
*The Century Story*¹ *by Joe Grimmond*²

'We've been here for more than 40,000 years, you've been here for 200, so we have a bit of a different view as to time' (as to whether this project should ever go ahead, and if so when).

Murandoo Yanner – Chair, Carpentaria Land Council and Aboriginal activist

The purpose of this case study is *not* to

- Discuss the historic High Court decision, that for the first time recognised that the country had previously been occupied by peoples of other than British descent at the time of British occupation in 1788 (The Mabo 2 Decision) and that some Indigenous rights continued in respect to land ownership, subsequent to occupation.
- Discuss the systematic dispossession of the Indigenous people in the region following white settlement between 1860 and 1900 and events in relation to Indigenous people since that time.

The primary purpose of the paper is to examine the use of systems leadership modelling in the resolution of issues between Indigenous residents in the Gulf of Carpentaria region of Australia and CRA Limited in the period following the discovery of the Century ore body in 1990, and the signing of the Gulf Communities Agreement in May 1997. These major factors cannot however be ignored in any discussion on Century as both of them drove widespread and commonly shared 'mythologies' amongst Indigenous and non-Indigenous people throughout the region.

Geography

The Century mine is located in far North West Queensland, 250 kilometres northwest of Mount Isa. It is closer to Adelaide than it is to Brisbane. The mine is close to the edge of the Barkly Tableland escarpment near the spectacular Lawn Hill Gorge. In addition to the mine, treatment plant and associated infrastructure, it also involves an underground pipeline to

1 January 15, 2004. A discussion paper on the application of the theory of systems leadership modelling that has been developed by Dr Ian Macdonald as it was applied during the negotiation of the Century 'Gulf Communities Agreement' between Indigenous people in the remote Gulf region of Queensland in Australia and CRA Pty Ltd in the period 1994–1997.

2 The author of this paper was employed by Century Zinc in 1994 as general manager – employee relations. In 1996 he was appointed as lead negotiator for the Agreement. He remained with the project following the sale to Pasmenco for one year to assist with the implementation of the Agreement. The views expressed are exclusively those of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of any other company or person.

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carry product as a slurry 300km across the black soil plains to the small township of Karumba at the mouth of the Norman River.

Here the slurry is dewatered and stockpiled prior to transfer with a 5000 DWT self-unloading vessel to export ships, which have to anchor some 50 kilometres off shore due to the very shallow water in the Gulf of Carpentaria. While there would be fewer than 50 people within a 100 kilometre radius of the mine and only 700 in Karumba, the project will impact, if only indirectly, the communities at Doomadgee, Burketown, Normanton and Mornington Island in the Wellesley Island Group. The Century mine had the potential to impact socially and economically on the entire region: an area roughly equivalent to Tasmania but supporting a population of less than 7000 – about 80 per cent of whom are Aboriginal. Apart from mainly seasonal work in the pastoral and Gulf fishing industries, new employment and training opportunities were virtually nonexistent.

The region is monsoonal and subject to cyclones. Road access can only be described as poor; road closures to Burketown and Doomadgee (the nearest communities) can be anything up to 12 weeks each year. To improve road access the Queensland government spent \$15 million to upgrade and seal the road from Nardoo to Gregory and the company has spent a further \$12 million to upgrade roads to the mine site. Even so, an eight-week road closure for heavy traffic during the annual wet season is likely to occur from time to time. Fortunately the mine site itself is well drained.



Some of the base maps presented in this report were compiled from data supplied by Australian Surveying and Land Information Group (AUSLIG).



0 125 250
Kilometres

Century Project
Location Plan

Figure 1.

