

## 2018 Metropolitan, Bendigo & Echuca

Koorie student enrolment data.

	Koorie program enrolments	Total number of Koorie students	Koorie students in Corrections facilities (if applicable)
Advanced Diploma and above		5	
Diploma		28	
Certificate IV	4	39	2
Certificate III	6	115	15
Sub Total	10	187	17
Certificate II	13	53	460
Certificate I	2	20	471
VCE/VCAL	2	17	3
Non-accredited course		37	2
Total	27	314	953

Koorie student transition data

	Further VET	Higher Education	Employment	Unknown
Koorie students		1	19	
Total		1	19	

Koorie student completion data

Across all regions	Course completion rate (%)	Modular completion rate (%)	Change from 2017
Koorie students	18%	42%	Course 8% MLCR -3%
Non-Koorie students	25%	59%	Course 5% MLCR -9%



Wathaurong Aboriginal Cooperative Limited  
Victorian Parliamentary Committee's  
Inquiry into Sustainable Employment for Disadvantaged  
Jobseekers

Public Hearing

24<sup>th</sup> October 2019

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## Opening Statement

I would like to firstly acknowledge the traditional owners of the lands that we are meeting on today the Wadda Wurrung people their elders past and present, my brothers and sisters in the room and thank the Parliamentary Committee for inviting Wathaurong Aboriginal Cooperative to provide input into the Inquiry into Sustainable Employment for Disadvantaged Job Seekers. My name is Lisa Briggs and I am a proud Gunditjmara woman from the Western District of Victoria and currently the Interim CEO at Wathaurong Aboriginal Cooperative. I have also worked with Kangan Institute Lee-Anne Habel Manager Indigenous Education and Tony McCartney Indigenous Engagement Capacity Building Officer.

When we speak about disadvantage it is important for the 'Committee' to understand that Aboriginal Australians suffer severe disproportionate rates of disadvantage against all measures of social-economic status compared to other Australians and that historical impacts of colonisation and dispossession of lands, language and culture have immediate social, economic and cultural determinants with deeper underlying causes such as intergenerational trauma resulting from ongoing and cumulative effects of colonisation for Aboriginal people<sup>1</sup>. The Victorian Government Aboriginal Affairs Report 2018<sup>2</sup> stated that:

- four (4) out of ten (10) Aboriginal youth did not meet year 9 writing benchmarks
- 7.% of Aboriginal people aged 20 -24 years old had attained a Year 12 or equivalent qualification however the number was not quoted which can be misleading leading to progress
- For 2017 by year 10 the gap in attendance equates to 6 months less schooling compared to other Australian children and youth;
- 1 in 4 Aboriginal school leavers go on to university aged 18-24 years

The report also highlighted against indicator 6 – Increase Aboriginal labour force participation that results were mixed and that:

- Aboriginal people were underrepresented in the workforce and over represented in unemployment statistics
- The Victorian unemployment rate for Aboriginal people was 2 times the rate (14%) compared to 7% of other Australians;
- In 2016, of those in the labour force 50% of Aboriginal Victorians were employed full time

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<sup>1</sup> 2016 Commonwealth of Australia Productivity Commission for the Steering Committee for Review of Government Service Provision: Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage

<sup>2</sup> 2018 State of Victoria - Victorian Government Aboriginal Affairs Report

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And in my opinion this is largely due to the 24 Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations across Victoria who are the largest employers and service providers for Aboriginal within the state.

Half of the Aboriginal population resided in regional Victoria with up to 24.4% being unemployed compared to 6.5% of other Australians. This is four times (4) higher. Aboriginal Victorians on average earned \$165 less per week for individuals and \$219 less for households than other Australians.

So what does this look like for Aboriginal people within the Barwon South West Region?

Wathaurong recently conducted a data analysis of the needs for Aboriginal people within our service catchment area, grey literature, 2016 census and ABS data which demonstrated:

- 1159 Aboriginal households participated in the Census
- Ongoing Overcrowding within housing
- Incomes for Aboriginal households were between \$1000 - \$1,249 per week
- Overall 25% of Aboriginal people live below the poverty line with 42% being sole parent families
- Aboriginal people aged 15-69 have lower employment and a higher crude unemployment rate than the population.

To achieve employment parity with the Barwon South West Region an extra **112 part time jobs and 207 full time jobs** would be required. These numbers are achievable.

- Additional 82 extra jobs required for 15 years +
- Lower rates of part time employment for Aboriginal people aged 15- 34 years
- Higher rates of Aboriginal women in part time employment

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Upon review of employment websites for Aboriginal identified positions, Aboriginal Youth Traineeships within the Geelong there were only three positions advertised:

- Department of Justice Aboriginal Wellbeing Worker
- Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA) Aboriginal Child Specialist Advisor
- Co-Health Aboriginal Access Worker

All requiring license and experience excluding many disadvantaged Aboriginal job seekers.

