

**INSTITUTE OF SOCIAL CHANGE AND CRITICAL INQUIRY**

**UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG**

**APRIL 2001**

**SOUTH EAST ARNHEM LAND COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH  
PROJECT**

**REPORT TO RIO TINTO LIMITED**

**FOURTH PROGRESS REPORT FOR THE PERIOD  
NOVEMBER 2000 TO APRIL 2001**

**South East Arnhem Land Collaborative Research Project  
Report to Rio Tinto Limited for the period November 2000  
to April 2001**

This report covers research activities for the period from November 2000 to April 2001. It is the fourth report provided in compliance with the Research Grant Contract between Rio Tinto Ltd. and the University of Wollongong.

The South East Arnhem Land Collaborative Research Project (SEALCP) continued work at Ngukurr throughout the period with a break of .

The milestones for the recent period are:

- the publication in December of SEALCP Working Paper #1 *Back Where we Started? Schooling in Ngukurr* by Kate A. Senior.
- the completion of the revised draft of Aaron Corn's report on male youth at Ngukurr. The report is entitled *Ngukurr Crying: Male Youth in a Remote Indigenous Community*. Following review this will be published as SEALCP Working Paper #2. The revised draft is included in this report for information and remains confidential at this stage.
- the continuation of Ngukurr News with fifteen issues for the year. Ngukurr News recommenced publication in March this year on a reduced schedule with assistance from the Ngukurr Language Centre and Ngukurr Community Education Centre. The editorial committee consisting of Eleonora Dark (Ngukurr Language Centre), Daphne Daniels and John Bern. The aim is to produce eight to ten issues during 2001.

**Current matters**

During November Dr. Mary Edmunds resigned from her position as SEALCP Research Fellow at the University of Wollongong effective the end of February 2001. The pressures of her work with the National Native Title Tribunal left her little room for other activities. Mary originally undertook the completion of four papers for the project's working paper series:

- Project description and methodology
- Literature review and overview
- Local government, CDEP, and decision-making

- Public sector agencies

In her remaining time it was not possible for this to be done. The literature review and the research on public sector agency interactions with Ngukurr are areas which we agreed the Director should undertake to complete. The report on Local Government and CDEP is being prepared as a joint paper by Mary and the Yugul Mangi Local Government Council Executive Officer, Lynn Mott. Mary is also revising her paper given at the Australian Anthropological Society Conference last September. The deadlines for these two projects is now early May this year.

Rosie O'Donnell spent most of the month of November in Darwin undertaking research at Nungalinya College, Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL), National Archives of Australia (NNA), and the Northern Territory Archives Service (NTRS) where the bulk of CMS files on the Roper River Mission are held. She searched NNA for government files relating to the Roper mission and was able to cross reference these with CMS files held at NTRS. Her aim was to track the influence of government and mission objectives and policies on Ngukurr.

Rosie's final two months of fieldwork after returning from Darwin allowed her time to work more closely with many of the core and non-core Fellowship members. First, she explored the inspiration for the songs they write and the events that prompted their generation. Second, she tracked the Kriol or language words for a range of Christian terminology in order to establish what modifications of meaning had resulted from the translation.

Her major reason for returning to Ngukurr in December was to observe a major Christian celebration there to see what significance this has for Aboriginal people. There is a significant alteration to people's daily lives at this time of year due to the closure of the school and, more particularly, the Council for a period of about eight weeks. This period afforded Rosie a great opportunity to observe a very different aspect of Ngukurr life - one that was not reliant on the expansive presence of Council.

Mr. Aaron Corn completed his fieldwork in November. He produced the first draft of his report in December and the revised version in April 2001.

Ms. Daphne Daniels, Mr. Moses Ponto, Ms. Miranda Rodgers, and Mr. Keith Rodgers, completed their terms as SEALCP Research Assistants at the end of December 2000. I would like to express my deep thanks to each of them. They have

been a tower of strength to the project, and have made all the other researchers welcome and have helped them understand their community.

Daphne Daniels returned to part time employment with SEALCP as editor and reporter for Ngukurr News in late February this year. Other locally resident research assistants are being engaged as the opportunity arises.

