

Inquiry into food production and supply in NSW



Left: Walgett held a community service for the demise of the Namoi River at Walgett in March 2019 after the river was completely dry for long periods from 2018. This important source of nutrition was wiped out with no sign of recovery despite today's diminishing floodwaters. Poor water management by the NSW and Commonwealth Governments is responsible.



Left: Walgett's only supermarket burnt to the ground 5 June 2019, compounding the food and drinking water crisis. The COVID-19 pandemic shortages increased our already distressed food situation.

Photos Dharriwaa Elders Group.

A submission to New South Wales Parliament's Legislative Assembly Committee on Environment and Planning from

Dharriwaa Elders Group

and

Walgett Aboriginal Medical Service

Walgett's Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations

28 February 2022

Introduction

This submission is made to the Committee from a small community in remote NSW. We know that the food and water issues that challenge our community are shared by many around NSW.

Walgett is experiencing food and water insecurity as a result of Climate Change, poor management of the rivers and lands around us, and food and drinking water supply systems that by their design do not serve our community well.

The richly fertile lands and waters of the Walgett floodplain located in the Northern Murray Darling Basin supported our families for many thousands of years. Today our rivers are exploited to benefit others while the urgent health and wellbeing needs of our community are neglected.

Australian Governments have been advised how to act to improve Food Security for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples¹ and we await action by legislators.

The Walgett Aboriginal Medical Service² and Dharriwaa Elders Group³ have long recognised the links between limited access to good nutrition, including safe drinking water, and our community's high incidences of chronic disease.

Instead of waiting for governments to respond positively to our advice re issues important to the Walgett community, Dharriwaa Elders Group ("DEG") has built a multi-faculty, holistic, community-led partnership with University of NSW ("UNSW") called Yuwaya Ngarra-li⁴ to progress Elders' long held vision for systemic change. 'Yuwaya Ngarra-li' aims to improve the wellbeing, social, physical and built environment and life pathways of Aboriginal people in Walgett through collaboration on evidence-based initiatives, research and building local community capabilities and control.

Food and Water for Life Working Group

The Food and Water for Life Working Group ("F&W4LWG") is convened by the Dharriwaa Elders Group Yuwaya Ngarra-li program and supports Dharriwaa Elders Group and Walgett Aboriginal Medical Service to progress Walgett food and water security projects.

The F&W4LWG includes people from Walgett IGA, Walgett Local Aboriginal Land Council, Walgett TAFE, Walgett Aboriginal Education Consultative Group, Walgett Shire Council, Walgett Community College, Aboriginal Environmental Health Unit Health Protection NSW, Mission Australia and DEG's Yuwaya Ngarra-li collaborators from The George Institute for Global Health and UNSW Global Water Institute.

The Working Group was established to progress actions developed the day after the Walgett Food Forum⁵ on the 8th of April 2019 which discussed issues of Walgett food and water security and nutrition, and local solutions.

At the Forum we presented information we had gathered with Professor Jacqui Webster's team at The George Institute that compared current Walgett supermarket prices with city supermarket

¹ *Joint Policy Statement on: Food Security for Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Peoples, and Supporting document for the Joint Policy Statement on: Food Security for Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Peoples*, Public Health Association of Australia, 2019.

² WAMS celebrated 35 years of operating in April 2021

³ DEG began operating formally as an association of Aboriginal Elders in 2000

⁴ "vision"

⁵ <https://www.dharriwaaeldersgroup.org.au/images/downloads/YuwayaNgarra-liFoodForumReport27June.pdf>

prices. A basic family weekly food shopping basket was priced at \$508 in Walgett, and \$347 in Parramatta. We discussed our local knowledge of current food quality and availability, the prevalence of hunger and our community's reliance on poor nutrition takeaway foods from 5 fast food outlets.

Food and Water for Life Project: co-creation and evaluation of sustainable innovations to strengthen food and water security

Our challenges and learnings of recent years have provided us with motivation and knowledge. Today, WAMS and DEG work to progress a 5 year NH&MRC-funded project with our UNSW Yuwaya Ngarra-li partners entitled: *Food and Water for Life: co-creation and evaluation of sustainable innovations to strengthen food and water security*. Through this project our organisations aim to produce strong advocacy based on irrefutable evidence to influence legislators like you to make systemic changes that will improve Walgett's food and water security.