Figure CS1.1 Century Project Location Plan

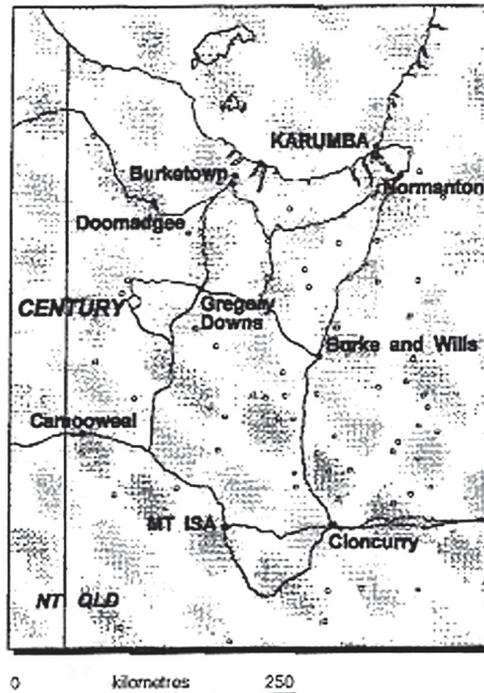


Figure CS1.2 Location of Century Mine

History

Although there were earlier visits by coastal explorers such as Flinders and Stokes, European influence in the region did not begin until Landsborough's expedition of November 1861, which led to settlement of the area in 1865.

The second half of the 19th century was a very turbulent period in the region, with considerable fighting between Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals, and on occasions between different Aboriginal groups. There were a number of massacres recorded with several involving the killing of between 10 and 20 people. 'European' diseases also took their toll on the Aboriginal population.

It was a period of widespread 'dispossession'. As was common practice in many other parts of Australia, pastoralists were granted parcels of land or took up holdings on their own initiative. Often, the new owners forced the Aboriginal people off their holdings away from traditional camping and dreaming areas. Police stations, such as the one established at Burketown in 1885, were set up to control attacks by Aboriginals on white settlers and their stock. However, little protection or justice was provided for Aboriginals against attack by whites.

It was in 1887 that mining first occurred in the area – at Hann's Galena Mine No I (later known as the Silver King), only two kilometres from the Century deposit. Hann's enterprise was unsuccessful, however, ten years later new mines were developed and the Burketown Mineral Field was proclaimed in 1899.

From the 1880s to the 1930s, Aboriginal camps were located near station homesteads and many Aboriginal people were employed in the cattle industry. Those not living on stations either carried on a traditional lifestyle, such as on the Bayley Point Reserve on the northwest coast, or lived in camps on the outskirts of Burketown and Normanton.

A Presbyterian mission was established at Mornington Island in 1914, however, it was not until 1932 that a mission was established by the Brethren Church near Bayley Point. This community, which became known as Doomadgee, moved to a new reserve on the Nicholson River in 1937. These missions became the destination of Aboriginal people forcibly removed from places such as Lawn Hill and Gregory Downs. Others were sometimes removed to other missions on Cape York, Cairns and Townsville.

Dispossession of traditional lands, confinement of different language and family groups into the one area, repressive 'missionary' and 'colonial' practices all contributed to loss of identity, internal group and family tensions and extreme dependency on social welfare arrangements. The problems deepened and intensified from generation to generation over the next 50 years. It is also important to recognise that until the 1960s Indigenous people in Australia had very limited rights and were not included in official population statistics prior to this time. Queensland Aboriginal 'protection' laws were adopted as the 'apartheid' model by the government of South Africa in the early 1900s.

This was the history of the area when CRA arrived on the scene in the late 1980s and in 1990 announced the discovery of the Century deposit and the prospect of a very large project in the region. Little wonder therefore that it became to be thought of by many in the Aboriginal community as the 'second invasion'.

The lead-up to negotiations

Whilst it is clear that the 'Mabo' decision was a major turning point in respect to recognition of some form of land rights for Indigenous people, there was a popular misconception that prior to this decision Aboriginal people had no rights at all in respect to mining projects. This is far from the truth.

Federal heritage and environmental legislation enacted in the 1980s provided the minister with considerable powers in respect to projects that had the potential to impact on heritage and cultural issues as they went to Indigenous people's interests.

For example, the minister was empowered to hold enquiries, conduct meetings, instigate mediation and ultimately to veto projects that in his or her view would damage or destroy areas of significance to Indigenous people – the infamous Hindmarsh bridge is a somewhat recent case in point where the construction of a major bridge was vetoed by the minister on the basis that a 'sacred' site would be destroyed if it went ahead ('the secret women's business case').

CRA was certainly aware of the potential for this legislation to impact on Century, having been involved in Ministerial enquiries when developing the Marandoo iron ore mine in Western Australia in the early 1990s.

The corporation had also been impacted by the loss of its operations in Bougainville when the 'revolution' came to that island and the operations remain closed to this day. One of the stated reasons for opposition at Bougainville goes directly to lack of community support and the perception that few benefits were going directly to second-generation Indigenous residents.

