

# Aboriginal water supply and sewerage program

The NSW Aboriginal Land Council is working in partnership with the NSW Government to improve the water supply and sewerage services in selected Aboriginal communities.

Together they will invest around \$200 million over the next 25 years on maintenance, operation and repairs in approximately 60 communities across NSW.



New South Wales  
Aboriginal Land Council



New South Wales  
Government

# Identifying the problems

From December 2007 to February 2008 the NSW Department of Commerce undertook a survey of the water supply and sewerage services in selected Aboriginal communities.

The survey looked at the existing infrastructure (buildings, pipes and machinery for example), operational procedures and the current levels of servicing and maintenance.

The Department also estimated the annual operation and maintenance costs, as well as repair and upgrade costs, if required.

The survey focussed on communities that satisfied the following criteria:

- It must be a genuine community of houses, not scattered houses in a mainstream community
- It must be a permanently inhabited residential community, not holiday centres, rehabilitation or commercial centres
- It must be community-owned and the community must be responsible for the provision of its own water supply and sewerage services, not communities managed by the Aboriginal Housing Office or religious organisations.

Approximately 60 communities were examined. Of those, the survey found that:

- About ten communities had satisfactory water supply and sewerage services but require assistance with ongoing management and servicing
- About 30 communities had adequate infrastructure but need maintenance and repairs to equipment
- About 20 communities had inadequate infrastructure and require additional funding.

The survey report was part of a submission to Government seeking funding, initially to fix the ongoing problems of maintenance and repairs to equipment.





The NSW Government responded by approving a new program to improve water supply and sewerage services in Aboriginal communities.

## The response

In May 2008, the NSW Aboriginal Land Council and NSW Government announced the Aboriginal Water Supply and Sewerage Program.

The program will be jointly funded with the NSW Aboriginal Land Council providing half and the NSW Government providing the remaining half.

Together they will provide \$200 million over the next 25 years for maintenance, operation and repairs.

The program commenced on 1 July 2008 with \$6.075 million to be spent in the 2008-09 year. This amount is expected to increase to \$8.4 million in 2009-10 before settling to \$7.7 million annually thereafter. It will be adjusted to allow for inflation.

Negotiations are continuing on additional funding to provide new water supply and sewerage infrastructure where it is required.

“NSW Aboriginal Land Council could not ignore the need to provide safe and effective drinking water in the affected communities, which are former missions and reserves, managed by our Local Aboriginal Land Councils.”

Bev Manton,  
Chairperson NSWALC.

Jointly funded by the NSW Aboriginal Land Council and the NSW Government, the package will provide:

### **Operation and maintenance**

Full routine operation and maintenance servicing of the water supply and sewerage systems

### **Repairs**

Repairs to existing pipes, pumps, treatment plants to return them to full operating capacity

### **Emergency repairs**

Emergency repairs to fix pumps or other equipment if they break down

### **Improvements**

Improvements to water quality and sewerage services

### **Regular inspection**

Regular inspection and maintenance of pumping stations and treatment plants

### **Regular maintenance**

Regular maintenance and cleaning of sewer pumps and sewer mains

### **Regular testing**

Regular collection and testing of water

### **Management plans**

Preparation of management plans to advise how to protect the water and sewerage systems and what to do if something goes wrong



# How the program works

The NSW Department of Water and Energy has been appointed as program manager.

The Department will work closely with the NSW Aboriginal Land Council, Local Aboriginal Land Councils and local water utilities to deliver improved water supply and sewerage services to Aboriginal communities.

The Department has appointed a program manager, two water and sewerage inspectors and a support officer to coordinate the implementation of the program, and to develop ongoing management plans.



## What happens now?

The NSW Department of Water and Energy will visit identified Aboriginal communities to inspect water supply and sewerage facilities and to discuss what needs to be done.

The NSW Aboriginal Land Council, Local Aboriginal Land Councils, community members and the local water utility (or another supplier to do the on-ground works) will all get a chance to have their say and help to develop a plan for operations, maintenance and repairs.

The agreed plan can be modified if emergency repairs are needed.

Part of the plan will be to do three inspections of the facilities every year.

A report will be written by the Department of Water and Energy and will be made available to the NSW and Local Aboriginal Land Councils and the local water utility.

For each community the process will be:

- 1. Plan:** plan for the works and services needed;
- 2. Consultation:** Discuss with the local community the planned works and services;
- 3. Proposal:** the local water utility will submit a cost proposal and timeframe;
- 4. Agreement:** NSW Department of Water and Energy, NSW Aboriginal Land Council and the Local Aboriginal Land Council will all agree on the proposal and approve the start of agreed works and services;
- 5. Action:** the local water utility will undertake the agreed works and services;



For more information contact your Local Aboriginal Land Council Office or the NSWALC Zone Office for your Region.

“By providing quality infrastructure and ongoing maintenance we can improve the health of Aboriginal people.”

Paul Lynch,  
NSW Minister for Aboriginal Affairs.