We refer to the submission made to the Inquiry by our partners in The George Institute to provide scholarly responses to your Terms of Reference. We offer the following brief statements.

Poor management of water impacts on Walgett's food and water security

The impact of water management on our food supplies cannot be underestimated.

The rivers were dry at Walgett for months on end in 2018, 2019 to early 2020.

The Walgett Aboriginal community up until the mid-1970s could always rely on the rivers to supply food and water. However, the health of rivers and the high nutrition food sources that are sustained by them require consistent surface water flows which are no longer guaranteed. Systemic neglect and mismanagement of local rivers and floodplains has had a devastating effect. For example:

- Walgett's once abundant mussels have disappeared, along with the smaller river animals and vegetation they depended on.
- Native fish are hard to catch at Walgett now. Platypus have disappeared and so have the water dogs and other river mammals.
- River water when it is present is muddy from fine topsoil washed into it from cleared lands and full of particles our town water infrastructure struggles to filter.
- River vegetation supplying food and water-filtering functions is diminished.
- WAMS's Community Garden that relied on river water was eradicated.

The food-generating capacity of the rivers hasn't recovered.

NSW Government must respect and preserve the health of NSW waters especially because of their contribution to food and water security for river communities like Walgett.

The rivers are not just canals to transport water between traders, and drains for waste.

Floodplain waters feed our lands, rivers, lakes and groundwaters and the living things that depend on them i.e. Country.

Irrigators, landowners and miners upstream in the Northern Murray Darling Basin are now allowed to take too much water from the Namoi and Barwon Rivers and the floodplains that feed them through surface water extractions and the practice known as Floodplain Harvesting. We are

concerned that some of these extractions remain unmetered. Inaccurate water modelling hides over extraction.

Impending and recent NSW Government decisions allowing unknown impacts to alluvial waters, the Great Artesian Basin and the Namoi River by mining companies near Narrabri we believe threaten our town's water and food security. Many expert and community submissions to recent Independent Planning Commission Hearings provide overwhelming evidence of these threats.

- NSW Government must reject the proposed Whitehaven thermal coal expansion project at the Pilliga Forest, and overturn its approvals of the expansion of Santos Coal Seam Gas mining at the Pilliga Forest east of Walgett
- NSW Government must properly resource the Natural Resource Access Regulator to investigate and ensure compliance for laws that protect the health of rivers and therefore the safety of Walgett's drinking water, our community's public health, Aboriginal wellbeing and culture.
- The NSW Government must not licence floodplain harvesting while we witness that flows are not ensured past Walgett to sustain the good health of the floodplains, rivers lakes and groundwaters.
- NSW Government must ensure that its Water Sharing Plans and funded projects ensure that rivers are revived and maintained well to supply high nutrition food and drinking water for river communities like Walgett.
- The NSW Government must also protect underground waters and their water pressure especially now that our communities are forced to rely on bore water more.

NSW Planning and local government planning processes must ensure access to a healthy Country for the purpose of local food security
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The rich Walgett floodplains provide fertile ground for foods – highly nutritious vegetation and meats. This rich diversity is being squandered on cotton and monocrops sourced by industrial food systems. Elders have seen this occur during their lifetime.

Access to lands with remnant vegetation or for hunting has become extremely limited for our community. The NSW Govt has slowly been eroding the Crown Lands estates and leasing or selling them to private interests, while neglecting the caretaking of what remains.

As access to Country diminishes, so does the knowledge of living in it.

- Aboriginal communities in NSW must have legislated prioritised access to land and waters.
- The DEG strongly advocates retaining Aboriginal Cultural Values and refreshing knowledge in younger generations and this task should be supported by the NSW Government.
- We call for a planning process that supports local food production.
- Lands for local food production must be protected from agricultural, mining and exploration purposes.
- Special zones must be established for local and regional food production.

