Presentation to the Drugs and Crime Prevention Committee Inquiry into Locally Based Approaches to Community Safety and Crime Prevention
Dandenong City Council Chambers
30 May 2011

I'd like to begin by describing the socio-political environment in which the Dock evolved, and then talk a little about the Dock itself, and its 'mother' organization — *Three Seas*.

Firstly, some statistics: Maori and PI people make up approx 1.6% of the Victoria population, but unfortunately currently 15% of the juvenile offender population in detention. This percentage is larger than that of the African and Aboriginal juvenile offender population. (Judge Michael Burke, Chairman Juvenile Justice Parole Board). It is counterproductive to assert that Maori and PI youth are any more criminally inclined than other ethnic groups, or that Maori and PI youth are 'picked on' by the justice system, but rather that something is causing this population group to fall through the cracks. Later I will speak about what the causal factors are, but first to continue the background to The Dock's creation.

Around 2008 Dandenong Police began engaging with Maori and Pacific Island youth after noticing the increasing representation of this group in the crime statistics for the greater Dandenong region. Increasingly this group became more and more involved in violent offending, and anti-social behaviour.

Recognising this cultural group as particularly vulnerable to crime, VicPol began a series of community safety and crime prevention initiatives in 2008, focussed on 'diversionary' activities — to build youth resilience through sport, and also to build relations between youth and Police. These early initiatives spanning 2008-2011 were focussed mainly around back yard rugby programs, and largely driven by the Crime Prevention Officers of Dandenong Police.

These initiatives had varying degrees of success and faced many challenges. Amongst those challenges is the fact that as a 'non-priority' ethnic group Maori and PI migrant issues tend to fall off the 'policy' radar, and subsequently off the funding radar, and subsequently again off 'resourcing schedules' for Govt agencies. The success of the back yard rugby can be largely attributed to the efforts and commitment of one individual (with limited real support — because of the lack of policy priority - within VicPol or elsewhere) — who drove this forward at high personal expense. That individual is now on well earned leave.

This highlights one of the major challenges for the Maori and PI communities. A lack of policy focus and subsequent access to funding opportunities, and resourcing, leaves this community reliant on the commitment of individuals, and volunteers. A lack of policy focus means that human resourcing policies and practices cannot address this specific problem. There are very few Maori and Pacific Island recruits into the public service — even when there is evidence of a specific need, e.g. in high M&PI populated areas. Indeed, until recently challenged in the Courts, some Government agencies in Australia denied access to NZ passport holders.

Maori and PI migrants arriving in Australia after Feb 2001 do not have immediate access to welfare services, because invariably they arrive on NZ passports, and are required to wait for 2 years until they can access social services. Those two years are a critical point when these people — largely from lower socio-economic and educational backgrounds - find themselves struggling in Australia. It is the children of these migrants that are finding their way into the juvenile justice system.

This is a key causal factor in disadvantage in this ethnic group — and marks this group as severally more disadvantaged than other 'priority groups' — as those groups — Aboriginals, Africans Asians, refugees etc - all have access to some kind of Govt support, and funding to drive community initiatives.
Another challenge is related to the lack of funding – the absence of a safe space for PI youth to call their own. Without access to funding for community initiatives it proved impossible to create a safe space for PI to congregate – so they tend to congregate in open, public areas (train stations) where other at risk youth also congregate and invariably this leads to conflict. The lack of a ‘place’ has not helped bring a disparate community together – the Pacific Islands are comprised of 14 countries all with their own cultural idiosyncrasies, and NZ Maori. PI’s in Victoria are mainly Polynesian (Tonga, Samoa, Cook Islands, Niuean,) and Maori. The communities within this group speak different languages, have different cultural roots, and have different strengths and weaknesses. All are competing for scarce resources within their own communities.

In early 2011 – good fortune intervened – and a building at 176 Stud Road, was offered rent free to base youth programs. Called “The Dock” – representing both a safe port where ships harbour, and a place all too familiar to Maori and Pacific Island youth in a Court of Law – The Dock was created as a place from which projects directed at Maori and PI youth could be launched, as well as a place for PI community to gather. “Three Seas” is the community based initiative – now a registered NGO – that gives leadership and guidance to Dock projects. The primary objective of Three Seas is to enhance community ownership of initiatives, to pool resources, skills, and programs, and to generate youth focussed support projects.