Whilst a detailed Indigenous people's strategy was in the process of being developed, the decision had been made both within CRA and Rio Tinto (at about the time of the Century discovery) that projects would not proceed anywhere without strong community support and without agreed mechanisms designed to provide project benefits to local communities.

Indigenous land rights had already been identified as an emerging issue in Australia during the late 1980s and this, in conjunction with the foregoing, led to the decision to purchase the leases of all the land between Century and the coast because it was obvious that a port would be required if the project was going to be viable. The prevailing logic at the time was that land ownership even by way of pastoral lease would provide some greater degree of certainty of coastal access than might otherwise be the case.

In retrospect, this decision was to contribute to major difficulties in ultimately reaching an agreement with local people. Ironically, none of the land that was purchased was ever required by the project except for a very small section of land that was for the actual mine site.

Properties that were purchased included Riversleigh (location of world famous fossil deposits) and Lawn Hill (encompassing the Lawn Hill National park), both operating as viable cattle properties and the backbone of the emerging live cattle export trade to Asia. Other properties that were purchased were Turn Off Lagoons, Pendine and Konka (both abandoned by non-Indigenous people for many years). All in all, a combined area of over 10 000 square kilometres was purchased.

The decision to purchase raised grave disquiet amongst residents (both Indigenous and non-Indigenous) because it was clear that the entire purchase price had been excessive (in terms of regional property values) and company intention was unknown. The properties were then leased back to the seller at attractive rental rates.

Activists immediately used the purchase decision to generate the mythology 'that we don't have any land at all and that it was unfair that a mining company can come in and buy up all this land which is really ours'.

The continued refusal by the lessees to permit Indigenous people access was then considered to be a problem for the new owners and not for the lessees.

This purchase action became the first real evidence that the mining company had arrived, because until this time contact had been intermittent – geologists generally flew direct to and from Century from the nearest regional airport at Mount Isa without any real contact with Indigenous residents. No local Indigenous people had been employed during exploration. However while the discovery had been made and the land had been purchased the facts were that it was still a very long way from a 'project'.

First formal contact by CRA geologists was made at Doomadgee in December 1990 and it quickly became evident that the project was a long way away from having 'widespread community support'.

Nevertheless, the engineers pushed on with the preliminary feasibility study that required (amongst other things) that archaeological and anthropological surveys be carried out in the region of the potential projects operations to determine whether any significant cultural or heritage sites would be impacted.

By 1991 a survey had been conducted at the project area in cooperation with the Doomadgee Aboriginal Council. This council was established under Queensland legislation titled Deed of Grant in Trust (DOGIT), which was an initiative of the Bjelke Peterson government designed to give them some say in land use but would not until Mabo give them the possibility of true land ownership.

The survey did not identify any areas of concern or any major cultural problems that would prevent the project from proceeding. The surveys would be much disputed over the next few years as being 'a white fella' survey where the 'real' traditional owners were never consulted'.

In June 1992 the historic Mabo decision was issued by the High Court, which was to become a major issue for the project.

By 1993 the feasibility study was still proceeding and no real attempt had been made to establish relationships with the Communities. In October of that year a group of Century people were denied access to Doomadgee (as was the communities' right under DOGIT legislation).

In December of 1993 the Commonwealth government passed the Native Title Act and the company moved quickly to apply for a mining lease for the area. The Carpentaria land council (CLC) lodged an immediate objection on the basis of inadequate consultation.

Land councils had been established under federal legislation with the primary purpose of protecting local Indigenous land interests and, until the time of Century, had really been nothing more than consultative groups. They were poorly funded and had very little, if any power to do much at all.

A very well-respected community leader who had died suddenly in 1991 had headed the Carpentaria land council. In 1992 his eldest son Jayson returned to the community to take over operation of the council. Jayson had left an emerging career as a journalist with the ABC in Cairns. This training was to equip him with considerable media skills in the forthcoming political battle that was to ensue. Shortly after returning Jayson adopted a traditional name of Murandoo.

Murandoo set about reconstituting the land council with representatives from the six language groups based at Doomadgee and Mornington Island in the Gulf. There is much conjecture amongst community members as to the legality and legitimacy of Murandoo's actions; no one for example can recall any elections ever having been held. The end result, however, was that through personal capability and charismatic leadership he was able to achieve full control of the council.

One of the first official actions of the council was to write to Century with the request that all future contact with Gulf residents in respect to the project be direct to the council.