The information providing this morning has the purpose of providing the Committee with a more in-depth understanding of the challenges faced by Aboriginal people who are unemployed and I look forward to working with both the Committee and Victorian government to improve the opportunities for Aboriginal people so that they may lead quality lives and open to further questions.

Thank you

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### **Committee questions:**

#### **1. The key barriers faced by Aboriginal jobseekers and suggestions for addressing these**

- Racism and/or unconscious bias – Aboriginal people are judge differently to other Australians which is a direct impact of colonisation and intergenerational trauma we experience.
- Employment Agencies not able to provide or providing the culturally appropriate supports for Aboriginal people based on their needs and requirements. Upon conducting a literature review
  - Employment agencies have a classification system A, B, C – C being defined for high complex needs which majority of Aboriginal people would fall into however from the four case studies being provided today will highlight this.
  - Employment agencies not providing the appropriate case management and supports systems for Aboriginal people eg: transition support into employment which is available for people assessed as a Classification C;
  - Employment agencies use of financial funds to support case management leading to improved and successful employment; Reimbursement scheme does not work for people unemployed due to lack of funds; denying training opportunities that lead to potential employment eg: Major construction – White Cards, Rail Cards especially since they have a specific Aboriginal employment targets which they are unable to meet. Is this due to barriers such as these?
  - Lack of transparency from Employment Agencies to Aboriginal jobseekers on what supports both financial and other are available. Within the case studies highlights of lack of client contact and follow up being provided by agencies.
- Culturally unsafe work environments that provide no support to develop skills and experience
  - Employment transition support both to employer and employee or the employment of an Aboriginal engagement officer to assist place-based employment?

Commonwealth and Victorian State Government have the ability to improve systems and outcomes for Aboriginal people particularly through the COAG process and Closing the Gap Targets. As the system already exists it would be essential for both governments to lead and demonstrate improvements in collaboration with Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations and peak bodies.

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## **2. The effectiveness of current government employment services for Aboriginal Jobseekers**

The current systems don't work for Aboriginal disadvantaged job seekers and there maybe a need for specific measures to be incorporated into Employment agencies supplier contracts to ensure these matters are addressed:

Employment agencies should be required to partner with existing Aboriginal Community Controlled Organizations such as Wathaurong to assist them in gaining employment for Aboriginal people as we can also provide the wrap around supports required where they fall short. This doesn't mean that they are exempt from support processes it should be a shared and mutual responsibility and not one that is power imbalanced on the Aboriginal jobseeker.

## **3. The effectiveness of social procurement programs and ideas for improvement**

What social procurement programs? There needs to be more information, consultation and collaboration on social procurement. Wathaurong Aboriginal Cooperative has a social enterprise arm however is not part of the current system and structure that is available.

## **4. The types of pre-placement support needed by Aboriginal jobseekers**

Employment agencies need to provide improved case management supporting both financial and social supports;

Financial Ability to support training and certification that leads to employment paid by Employment agency not job seeker than reimbursement eg: license, rail cards etc

## **5. How government could encourage the age setup of more Aboriginal small businesses**

1. Scoping Aboriginal industry requirements
2. Reviewing what exists and the barriers particularly financial and mentoring that prohibit establishment of Aboriginal small businesses eg: Social Enterprise Framework for Aboriginal people – Wathaurong would love to trail or be a pilot for this type of initiative as we have the current infrastructure to support it.

## **6. The types of mentoring most effective Aboriginal jobseekers**

- a. Aboriginal mentors and culturally appropriate TAFE's such as Kangan
- b. Aboriginal liaison and engagement officers for employers

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## CASE STUDIES OF WATHAURONG JOBSEEKERS

### CASE STUDY 1

Michael is a 35 year old male. He has had multiple short term and casual jobs in recent years, and is keen to work to better his situation.

However Michael has suffered past trauma and is a long way from his own Country, so he lacks the close family supports he could normally rely on.

As a result, Michael struggles to succeed in an environment that is not culturally safe, especially when he is the only blackfella on staff.

#### **Names changed and identifying features not disclosed for reasons of confidentiality**

Michael has had at least two different job network members and is seeking another due to dissatisfaction. He says they do very little for him and that all the suitable work he gets is through word-of-mouth. On one occasion they did arrange a warehouse job but Michael doesn't cope well with indoor work. Additionally, there were no other Aboriginal people employed at this workplace, which also had no policies, supports or cultural understanding around Aboriginal employees. Further, the provider did not follow up with Michael or the employer to help the placement succeed, hence it was always going to fail.