The Director continued his research at Ngukurr during the period concentrating on the mechanics of traditional cult activities, organisational change and dispute resolution. The literature review exercise is being carried out under the Director's supervision. Over sixty relevant titles have so far been entered and annotated. The interrelations of Ngukurr and external Government and non-government agencies is now a priority exercise. The Director commenced interviews in Katherine in February and is continuing this aspect of the project with a schedule of interviews after Easter.

### **New research for the next period**

Negotiations with Paul Josif and Gay English to conduct the project at Ngukurr, which was noted in the last report, are nearing completion. There are two pieces of work involved. Both of these utilise their local knowledge and skills in participatory planning (including housing planning) and policy. One concerns housing policy and the other perceptions of day to day living.

A follow-up to their 1997 Housing Plan update would be particularly valuable if related to the economic and socio/cultural issues. The second, more fundamental area we are looking to is: community, household and family access to resources and their use. This study will raise concepts of responsibility in relation to a wide range of areas such as people's assets, resources and livelihoods.

The access to resources and their use is a fundamental study for SEALCP. We see this study as one of access to, receipt and distribution of income and other disposable resources. There are two approaches to this that would be undertaken. One is the collection of primary factual data, in which would draw on existing data such as that in the baseline monograph. The second is to elicit from people their perceptions of meaning of the resources and different parts of processes of receiving, spending, saving and distributing. Case studies would be the primary methodology for this study.

The issue of the constitution of the household (or subsistence unit) is one that needs further investigation in the context of this study. Does it have a core composition? How variable and flexible is it? Indeed, is there more than one type? How does the unit of subsistence and close familial interaction relate to people's occupancy of houses?

The fieldwork for these studies will take place at Ngukurr between late May and October this year.

Alongside this there is the need for a more mainstream micro-economic analysis of Ngukurr, including labour and management dependency and capacities for small scale enterprise and financial services. Earlier negotiations with the International Business Research Institute of the University of Wollongong have not been successful. However, Professor Michael Gaffikin, Head of our Department of Finance and Accounting, is currently assessing the prospect of undertaking this study and the methodologies required. This study would largely be based on data supplied from other field work and external sources. The collection of on site material will be carried out under the supervision of the Director with Paul Josif and Gay English and the assistance of local research assistance.

### **Program of proposed publications for 2001 (subject to guidelines in the Research Protocol)**

Since the last report our first Working Paper has been published. The final draft of the proposed second Working Paper is attached as an appendix. This is still a confidential draft subject to reviewing and community clearances.

#### Published and under review

Senior, Kate A. 2000. *Back Where We Started? Schooling in Ngukurr*. Working Paper, No. 1. Wollongong, NSW: SEALCP.

Corn, Aaron 2001. *Ngukurr Crying: Male Youth in a Remote Indigenous Community*.

#### Forthcoming

Bern, John. *Local Governance and Relations with External Agencies*.

Bern, John and Kate Senior. *Ngukurr and South East Arnhem Land, a Review of the Literature*

Blanchfield, Sue & Sue Lovegrove. *The Ngukurr Arts screen printmaking project*.

Cook, John. *Compensation, how we can understand it.* (Currently under negotiation).  
Edmunds, Mary. *Separation of Powers. Sources of Authority and Decision-Making in a South East Arnhem Land Community.*  
Edmunds, Mary & Lynn Mott. *Local government, CDEP, and decision-making.*  
Wand, Paul & Jeff Wilkie. *The South East Arnhem Land Collaborative Research Project, A Rio Tinto Initiative.*

**PhD Theses in progress**

Rosie O'Donnell. 'Aboriginal Religion and Christianity: shifting frameworks for constructions of self and community in Ngukurr, South East Arnhem Land'. (completion mid 2002).

Kate Senior. 'A Gudbala Laif? Health and its relationship to quality of life in two Aboriginal communities'. (completion in second half 2001. The ANU have granted a six month extension to Kate's PhD Scholarship).

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12<sup>th</sup> April 2001