The company reluctantly agreed, and this led to the first formal meeting between the council and the Company at Sweers Island in the Gulf in February 1994.

That meeting did not go well; much concern was expressed about the potential for lead and zinc concentrates to pollute the Gulf and damage the environment. Opposition was also expressed to the concept of a slurry pipeline to transport concentrates to the coast and there was a general reluctance to participate in further cultural clearance work.

The issue of access to Lawn Hill property was also raised for the first time with the new owners.

The meeting, however, ended on the basis that the council recognised the economic benefits of the project and would support it by participating in surveys at the site. The next survey did not take place until 1998, four years later.

The next major event after this meeting related to the need to extract a large bulk sample (enough to produce 5000 tonnes of concentrate) for testing by customers in June of that year. The CLC lodged an objection to this activity, which was withdrawn about six weeks later, and the work went ahead.

By this time the workings of the Native Title Act were starting to become a bit clearer and lawyers on behalf of the CLC lodged a native title claim to a small section of the proposed mining lease which, if successful, would have prevented the mine from going ahead.

The legal cases now commenced in earnest. They would see the parties appear in courts in Queensland and Canberra almost continuously over the next four years. All major political

parties became involved, both federal and state; Aboriginal leaders throughout the country and government bureaucrats (however remotely connected) played (or attempted to play) some role in the forthcoming legal proceedings or behind-the-scenes negotiations.

The use of systems leadership modelling

By the middle of 1993 the future for the project appeared economically attractive and while it was recognised that there was still a long way to go, the CRA board decided to declare Century a project and appointed Ian Williams' as managing director of Century Zinc Pty Ltd.

Ian had spent many years at Hamersley Iron in Western Australia in various operating roles and came to Century from the position of project director, having just successfully completed the Marandoo mine in that state.

During his period at Hamersley he had introduced an Aboriginal training and employment project (albeit on a much smaller scale than might be required at Century), which was having some success. Ian had also spent time on various organisational development teams and was familiar with stratified systems leadership theory (developed by E. Jacques) and the emerging systems leadership theory (being developed by Dr Ian Macdonald).

He quickly set about establishing a management team that would take over from the exploration and engineering people, who had had charge of the project up to this time.

Ian and a number of his team had used the modelling with great success in Hamersley and other CRA companies throughout the 1980s and early 1990s, and it was really without any debate that the team decided that Century would be established using these organisational principles. At this point in time not much thought was given to their application in the Gulf environment.

Systems design work commenced with particular focus on

- authorities and accountabilities
- role descriptions
- selection and recruitment and
- performance review.

The early decision was also taken that all Century people would be exposed to 'Working Together' courses, almost as part of the induction process, to establish a common language and culture and a shared understanding of the principles by everyone involved.

As far as negotiations were concerned the period up to and including 1994 saw all discussions occurring with the land council, a process that seriously restricted access to the local community and inhibited the ability to effectively address issues in a non-confrontational environment

Because of this the company did not have a clear picture concerning

- who the community decision makers were;
- what 'mythologies' were held about the company and the project;
- what Indigenous people wanted to achieve from the project and
- what Indigenous people thought about 'themselves and their leadership'.

It was also obvious that there were very limited contacts with anyone not associated with the CLC and that the whole future of the project might rest with these people and others far removed from the project who had other 'agendas' to pursue (for example, full ownership of

land and resources, and in a few extreme cases, the objective of the establishment of a separate state and Indigenous government).

Many people, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous did, however, see the possibility that the project might have great potential for social and economic improvement for the people in the region. Many made considerable effort to support the project and a number took some considerable risks (both personal and political) in providing public support. The simple facts were that they had no real role authority to do anything.

In some cases community leaders could not even require that the provisions of the law be observed. Riots in the region were not uncommon and in one infamous case the Doomadgee police station was 'stormed' and the rioters removed impounded cartons of illegally imported beer. Little of the evidence was ever recovered.

A number of systems were contributing to this unlawful behaviour, including the fact that traditional initiation practices had in the main ceased. In the absence of traditional practices many young people felt that new initiation practices required a period of detention in the Townsville regional prison. A majority of young men in the region had experienced some form of conviction for criminal offences. In some few cases people had extensive criminal records.

