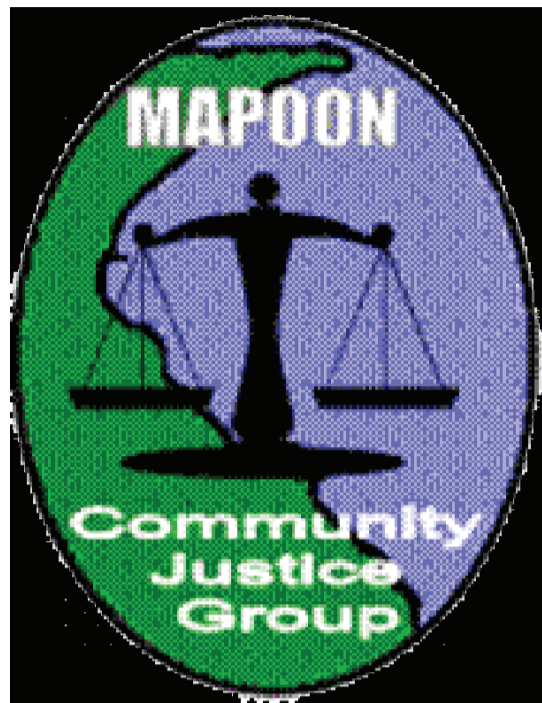


This week Mapoon Community Justice Group coordinator Ricky Guivarra reports on housing and alcohol matters from just up the road there...



Mapoon Aboriginal Shire Council is working in line with other Indigenous communities to establish an equitable Housing Rental Policy which will meet new standards being imposed by the Queensland State Government.

The Government has an expectation that Council-managed housing should incur a 25% standard income rental levee upon all income coming into the household, capped at what is deemed a sustainable level for the type of house being rented.

The new rates are expected to be put in place by 1st July, 2009.

Council is concerned that this level of rent will be burdensome on community members given the low income levels of many households and the general cost of living in isolated communities because of things like store prices and fuel costs for power and transport.

Through its Housing committee Council has sought to recommend to the Government that an

alternative scale of rental application - more closely attuned to the financial situation of our community members - should be considered.

Arguments of a similar nature have been put to government by a number of Cape communities on previous occasions but have been met with dismissive disdain for the circumstances Cape York people face, especially those in isolated communities.

We expect, however, that our tenants will continue to pay nominal rentals so repairs and maintenance schedules for homes can be maintained.

On the matter of alcohol, consumers in Mapoon have been fortunate enough to enjoy an equitable carriage limit which allows limited access to alcohol within the community.

Council and the Community Justice Group, in unity with the community, fought hard for the right to have that carriage limit and expect those limits to be respected and adhered to by the community.

Any increase in domestic or community violence, including child protection issues, could well affect these hard-won rights.

Council and the CJG meet monthly with members of an Alcohol Reform Group to monitor local statistics surrounding these issues, and look at various strategies to limit alcohol related violence.

We all want to ensure women and children in particular on our community are guaranteed the safe environment they are entitled to enjoy.

On the other hand, however, both Council and the CJG are disappointed with the Government's apparent abandonment of workable

community-based solutions which allow meaningful responses and have in the past provided assistance to our regional communities in both Mapoon and Napranum.

Strategies put in place by these communities have assisted in filling the gaps that have in turn helped to empower the communities within these processes.

They have also allowed our people to take some ownership of their problems by working on their own solutions, using the sparse resources and infrastructure available to us, including the use of volunteers on the ground.

The Justice Group is annoyed that spin-doctoring from the Government around program funding such as the "Demand Reduction Strategy" for Alcohol Management Plans, has earmarked internal government initiatives, pretty much amounting to 'same old, same old', leaving little or no room for any community-based initiatives which have already had proven outcomes.

The recent cancellation of programs and segmentation of strategies such as the "Wet Season Demand Reduction Strategy", was very much the result of internal governmental wrangling which failed to adequately consult with the very communities the funding was designed to assist.

On top of this the provision of the funding for such programs has been consistently delayed to the point where the money for the aforementioned program wasn't assigned until after the wet season had ended.

Ricky Guivarra
Coordinator
Mapoon Community Justice Group

Overwhelming demand for Caring For Our Country funding

The Federal Government has received an overwhelming response from environmental, farming, Landcare, Indigenous and community groups under the latest Caring for our Country funding round.

Minister for the Environment, Heritage & the Arts Peter Garrett and Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries & Forestry Tony Burke said more than 1,300 applications had been received for 2009-10 under the inaugural Business Plan.

Around \$450 million is available to be committed in 2009-10 to support projects which help to ensure the environment is better protected and more resilient in a changing climate. This will include two, three and four-year projects.

However, applications received are worth a total of more than \$3.4 billion, including one project which would require the entire year's funding.

Applications will be assessed by a range of panels, including community members and scientific experts.

Mr Garrett said the response showed the commitment of local groups to achieving key national environmental targets in six national priority areas under Caring for our Country.

The Business Plan sets out a range of targets, including protecting important wetlands and improving soil condition on farming land.

"These targets are ambitious but achievable and I welcome the ongoing support of environmental and farming groups," Mr Garrett said.

"All applications will be assessed carefully, although this will be a very difficult task given the incredible volume of requests."

Mr Burke urged groups to continue their invaluable work, including farmers working in partnership with Landcare groups and other local networks.

"The Government absolutely recognises the fantastic work by farmers and Landcare groups in managing weeds, erosion, water quality and biodiversity," Mr Burke said.

"We will continue working hard to ensure we get the best possible outcome for the environment under Caring for our Country, which is more transparent and accountable."

Funding announcements are expected by in the next couple of months. For more information visit www.nrm.gov.au

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Entry fee: • \$10 Senior • \$5 Junior (up to 17 years)

Categories include: • Baby • Natural environment
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