Chemical pollution

Chemical spraying of herbicides and pesticides occurs regularly around Walgett. We suspect that diminished bird and aquatic life in the rivers at Walgett today results from polluted soils and over spraying contaminating the rivers.

- The NSW Government must prove that chemical pollution is not contaminating the lands, communities and waterways surrounding Walgett
- The NSW Government must ensure that the Walgett community's high nutrition food and water sources are safe from chemical spraying and industry pollutants. We believe that we can expect our government to do this under its public health, human rights and racial discrimination obligations.
- WAMS and DEG request regular receipt of water chemistry test results from NSW Health Public Health

Walgett's drinking water crisis from river mismanagement, compounded by supermarket fire and COVID-19 emergencies.

When Walgett's water utility became unable to source potable water from the rivers it applied for NSW funds to drill new Great Artesian Basin bores from which to source the town's drinking water, and raise the Barwon Weir at Walgett, thereby increasing the damage to river habitats requiring flows.

In Yuwaya Ngarra-li⁶, DEG established relationships with Professor Jacqui Webster of The George Institute for Global Health ("TGI") and the UNSW Global Water Institute ("GWI") led by Professor Greg Leslie. In 2018 GWI tested our drinking water. High sodium levels were discovered, and DEG requested the opinion of Dr Jacqui Webster – international sodium in nutrition expert. This was used by WAMS and DEG to advocate for a town Reverse Osmosis system to desalinate the water. The NSW Government eventually installed a system which was mothballed as not fit-for-purpose. Because of the poor palatability of high sodium tap water Walgett residents rely on buying water from the only supermarket, Walgett IGA. This arrangement is unsustainable because of the cost and the waste generated by plastic bottles as there are no local recycling services.

During the height of our drinking water crisis in early January 2019, we lobbied the NSW Government to initiate an emergency response. Mr James McTavish was appointed as the Regional Town Water Supply Coordinator, who WAMS and DEG met with regularly. Soon after the NSW election, and as the water crisis extended to other towns he became unavailable to us. Residents relied on water donations provided by concerned diaspora, Dignity Water, donations to DEG's Food and Water Fund quickly established for the purpose, and eventually two NSW Government deliveries, which DEG and WAMS were responsible for distributing (in the absence of suitable storage and distribution solutions being provided).

Three years later, as residents continue to rely upon buying drinking water at the town's sole supermarket, supply is vulnerable, as discussed below. Drinking water sales compete with the sales of sugary aerated drinks. WAMS and DEG fear that public health is risked because residents need to buy drinking water. Dehydration, obesity and dental issues are of concern.

The Walgett Aboriginal communities' consistent work with Yuwaya Ngarra-li collaborators to improve Walgett's drinking water quality and accessibility are made difficult by the lack of public health funds for the purpose, and a risk-averse, poorly resourced local government.

Local Government water utilities must be properly resourced to provide quality drinking water.

⁶ <https://www.dharriwaaeldersgroup.org.au/index.php/yuwayangarrali>

Walgett's only supermarket burnt down – compounding our food and water security crisis

On the 5 June 2019, Walgett's supermarket burnt to the ground. It had been rebuilt after a previous fire in 2014. DEG and WAMS commenced immediate action to support our community's most vulnerable – and raised funds to buy food from nearby Coonamble, while supporting city volunteer groups⁷ to distribute donated groceries. In the process we learnt more about the vulnerability of our food system, about the challenges of food delivery and disaster responses.

As access to food variety decreased, our community was forced to rely on takeaway foods, and staples of limited choice and nutrition value. Water security was threatened because our town relies on buying bottled water from the supermarket. Many families resorted to driving to neighbouring towns to shop for essentials – increasing personal expenses as well as running the risk of road accidents. Walgett Shire Council trialled a bus system which failed due to lack of planning.

Eventually a temporary IGA was established with financial assistance from the NSW Government, where basic supplies were bought. Only the most popular items were stocked by the small store, which revealed the foods most relied upon by families currently. No-one measured the impact on our health and wellbeing of this crisis which we believe was substantial. In November 2021 the new Walgett IGA Supermarket was opened.

