

MINTABIE

SUMMARY OF EVIDENCE

Mintabie is a small non-Anangu town on the eastern-side of the APY Lands. Its population is declining.

For over 30 years, a significant amount of the illegal drugs and alcohol consumed on the APY Lands has come through Mintabie.

When the original township lease was established in 1981, opal mining was the main commercial activity. This is no longer the case. In 2004, the Department of Primary Industries and Resources SA reported that there were 10 businesses operating at Mintabie, including five general stores and/or second hand car dealers.ⁱ These businesses rely heavily on commercial transactions with Anangu. The terms of these transactions are often detrimental to Anangu.

KEY ISSUES

Mintabie as a source for alcohol and drugs

Mintabie's role in the trafficking of alcohol and prohibited substances onto the APY Lands is well-documented and pre-dates the granting of land rights.

- In November 1979, the Uniting Church in Australia documented the negative impact of the sale of alcohol (in Mintabie) to Anangu. This included domestic and community violence, serious assaults and death.ⁱⁱ
- In December 1980, the Pitjantjatjara Council highlighted concerns about "sly-grog running" in a written submission to the Select Committee tasked with examining the "Pitjantjatjara Land Rights Bill 1980". The submission stated:

For a long time, [Mintabie] has been under little control from the Government, either through the Police or the Mines Department. ... As a result of unlimited access to take-away liquor, many Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara people have been subjected to acute social dislocation. One of their men was shot-gunned to death, others killed in road accidents and many involved in lesser violence.ⁱⁱⁱ
- In October 1987, Anangu advised a group of visiting parliamentarians that alcohol had become a major problem for their communities and that a significant amount was being brought illegally on to the Lands through Mintabie. On that occasion, Anangu called for South Australia Police "to pay greater attention in Mintabie to the sale of alcohol to Aborigines."^{iv}
- In 1988, after visiting both Anangu communities and Mintabie, a Parliamentary Committee recommended "that the matter of alcohol distribution from the Mintabie area be investigated urgently by the Police."^v
- In December 1995, the Mintabie Miners Restaurant "had its license revoked after repeated breaches of the Liquor Licensing Act." The breaches included "selling alcohol to people who live in nearby Aboriginal communities."^{vi}
- In October 2002, South Australia Police (SAPOL) confirmed Mintabie as the source for a significant amount of the drugs and alcohol coming on to the APY Lands.^{vii} SAPOL also reported that it had "recently found buried at Mintabie a large container set up with hydroponic gear that [had] been the source of cannabis for much of the lands for the past couple of years."^{viii}

- In March 2004 an internal SAPOL report noted that “cannabis originating in Adelaide” was being transported to suppliers in Mintabie “who then distribute it throughout the [APY] Lands.”^{ix}
- In October 2005, Nganampa Health Council reported in its annual survey of petrol sniffing on the APY lands that “Mintabie was cited as the preferred place from which petrol for safe to sniffers is brought in, along with alcohol and other drugs.”^x
- In August 2007, South Australia Police arrested and charged two men at Mintabie for their alleged involvement in a “cannabis selling network.”^{xi}
- In April 2008, the Mullighan Inquiry into child sexual abuse on the APY Lands noted South Australia Police’s concern that Mintabie was “being used as a staging post for the trafficking of marijuana on the Lands.”^{xii}
- In July 2008, Ms Alison Anderson (Member for McDonnell, Northern Territory Parliament) attended a funeral at Amata. In the course of her visit, she observed “four young people sniffing petrol at a house in the community.” The main resident of the house informed Ms Anderson “that the (premium unleaded) fuel had come from the Mintabie Opal Field and was selling for \$70 a soft drink bottle.”^{xiii} The Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (NPY) Women’s Council subsequently raised the matter with the South Australian Crown Solicitor’s Office. In a reply dated 29 July 2008, the Office advised the NPY Women’s Council that premium unleaded petrol was sold in Mintabie in containers for use in power generators. The reply continued: “while I am assured by relevant people at Mintabie that sale to Anangu does not occur at fuel outlets, having the fuel available in containers increases the likelihood of illegal sale to Anangu.”^{xiv}

Mintabie stores and second-hand car dealers

- In 1994, the SA Commissioner for Consumer Affairs reported that “two shopkeepers from Mintabie” had been “prosecuted ... for dealing in motor vehicles without a licence.” Both men, who “dealt mainly with local Aboriginal residents ... were found to have been buying vehicles in the southern capital cities and transporting them to Mintabie where they would be displayed at the rear of their shops and sold.” Neither of the men “provided their customers with proper warranties on the cars and in some cases actually charged their customers for doing repairs when the cars were returned with faults.” The Commissioner noted that the Counsel prosecuting the case had described the vehicles sold at Mintabie as “bombs” and that the Judge had “stated that cases such as these were far too prevalent.”^{xv}
- In March 2007, the Office for Consumer and Business Affairs (OCBA) examined the operations of four Mintabie stores.

It subsequently reported that one store was selling between 300 and 350 second-hand cars per year, holding 60 key cards (and associated pin numbers) and was allowing Anangu – some of whom lived more than 500km away – to enter into book-up arrangements.^{xvi}

In a second store, 30 key cards and pin numbers were being held and the average amount of book-up was \$1000.