Michael has previously missed out on work as he doesn't have a driver licence. Michael's job network member is prepared to at least partly fund this but whenever he raises it they state he must pay for getting his learner permit and they will reimburse him. Currently on Newstart Allowance, Michael is unable to cover the costs, so the offer of reimbursement is useless to him. He recently had a very good job offer from a municipal council but driving was part of the role. When again told by his job network that he will have to pay for it himself before reimbursement, Michael became frustrated and says he expressed it with a raised voice. In response, the job network have now allocated the team's manager as his new case worker, but have done nothing

to resolve the licence situation. Michael had to turn the job down.

Michael's provider has bought him work gear and boots. They also occasionally top up his phone credit or Myki card by \$20, but usually tell him there are no funds available. When Michael recently broke his phone they purchased him a new one. However, the phone is poor quality and he cannot access Centrelink via MyGov and he cannot apply for online jobs via the phone.

Michael used to be employed by Wathaurong until the program funding ended: had the funding not ended, he would still be employed. Michael enjoyed this work and has identified a course that will further his opportunities in the field. However it costs \$500 and his provider has declined to fund it.

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## CASE STUDY 2

Mitch is a 16 year old boy who lives at home. He left school last year after experiencing bullying, to which he retaliated.

Mitch enjoyed school but left after problems with other students. He lacked confidence in himself but was a reliable and successful participant in the Wanthaurong/Kangan Institute construction course. His success was a direct result of his own developing self-esteem which was strengthened by the culturally safe and supportive environment we created for the course. He now says that he wants to work in construction for the rest of his life; and his plan is to start in residential construction and work towards commercial work. We have seen a noticeable difference in his confidence and would love to see him be able to continue on this path in an employment environment that will support his development, but his age and quiet persona work against him when it

comes to selling himself to non-Aboriginal employers.

Mitch is not actively pursuing his own employment path. He has more faith and confidence that he will secure employment in a safe and supportive environment through Wathaurong, which we are actively pursuing.

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### CASE STUDY 3

Terry is a 17 year old male. He already has an employment history and is seeking a career rather than just a job. His primary parent deals with generational trauma through substance abuse, so Terry mostly lives with the family of a trusted friend.

Terry is a very responsible young man, but as a result of his upbringing, his own mental health is poor.

Terry has worked cash-in-hand in a specific labouring industry but has seen the toll that the work has taken on the bodies of older workers so he wants something more sustainable for himself. He has also been exploited in this field financially so does not see it as a career. Despite his initial anxiety, Terry completed the construction course that Wathaurong and Kangan Institute partnered to run. However, we saw firsthand that even with the cultural supports he was surrounded with, he could become overwhelmed with certain aspects of a work environment. To succeed, Terry needs culturally aware mental health supports.

Additionally, due to the actions of his emotionally damaged parent and before Wathaurong staff became aware, there were many times that the only food that Terry ate was at the course. We also saw how vulnerable he could be; however, he was supported by other students, course mentors/teachers and Wathaurong staff to recover from his 'wobbly' moments. We also assisted him in stabilising his living arrangements, safety and ongoing mental health support.

His age and the impacts of his complicated family life are now affecting his ability to secure legitimate employment. There are also concerns that should he secure legitimate employment he will be financially targeted by his substance abusing parent, to whom he is very loyal. Wathaurong staff are working with him to maintain his safety and wellbeing, but his employment pathways are currently limited, despite his significant potential. Our opinion is that he requires a culturally supportive and aware workplace to help him to achieve this potential, otherwise over time he could potentially succumb to the pitfalls of his struggling family.

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## CASE STUDY 4

Warren is over 55. He has extensive experience working in a specialised field for more than 30 years. Despite this track record, he is still struggling to secure ongoing work.

Warren is highly employable (we know because we have employed him casually ourselves) but he believes that despite his experience and excellent work ethic, he is discriminated against because of his age. Warren has a large immediate family and still needs to provide for young children.

Warren says his job network member has told him he is too employable, therefore he has received limited assistance from them. Last year they lined up some work for him, but it was over an hour away, a 12-hour shift, and also a rotating shift meaning that he had to work day and then night in three day stints. This was unsustainable for his health and family life and he left the position. Fortunately he immediately found himself a short-term job so he did not have to suffer the Centrelink penalty for quitting.

At one stage Warren sought help from an Aboriginal-specific employment agency. He says they met with him once, promised to call him and then disappeared. He contacted them and was again told that someone would contact him, but again he did not hear from them. He lost confidence in their commitment to assisting him with finding work and gave up on them. Warren is extremely concerned that the employment agency has received funding intended to help Aboriginal jobseekers, while his experience shows that no help might actually be being provided. He has heard other anecdotal stories supporting this opinion.