The NSW Government must recognise the importance of supermarkets to single-supermarket towns and establish legislated oversight practices, appropriate insurances, and emergency plans in preparation for when they are unexpectedly lost.

The impact of COVID-19 on Walgett's food and water security

The COVID-19 crisis city panic buying led to the Walgett temporary supermarket stock shortages. At the height of the first wave, IGA was only receiving 26% of the stock it was ordering. We again became highly aware of the vulnerability of our current food supplies. Some people were missing out on buying food due to the short stock, others were hoarding and buying more than they needed, and some didn't have the money to purchase stock when it did become available ("first in best dressed"). During the crisis we became acutely aware of the housing shortage and therefore that access to the ability to cook nutritious meals in a kitchen from a weekly shop is impossible for some.

DEG and The George Institute collaborators reported on this in Croakey news:

<https://croakey.org/walgett-community-unites-to-tackle-pandemic-related-food-shortages/>

We identified that some families rely on the meals provided by the school canteen and breakfast programs. With families isolating from COVID-19 at home households were running short of food. The ongoing food and grocery shortages at the Walgett IGA increased this food insecurity. DEG and WAMS lobbied through our Aboriginal networks and the NSW emergency committees, for food relief. NSWALC, and NSW Centre for Aboriginal Health in partnership with NSW AH&MRC responded by sending 2 or 3 grocery box deliveries from Foodbank. During the second and third COVID-19 wave private responders with Addie Road Food Pantry, and NSWALC with Foodbank made minimal but heartening responses that assisted some families. **Some of these donated**

⁷ FIRE responded, as did eventually Foodbank via the CWA

groceries were unsuitable for people with chronic disease and should be evaluated by nutrition researchers before they are relied upon again in an emergency.

DEG fundraised and bought fresh fruit and veggies from Qld and delivered them to Elders, along with frozen meals. Australian Unity delivered additional meals to their MyAgedCare clients. During the second wave in 2021 Resilience NSW began providing grocery boxes and care packages to Walgett Council for distribution to services. Our organisations could not participate in this scheme as it was poorly designed and couldn't respond to the needs we were identifying. It may have better suited the non-Aboriginal community **and should be evaluated for its methods and results.** No distribution systems were established for safe and efficient ways to deliver food to isolating households donated by the food charities.

In the COVID-19 Delta and Omicron waves in late 2021 and early 2022 the Walgett supermarket was hit by staff and stock shortages. **There appeared to be no ability of emergency responses systems to step in and assist the Walgett sole supermarket despite our requests to the Local Emergency Management Committee (LEMC).**

DEG and WAMS changed their responses to supplying meat and grocery vouchers to households experiencing shortages, supplemented with occasional drinking water deliveries to houses. Our organisations realised we did not have the capacity for large-scale food distribution. This meant we had to ensure COVID-19-safe and COVID-19-preventative measures were in place at the food retailers.

DEG regularly requested IGA to establish regular home delivery systems and to request assistance from SES and police through the LEMC as required. But the supermarket and emergency responders could not provide this to the extent needed.

We conclude that volunteers and food charities cannot be relied upon in emergency food security crises which we anticipate will increase with Climate Change until local food systems are secured.

Additionally, emergency human resources and oversight are required to support food retailers during an emergency affecting food and drinking water security.

We would also like to mention that WAMS and DEG were the only agencies consistently delivering PPE to Walgett households during the COVID-19 emergencies. WAMS delivered packages of sanitisers, gloves, insect repellent and masks. WAMS were also the consistent supplier of vaccinations and COVID-19 testing services. DEG delivered pallets of handwash and sanitiser to WAMS and Walgett LALC for distribution, and distributed masks and PPE to households regularly as we received donations from many kind responders. We are proud of the efforts we made to limit the spread of COVID-19, vaccinate the community and of our community communications keeping our community safe.

