

INTRODUCTION

In the post-ATSIC era it has been clear that the desire for a national representative voice remains high on the political agenda. But it has also become apparent that the key place in which self-governance aspirations are finding form is at the regional level.

As part of an ARC funded research project on the aspiration of Aboriginal communities to achieve a form of self-government, we commissioned a paper on the history of the Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly. In an era where governments have tended to focus on the crises in Aboriginal communities, the creation, sustainability and longevity of the Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly has been a much overlooked success. It provides an inspiring story of the grass-roots will of Aboriginal people to assert their authority (one might even say sovereignty) to make decisions about the priorities in their area and the way those priorities should be met.

This history is an important story for the people of the Murdi Paaki area, of New South Wales in general, and indeed the whole of the country. It is especially timely given the recent change of government and the ALP's commitment to establishing a representative structure. This study should inform debates about any proposal for a national representative structure that accommodates governance structures at the regional level.

Given the significance of the Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly, and the lessons and insights its genesis and operation provides to policy makers, we have decided to devote the whole edition to the history so that it can be published in full. It is also a way in which to celebrate the achievements of the Aboriginal communities in the Murdi Paaki area who have created, through their own initiative and commitment, a voice for their region and an interface to negotiate with government.

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