable water flows in the Darling River, the lack of dependable drinking water supplies, inadequate telecommunications infrastructure, insufficient housing and the high costs of goods and services are just some of the hardships that Far West communities continue to endure.

Council welcomes the Taskforces to work on this important matter.

### **Central Darling Shire Advocacy**

Council has for many years advocated for additional housing to address the issue of overcrowding. Following the sale of land for unpaid Rates, Council offered several blocks in Wilcannia for Aboriginal Housing to the NSW Government.

The lack of housing in Wilcannia can be demonstrated by the number of houses which are seriously overcrowded. Of the Local Land Councils', sixty-four (64) properties, two thirds range from moderate to severe overcrowding.

Thirty-five (35) three-bedroom houses have three (3) generations of family: aunts, uncles, cousins living in the one house – between five (5) to twelve (12) people. Loungerooms become bedrooms – bathrooms and kitchens require constant repairs due to overuse. One property has two (2) caravans to accommodate the overflow from the house.

The issues around housing are complex and they must be address. For example:

1. Applications for housing can only be done online, limiting Aboriginal peoples ability to apply due to lack of access to computers. Hard copy applications for housing are not available in the community. The Wilcannia Safe House does assist women only in applying for housing.
2. The Confirmation of Aboriginality Statutory Declaration put out by FACS is often not accepted as Proof of Aboriginality, and only a Local Aboriginal Land Council member can get a Confirmation of Aboriginality.

3. Aboriginal people do not apply, as the applications require applicants to agree to accept a tenancy in another town.
4. Mid Lachlan Aboriginal Housing Management Corporation, which manages the Wilcannia Aboriginal Land Councils' sixty-four (64) properties, has their own housing applications and these are not reflected on the State list.
5. Large numbers of people know there are no local rental properties, so they do not apply. Most rental properties exceed the number of tenants stated on Rental Agreements.

The timely provision of services and appropriate infrastructure in Far Western NSW is problematic, but this should never be an excuse for inaction.

Timeliness and strategic planning are critical issues and there is a case to require the Central State Planning Agency to prepare an Annual Report on Housing Stock and land availability by LGA and Region. The report should include analysis of housing demand, particularly for our Aboriginal community so that this long-term legacy issue may be considered and addressed.

Housing supply and Action Plans must be part of Regional Plans.

### **Central Darling Shire Community Strategic Plan**

Over the past 12-months, Council has been consulting with its community to develop a new Community Strategic Plan 2022-2032 for Central Darling Shire.

It is important to emphasise that this is *not* a Council plan. Whilst Council has coordinated the process to develop the plan, it is owned by the communities of Central Darling Shire and represents the voices of our community. It provides a comprehensive account for their long-term goals, aspirations, and priorities for the future of their towns and village and the Shire.

Housing was very much an issue of concern and the communities' comments are set out below:

- *Insufficient housing stock to rent or buy in Wilcannia, Menindee, and Ivanhoe.*
- *Chronic overcrowding in many houses with a significant number of houses that are dilapidated and uninhabitable and/or in urgent need of repairs.*
- *Inadequate mix of housing to reflect the needs, constraints and living situations of families and individuals – from granny flats and small houses to larger family homes.*
- *Very low Rates of Home Ownership and little or no prospect of Ownership.*
- *Disproportionately high Property Rental prices.*
- *Difficulties in securing loans based on the postcodes.*

## **Supporting Evidence**

### **Maari Ma Health**

Maari Ma Health is an Aboriginal community-controlled health organisation based in Broken Hill, dedicated to improving the health outcomes for communities in the Far West Region of New South Wales with a special focus on Aboriginal health.

Maari Ma began in 2009, publishing a strategic framework document titled *Health, Development & Wellbeing in Far Western NSW – Our Children & Youth* for Aboriginal Child Development and wellbeing for its service area in Far West NSW in conjunction with several State and Local Agencies.

Maari Ma has followed several indicators over time to monitor progress against Closing the Gap targets for Aboriginal Children in the Maari Ma Region and NSW.

One indicator is Housing overcrowding and stability, and this report provides an insight into the Aboriginal Housing problem in Far West communities.

Overcrowding occurs when the Dwelling size is too small for the size and composition of the household living in it. It causes stress on kitchens, bathrooms, laundry facilities, and sewerage systems, which in turns increases the risk of spreading infectious diseases between residents and places unnecessary strain on interpersonal relationships and community social outcomes.

Whilst the report indicated there has been an improvement since 2016, the issue remains. The percentage of overcrowded housing continues to nearly double as other households in NSW.

[https://maarima.com.au/uploads/documents/MM\\_CHP\\_Report\\_2019.pdf](https://maarima.com.au/uploads/documents/MM_CHP_Report_2019.pdf)

### **Murdi Paaki Regional Plan, 2016**

The Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly (MPRA) is the peak Aboriginal Governance Body for the Murdi Paaki Region representing the interests of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples throughout Western NSW.

The Murdi Paaki Regional Plan, 2016 sets out the actions and brings together the needs, aspirations, and priorities of all Aboriginal communities across the Region and take from Community Action Plans.

MPRA has identifies as a Policy priority the need to increase the stock of social housing across the Shire to respond to housing needs and support individual Aboriginal home ownership.

Housing in each community must take into account homelessness; crowding; housing needs of elder persons; access to emergency housing; needs of young people and those in the phase of family formation; and hostel accommodation for specific grounds such as those requiring health care, offenders seeking re-integration into the community, and other special needs categories.

Population growth is projected for the Aboriginal population in all age cohorts: children, working age population and the retired age cohort and there is an urgent need to address this issue.

## State Response

**Housing 2041** represents a 20-year vision for housing in NSW. It embodies the Government's goals and ambitions to deliver better housing outcomes by 2041 – housing in the right locations, housing that suits diverse needs and housing that feels like home.

The actions for Housing 2041 are embedded in a Strategic Framework and are united under the vision to ensure that NSW will have housing that supports security, comfort, independence, and choice for all people at all stages of their lives.

Accompanying Housing 2041 is the Housing 2041 2021-22 Action Plan.

The Plan contains several actions notably:

*Support better outcomes for Aboriginal people and communities and foster collaboration between mainstream community housing and Aboriginal community housing provides on housing renewal projects on Land and Housing Corporation-owned land.*

## Conclusion

Aboriginal Housing needs must be addressed and be a part of Regional Plans and Development programs. Support should be targeted to specific needs and programs be a part of delivery to ensure that ongoing community capacity is developed to deliver maintenance and repair programs by local Aboriginal people.

There is a need to provide diverse housing types to address social and affordable requirements of today and into the future. Diverse housing approaches are required which are affordable (remote location cost factor), appropriate (respond to current and emerging demographics), ensure affordable living (i.e., energy, water, and transport), and are resilient.

Designs must be environmentally, culturally, and spiritually responsive for remote and very remote Indigenous communities. The housing must be well-built, meet people's real needs, and should be part of Regional Action Plans.

The upcoming update of the Far West Regional Plan provides a unique opportunity to incorporate this approach to build resilience into local communities. Housing is a critical factor for individual and the communities' wellbeing and the planning process must identify the needs and provide proactive leadership and solutions.

Yours sincerely,



R K Stewart  
Administrator