NSW food security emergency responses currently do not require the inclusion of ACCOs
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When the supermarket burnt down, the Local Emergency Operations Controller ("LEOCON") was encouraged by our supporters in NSW Premier and Cabinet to invite Dharriwaa Elders Group and Walgett Aboriginal Medical Service onto the Local Emergency Management Committee (LEMC). The new LEOCON was again supported by NSW Premier and Cabinet to invite our organisations on to the COVID-19 Local Emergency Management Committee ("LEMC"). We had to be "invited" because our Aboriginal organisations are not prescribed members by the NSW legislative framework established for emergency responses. Our Aboriginal organisations are present in the

LEMC at the personal discretion of the LEOCON, usually a senior member of NSW Police. This is concerning for other communities which might not have the capacity and confidence that strong local Aboriginal community controlled organisations ("ACCOs") in Walgett have built over more than 30 years. We note that the Walgett LEOCON has received kudos for the active inclusive Walgett COVID-19 LEMC.

During these recent food emergencies, we discovered the limitations of NSW emergency responses to our food crises. It was Dharriwaa Elders Group and Walgett Aboriginal Medical Service that raised the alarms about the food needs of the Walgett community both in the LEMC and to our NSW MP Roy Butler. We also advocated for accurate data and evidence-based public health responses, and many other issues not food-related e.g. emergency housing needs, policing matters, concerns for corrections inmates. We often had to manage community communications in the absence of other news sources and to correct mainstream media inaccuracies.

We were pleased that food supply issues were raised at the State Emergency Controller (SECON) and higher levels, and that the issue of "just in time" centralised food distribution to our Metcash-supplied supermarket, was recognised as a major vulnerability during disasters.

When Dharriwaa Elders Group raised hunger reports from the community during the COVID-19 crisis we discovered that **no holistic emergency food responses are currently funded by governments**. NSW Dept. Communities and Justice will only support families already under their notice. While the school struggled to maintain contact with children and young people, police were the only agency undertaking other children's welfare checks. We were not surprised when police would report that all children and young people they saw reported no problems, but we were receiving reports that families were short of food. We could not receive funds from any NSW agency to prepare and/or deliver food to vulnerable families who do not want their situation to be noticed by police and child protection agencies. Responses must start from the knowledge that Walgett is a Stolen Generations community.

Food security solutions during emergencies are currently not provided by governments

Our Aboriginal organisations were forced to seek food security assistance through the networks we have established OUTSIDE governments. DEG and WAMS have since written to NSW Premier and Cabinet urging them to reduce duplication of emergency efforts by working to respond to community needs when they are identified by local Aboriginal organisations, and to fund holistic service delivery by ACCOs.

Food affordability, accessibility and nutritional quality in Walgett

Access to nutritional quality food depends on vulnerable supply systems to our town.

Access to nutrition is also impacted by the financial pressures most in Walgett experience.

Jobseeker and other supports do not cover basic living costs in Walgett.

Energy poverty is increasingly concerning. We have learnt through a Yuwaya Ngarra-li student project that Walgett social housing has very poor thermal comfort requiring high energy expenditure. DEG staff are increasingly approached by community members with mounting energy debts.

Our Food and Water for Life project has learnt that families often cannot shop for quality nutrition to supply home cooking. Cheaper supermarket food options are often of poorer nutrition. Small discretionary funds are often used for daily purchases of more expensive rubbish foods from

takeaway food outlets. Anecdotally we believe this practice increased during Walgett's rolling food security crises since 2018.

Generational traditions of preparing ration foods using white flour and sugar and the decreasing ability to access wild foods from the lands and waters, combined with the inaccessibility of high nutrition foods from retailers, we believe has led our town to an increased risk of chronic disease.

There appears to be little regulation of the Walgett fast food outlets frequented by Walgett's Aboriginal community and the affordability and nutritional value of the takeaway food options they provide – mostly fried foods and sugary aerated drinks. The exception is the newsagency which provides a welcome range of meals and snacks cooked on the premises.

For all these reasons WAMS and DEG provide nutritious meals and bottled water whenever possible to meetings and community activities.

WAMS and DEG continue to explore temporary local food and water interventions while we seek to establish more permanent food and water security for our town, higher incomes and better housing through our advocacy to legislators like you.