In a third store, OCBA found that prices were only displayed on half the items, goods were not properly weighed, and out-of-date items were being sold without the proper notification. In that store, customers were charged a 5% levy on any cash withdrawals and \$5 ever time they bought something on book-up.

At a fourth store – whose Anangu client base stretched from Yalata to Docker River in the Northern Territory – 95% of its business came from the direct debit of customers' Centrelink payments.^{xvii}

- On 25 March 2009, Uniting Care Wesley met with a representative of the Office for Consumer and Business Affairs.^{xviii} In the course of that meeting, OCBA confirmed that:
 - some Mintabie businesses continued to hold both the key cards and pin numbers of Anangu customers;
 - in excess of 500 second-hand cars are sold to Anangu out of Mintabie per annum, and
 - it (OCBA) believes that the accounting practices of Mintabie stores may not always be accurate.

A declining community

- In excess of 1000 people lived in Mintabie in the late 1980s.^{xix}
- The 2006 census recorded 122 people at Mintabie, of whom 112 were staying in their usual place of residence.^{xx}
- In 1988, 59 students were enrolled at the local school.^{xxi} By 2002, this number had fallen to 36.^{xxii} In 2009, there were only 11 enrolments.^{xxiii}
- In early 2009, the Uniting Church's Frontier Services closed its clinic in Mintabie. Frontier Services subsequently noted that the facility had been "constantly vandalized, trashed and everything needed to make it work – wiring, diesel, copper pipe etc – stolen." It explained that keeping the clinic open would have perpetuated "an unsustainable service" and put "our staff at risk."^{xxiv}

REFERENCES

- ⁱ PIRSA, 1 September 2004, Information provided to the Aboriginal Lands Parliamentary Standing Committee, p16.
- ⁱⁱ Scott, G. November 1979. "Report to the Social Justice Commission (Synod of South Australia) and the Assembly Commissions for Social Responsibility and World Mission," Uniting Church in Australia, p2-4.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Pitjantjatjara Council. 16 December 1980, "Submission to the Parliamentary Select Committee on the Pitjantjatjara Land Rights Bill 1980," p8.
- ^{iv} Tilbrook, K. 30 October 1987, "Grog running worries," *Advertiser*.
- ^v Parliamentary Lands Parliamentary Committee, 12 October 1988, Report to Parliament, p8.
- ^{vi} "Outback licence revoked," 24 December 1995, *The Advertiser*.
- ^{vii} Mildren, P. 29 October 2002, Transcript of evidence to Select Committee on Pitjantjatjara Land Rights, p285.
- ^{viii} Mildren, P. 29 October 2002, Transcript of evidence to Select Committee on Pitjantjatjara Land Rights, p289.
- ^{ix} South Australia Police. March 2004, "Delivery of Police Services: Anangu Pitjantjatjara Lands – Recommendations to the Commissioner, 11 March 2004." Internal report, p12.
- ^x Nganampa Health Council. October 2005, "Survey of the prevalence of petrol-sniffing on the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Lands," p22.
- ^{xi} South Australia Police, 4 September 2007, "Tri-State Police initiative – Two men arrested at Mintabie," media release.
- ^{xii} Mullighan, E. April 2008, *Children on Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) Lands: Commission of Inquiry - a report into sexual abuse*, p103.
- ^{xiii} Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Women.s Council (Aboriginal Corporation). July 2008, .Submission to the Senate Community Affairs Reference Committee, Parliament of Australia, . P4 (Submission No. 11).
- ^{xiv} Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Women.s Council (Aboriginal Corporation). July 2008, .Submission to the Senate Community Affairs Reference Committee, Parliament of Australia, . p5 (Submission No. 11).
- ^{xv} Commissioner for Consumer Affairs (SA). 1994, *Annual report 1993/94*, Adelaide, p29.
- ^{xvi} Minutes of the meeting of the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Executive Board held at Umuwa on 7 March 2007, p2
- ^{xvii} Minutes of the meeting of the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Executive Board held at Umuwa on 7 March 2007, p2
- ^{xviii} This meeting took place in OCBA's Adelaide office and was attended by Mr Graham Sharley (OCBA) and Mr Jonathan Nicholls (UnitingCare Wesley Adelaide).
- ^{xix} Report of the Pitjantjatjara Lands Parliamentary Committee, 1988, Parliament of South Australia.
- ^{xx} Because Mintabie's population had fallen below 200 at the time of the 2006 census, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) no longer considered it to be a locality in its own right for statistical purposes (Information provided by the Australian Bureau of Statistics, 18 and 19 October 2007). However, the ABS did gather data for the same 'Mintabie' collection district (No. 4010107) as it had in 2002. (See "B03 Place of Usual Residence on Census Night (a) by age," in Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2007, *2006 Census Community Profile Series, Collection District (4010107)*).
- ^{xxi} Information listed on the Mintabie school's website:
http://www.mintabieas.sa.edu.au/documents/history/history_of_mintabie.htm. Accessed 19 October 2007.
- ^{xxii} Robinson, C (DECS). 16 September 2008, Letter to Rev P McDonald.
- ^{xxiii} McKenzie, C (DECS). 3 August 2009. Email to J. Nicholls.
- ^{xxiv} Young, R. (Frontier Services, Uniting Church in Australia). 15 November 2009. Email to J. Nicholls (UnitingCare Wesley Adelaide).