Three Seas has been registered for 2 weeks! And we are going through the process of establishment. While we are finding it a costly and time consuming enterprise, there is increasing interest by the Maori and PI community itself, and of both project delivery agencies (Parks Victoria, YouthWorks Victoria, Casey Council etc) and social service providers (DHS/YIS, Centreline, etc) to use the space. But with no funding to meet establishment needs, and no full time workers, we are struggling to make this happen. This again is another consequence of being a non-priority group – we have limited avenues of support, and are relying totally on community volunteers, including myself and others.

We have rent free access to the premises at the Dock for up to 12 months – possibly longer. We plan to run a range of community led projects including e.g.

- Youth Drop in center providing access to ‘down time’ activities and services in a safe and supervised environment. The drop in centre will be the bait in which to attract at risk youth into the centre where services and projects are accessible to them

- School Support Project – Linking in with other CBOs e.g. One Ocean
  - Before School Breakfast Project
  - Lunch Box Project
  - After school homework support

- Body, Mind, Soul project
  - Body
    - Sports For Life Projects
      - Back Yard Rugby Project (VicPol); CarPark Basketball; Netball; weight training; fitness for fatties
    - Healthy Body Project
      - Community Gardening – growing healthy SP foods
      - Eat What We Grow Cooking Class
      - Eat Well on a Budget
      - Smell Good Feel Good (Personal Hygiene for Youth)
  - Mind
    - Anger Management Course
    - Stress Management for Mums
    - Non-violent dispute resolution
    - Crisis, Trauma and Loss Counselling
    - Addiction Support Groups
    - Self Esteem and Motivation support
  - Soul
    - Meditation for kids
- Yoga for Youth
- Laugh until it Hurts
- Faith in Life (non-religious faith counselling)

**Culture and Arts Project**
- Cultural dance
- Carving and weaving
- Organise and run annual POLYneziANZ Cultural festival
- Young Artists Expo

**Young Mums and their Babies Project**
- Ante- and Post natal courses
- Breast is Best
- MCH checkups
- Young Mums support group
- Share the Care (child care)

**Cars Are Cool Project**
- Basic Motor repair and car mechanics course
- Learn to Drive ("Get Your Ls")

**Life Skills for the Out-of-Schools**
- How to access services?
- What's a budget? - Financial Management without money!
- How to get a job - what can I do?
- Busy Hands - Volunteering

This is an ambitious program. We aim to start small - working with current programs and projects and with service providers, to draw in the community. The Maori and PI communities are joined in their commitment to improving the life options for our young people and presenting to them positive role models.

The challenges will be overwhelming unless a range of tactical and strategic things happen:

1. We need the same access to funding and support, as other disadvantaged groups – without discrimination based on nationality.
2. In the immediate term, we need financial assistance to ensure compliance with relevant legal requirements to operate out of the premises; and
3. We need paid, full time staff to supervise projects and activities.
4. In the medium term, we need practical engagement with service providers, and Victorian agencies.
5. We need the Victorian Government to rethink its application of support to ‘priority’ communities to allow for this clearly disadvantaged group to access funding opportunities – at an equal level to other disadvantaged groups.
6. We need Victoria Government agencies to recognise the needs of Maori and PI migrants and apply human resources and intellectual resources to addressing these issues.
7. We need to see the issues facing Maori and PI residents in Australia, on the policy agenda, at State, Federal and bilateral (ANZ) levels.

At the highest levels, there needs to be a sustained whole of Government approach, across both State and Federal agencies, and with the Govt of NZ, to address these issues. As a high priority, we need the Australian Government to research and understand the impact of a poorly thought-out policy on NZ migration and welfare support, and to address the significant negative impacts of that policy.
Without addressing the policy issues around these problems, locally based initiatives will struggle to bring about long term change. We acknowledge the need for Maori and PI communities ourselves to act collectively to bring about change. Sustainable change rests with the community, but it's almost impossible to succeed against the backdrop of discriminatory policies.

If we can get the Dock operating – it will be one step in the right direction. But we need help to get even this far.

Thank you for the opportunity to present to you.

Isabel Calvert
Secretary
Three Seas Steering Committee