We call on larger policy and legislative solutions that address the systemic issues outlined, and ongoing support for our organisations to continue to develop the food and water security interventions required in Walgett.

Local Food Security Solutions are required

WAMS cultivates a Community Garden that provides regular supplies of vegetables to patients experiencing chronic disease and Elders. In 2018 and 2019 the garden died when the rivers were dry at Walgett for an unprecedented period of time. NSW Government switched Council to source water from high sodium groundwater from the Great Artesian Basin. In response DEG and WAMS worked with YN collaborators and small funds from philanthropic UNSW alumnae and NSW DPIE to install more water-efficient beds, a super productive micro farm. The new water-efficient beds have provided to be very effective at maintaining plant productivity especially over summer when temperatures in Walgett reached 47oC. Our community will become more dependent on these systems in a warmer and drier climate, however, our submission to the NSW Government under 2021 NSW Stronger Communities program to double the productivity of the micro-farm was rejected which greatly disappointed us. Our aim is to produce weather-resilient high quality local fruit and vegetables for households and yet-to-be developed community and school weekly food programs.

We call for support to initiate Walgett food waste collection and manage a compost bank for community gardens.

DEG and WAMS have been advocating for chilled, low sodium drinking water kiosks to be supplied in high public use locations in the town's main streets. WAMS and DEG are progressing the installation of 3 drinking water kiosks at the Community Garden, WAMS and DEG premises to prepare for future advocacy to rollout the main street drinking water kiosks.

We call for resources to provide high quality drinking water kiosks in high-traffic public locations in recognition of the high incidence of chronic disease in Walgett⁸ and the public health benefits of providing free drinking water.

⁸ high sodium levels in drinking water are not recommended by the Australian Drinking Water Guidelines for patients with hypertension

DEG and WAMS believe we are fortunate to progress local solutions, where many other communities cannot. We are aware that we could achieve much more, and concentrate better on our core services if NSW provided public health human resources and project funds that could be deployed to communities like ours.

Most of the food security issues Walgett has experienced could have been avoided with more effective NSW government action

Recommendations for remedy:

Food and water security are a human right

NSW Government must:

- Uphold the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which states “everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food”⁹
- Respond to the nutrition needs of our community by implementing a Food Security Strategy that has been developed with our organisations

Water regulation

- NSW Government must respect and preserve the health of NSW waters especially for their contribution to food and water security for river communities like Walgett
- NSW Government must ensure that its Water Sharing Plans and funded projects ensure that rivers are revived and maintained well to supply high nutrition food and drinking water for river communities like Walgett
- Local Government water utilities must be properly resourced to provide quality drinking water that accommodates Climate Change and prioritises our community's access to water over all other interests except the health of the river itself
- The Health Minister must uphold the Public Health Act and ensure supplies of drinking water are fit for human consumption and do not constitute a public health risk
- Because of their importance for food and water security, the NSW Government must stop practices that treat rivers merely as canals to transport water between traders, or as drains for waste
- The NSW Government must protect underground waters and their water pressure especially now that our communities are forced to rely increasingly on bore water
- NSW Government must stop Floodplain Harvesting and over-extraction of waters that take water away from town food and water priorities, to benefit irrigators, miners and financial market traders
- Floodplain harvesting must not be licenced while our organisations can see that there is not enough water flowing past Walgett to sustain the good health of the floodplains, rivers, lakes and groundwaters
- NSW Government must properly resource the Natural Resource Access Regulator to investigate and ensure compliance for laws that protect the health of rivers and therefore the safety of Walgett's drinking water, our community's public health, Aboriginal wellbeing and culture

⁹ United Nations. Universal Declaration of Human Rights <http://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/>: UN; [cited 2018 5 November].\

Food quality, accessibility and affordability

The NSW Government must:

- Cease increasing amounts of harmful, highly processed foods being supplied cheaply to our low socio-economic community by food suppliers and food charities
- Control and regulate aerial spraying of pesticides and herbicides impacting water and vegetation, birds and animals i.e. our drinking water and wild foods
- Prove that chemical pollution is not contaminating the lands, communities and waterways surrounding Walgett
- Ensure that the Walgett community's high nutrition food and water sources are safe from chemical spraying and industry pollutants
- Provide to WAMS and DEG regular water chemistry test results from NSW Health Public Health
- Provide high quality drinking water kiosks in high-traffic public locations in recognition of the high incidence of chronic disease in Walgett and the public health benefits of providing free drinking water
- Reverse the trend of reducing public access to crown lands and leased lands and encourage Aboriginal communities' access to wild foods
- Legislate prioritised access to lands and waters by Aboriginal communities in NSW.
- Resource and legislate for local ACCOs¹⁰ to protect Aboriginal Cultural Values of Country (i.e. lands and waters) and cultivate knowledge in younger generations
- Introduce a planning process that supports local food production
- Legislate for suitable lands to be zoned reserved for local high-nutrition food
- Protect lands used for local food production from disasters, agricultural, mining and exploration purposes
- Provide social housing to address high unmet need in Walgett recognising that a kitchen supplies the opportunity for home cooking and food storage

Improving food systems

NSW Government must:

- Stop the theft and degradation of Aboriginal nation and public food and water security assets through poor management of water, lands and public health
- Regulate supermarkets and food manufacturers to uphold nutrition standards by encouraging food reformulation or more effective and informative food labelling which could change the informational environment and shift consumption patterns therefore promoting good health
- Encourage better food transport and distribution systems that serve our communities well
- Encourage decentralisation of grocery warehouses from cities to be distributed around regions to distribute and decentralise risk, avoiding concentrations of risk in regional hubs
- Encourage the increase of local stockpiles of essentials and other measures to strengthen remote community food resilience during emergencies
- Subsidise retailers to ensure prices are equivalent across the country and standards relating to prices are regulated

¹⁰ Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations

- Introduce subsidies, standards and regulatory regimes that ensure nutrition values are increased in affordable foods offered by food suppliers and retailers
- Recognise the high value of supermarkets to single-supermarket towns and establish legislated oversight practices, appropriate insurances, and emergency plans in preparation for when they are unexpectedly lost
- Plan for ensuring continuity of service by high value supermarkets in single-supermarket towns during future pandemics and other emergencies where shopping is affected by staff shortages and infection risks
- Audit and evaluate recent food and water security responses by NSW Govt and charities, including their nutrition value and local methods of distribution, for the purpose of preparing for future emergencies better
- Factor remoteness into all food and water system responses including resourcing.

Resourcing community-led food and water security solutions

NSW Government must:

- Increase and improve the availability of healthy food in remote Aboriginal communities at all times
- Invest in the health values of local food programs, community gardens and the water sources that nurture them and protect them in legislation
- Establish ACCO highly nutritious local food supplies resilient to increasing climate and water challenges
- Resource ACCOs to provide appropriate holistic food and water security emergency responses in their communities
- Recognise the expertise of ACCOs particularly in Stolen Generations communities like Walgett for monitoring community needs and responding appropriately
- Resource and support the food and water security responses of ACCOs in recognition of their effectiveness until there is no food and water insecurity
- Resource Walgett ACCOs to initiate Walgett food waste collection and manage a compost bank for community gardens.
- Use the Walgett Aboriginal community's existing governance mechanisms via ACCOs for advice and negotiation to ensure systemic changes will be fit for purpose and ground-truthed

All the above recommendations can be resolved by the NSW Government working with the Commonwealth through genuine and effective partnership with Aboriginal communities. **We leave it to others to justify the investments we propose against Premier's Priorities and Closing the Gap targets and outcomes.**

NSW must prioritise community involvement in food policy and make sure there are mechanisms in place at all stages to implement community food security priorities as this will ensure that community needs are met.

Programs must be evaluated by communities, and planning and decision-making shared by communities and government. We know from experience that governments find this difficult – but we maintain that WAMS and DEG have the experience and expertise to assist.

Dharriwaa Elders Group, Walgett Aboriginal Medical Service, 28 February 2022.

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