Warren has also previously gained casual employment through a labour-hire company. These were often not positive experiences, for example, in one position the workers were told one hour before the end of their shift that their services were no longer required. As a man with three school-aged children at home and a mortgage, this unnecessarily places him and the family in a difficult financial situation.

While Warren has worked casually for us, we presently have no suitable positions to keep him in our employ.

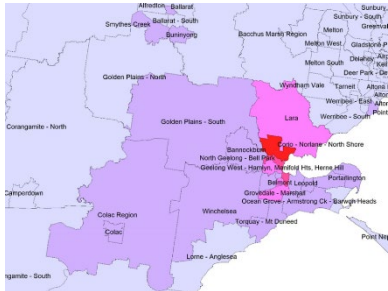
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## **Organisational Overview**



### **Wathaurong Aboriginal Cooperative Limited - Service Profile**

The name Wathaurong (Wada-Wurrung) is a recognized tribe (community which consists of some 25 clans (family groups) that form part of the Kulin Nation of Aboriginal people. The traditional boundaries of the Wathaurong people span the coastline from the Werribee River to Lorne peninsula and traverse inland to a north direction towards Ballarat. Wathaurong people have lived within these regions for more than 25,000 years.

Wathaurong was formed by community in 1978 as a place of common ground where Aboriginal people could be together and share in a sense of community with formal registration in 1980 to support the social, economic and cultural development of Aboriginal people, particularly within the Geelong and surrounding areas. Wathaurong Aboriginal Cooperative Limited is located 70 kms or 60 minutes travel time one way from Melbourne CBD and is an Aboriginal Community Controlled Organization (ACCO) governed by an Aboriginal board who are elected through the Annual General Meeting process annually, with their Chief Executive Officer to operationalize the strategic directives of the board.

Wathaurong Aboriginal Cooperative Limited is the largest service deliver provider to 1373 (50%) of Aboriginal people and employer of Aboriginal people within our catchment area, employing over 115 staff. Wathaurong has a coverage area exceeding 6700 kms across the Geelong, Barwon and Bellarine Peninsula region and western region of metropolitan Melbourne meaning travel time can be four (4) hours one way and eight (8) hours round trip.

Wathaurong is also multi-accredited organisation meeting eight (8) national and state quality standards with over 1150 indicators. Our quality framework includes thematic areas of Governance, Finance Risk and Audit Committee (FRAC), Organisational Standards – including Clinical Governance and Community Engagement that ensures Wathaurong is providing the best quality of care to the highest standard.

The ABS Census and B series population projections for Victoria 2021 and 2026 reported that the Local Government Areas in Wathaurong's catchment have experienced population increases of 17% to 65% and 36% overall in the last five years demonstrating higher increases than the state average. This will need to be considered a part of challenges particularly in accessing essential services leading to 2026.

Wathaurong provides comprehensive primary health care across nine thematic areas delivering 50 programs focused at improving the health and wellbeing and the social determinants of health that impact Aboriginal people.

Organisational thematic areas are:

- Community Engagement
- Health Promotion and Prevention
- Health Wellness and Recovery
- National Disability Insurance Scheme
- My Aged Care
- Justice including family violence, child protection, juvenile justice and corrections
- Housing both social and public housing
- Culture and Land
- Social Enterprise Wathaurong Glass

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## **Recommendations**

1. That both Commonwealth and the Victorian State Government through the existing COAG processes improve the delivery and outcomes for Aboriginal employment in collaboration with Aboriginal Community Controlled Organizations such as Wathaurong Aboriginal Cooperative and our Aboriginal peak bodies;
2. That the Victorian State government considers developing an Aboriginal Social Procedure Framework and initiatives that are inclusive of Aboriginal Community Controlled Organizations such as Wathaurong Aboriginal Cooperative as we have the infrastructure to support such initiatives.
3. That the Commonwealth and Victorian Governments considers placing special measures and targets into procurement contract to Employment Agencies as an opportunity to improve both the financial and social supports required for Aboriginal Jobseekers to improve employment and education opportunities;
4. That existing Employment Agencies are reviewed, monitored and held to account on their role, function and outcomes when specifically, for Aboriginal disadvantaged jobseekers
5. That greater provisions, transparency, decision making for Aboriginal jobseekers be provided to improve available, accessible, affordable and appropriate services targeted to individuals.
6. The Victorian Government and Employment Agencies should consider funding or obtaining Aboriginal engagement officers, liaison Officers and Aboriginal Mentors to improve quality of services current being provided;
7. The Victorian Government should consider successful partnership such as Wathaurong Aboriginal Cooperative Limited and Kangan Tafe as a model that can be duplicated across Victoria to support further education requirements in a culturally safe setting leading to improved education and employment opportunities for Aboriginal people.

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