Against this background Ian decided that a lot more had to be done to establish direct relationships with local people and despite the agreement of non-contact with the CLC he decided to engage Kate George (an Indigenous woman from Western Australia) to conduct a 'community communication survey' throughout the region. Kate had worked with Hamersley on the Marandoo Project and had proved to be very capable.

One of Kate's first tasks was to visit each of the communities and to make contact with community leaders. On reflection by everyone involved (including Kate), this was at considerable personal risk – which was not appreciated at the time.

Kate's first report was not encouraging, and she reported that the following mythologies were widespread:

- 'They will poison the water of the Gulf and food will die and children will be born with defects.' (loving and trust)
- 'The mine will dry up the rivers and places of significance will be destroyed.' (loving and trust)
- 'There will be no jobs only cleaning toilets and cutting grass.' (dishonest and undignifying)
- 'The region will be invaded for the second time by "redneck miners".' (unloving and cowardly)

Examples that were being used to support these mythologies included the symbolism of the purchase of pastoral properties and continual denial of access to traditional owners; the mining of the bulk sample pit without consultation with local people; the absence of Century people in the region (no mention or knowledge of the CLC non-contact agreement); and the Bougainville Revolution (OK-TEDI in Papua New Guinea also received partial reference as an example of mining company-generated pollution).

Kate did however report that many of the women consulted saw Century employment as the only possible hope for young people in the communities. She was also approached by a number of men throughout the region with offers of support. Again the main interest was in employment and, whilst opponents had been referring to the 'immense' wealth that would be created by the project, this did not appear to be high on the locals' agenda.

It was also obvious that the CLC did not have universal support, particularly in regard to the values of 'honesty and fairness' as far as many Indigenous people were concerned.

It became apparent to Ian that Century was going to be much different from Hamersley and he set about thinking about how the 'models' could be applied in this new environment.

First of all it was recognised that whilst many of the team had years of mining experience in remote areas, no one had much experience in working or dealing with Indigenous people. A lot of third-party advice about how to develop relationships was being offered that subsequently proved to be of little value in the Gulf given events of the preceding 100 years or so.

A fast-track education programme was implemented where staff set out to identify 'best practice' operations in Australia and overseas, particularly in the USA and Canada as far as Indigenous relations were concerned.

A number of factors became evident during 1994 as a result of this work and some basic decisions started to be taken about a new approach for Century.

SYSTEMS MODEL

An initial decision was taken that a new suite of employment-related systems would be necessary if there was going to be any real success with Indigenous employment. Ian established a very large stretch target for the number of Indigenous people to be employed (some 200 per cent higher than next best Australian mining company at the time). Many attempts were later made to enshrine this target in agreement documents; these attempts were resisted. Team members were certain the inclusion of 'hard' targets would ultimately lead to systems of differentiation being introduced based on reasons other than the work to be performed.

An early decision was taken that any systems that were designed must only differentiate on the basis of the work that was to be performed. It was decided that it would be quite legitimate to establish systems of differentiation designed to get people to the point where they could compete with non-Indigenous people (who had had access to prior employment and training), but once training had been completed employment systems would apply equally to all. A decision was also taken that preference to traineeships would be given to Indigenous people, given that they comprised the large majority of regional residents (a standard practice that applied in most overseas countries where CRA was operating).

A further example of the use of the equalisation-differentiation model went to the ability to purchase alcohol in the camp. It was strongly recommended by 'experts' that Century be declared a 'dry' site (a first in the Australian mining industry). After much internal discussion it was decided that a 'dry' site would not find much favour with non-Indigenous employees and a system of equalisation would apply to all, with very clear consequences for breaches.

This basic principle was to apply to all systems that were designed and introduced at Century.

VALUES CONTINUA

Community leaders needed to be identified and positive relationships needed to be developed if the project was to have any chance of 'developing widespread community support'.

Early work using the 'values continua' identified that this would be a major task given the history of treatment of the local indigenous people over the past 100 years. A very old gentleman who lived in the Northern Territory (since deceased) was identified by Kate as a person held in very high regard throughout all of the various language groups in the Gulf. Anthropologists say that this situation is very unusual.

Arrangements were made for Ian to make contact. This was just to be the first of many meetings that were to occur between Ian and this man until the time of his death in the year 2000. He became a very strong supporter of the project and provided great assistance in identifying those areas of great significance to the people but as equally important was his ability to discount other claimed areas as being important when put forward by project opponents.

It was also recognised from the theory that existing mythologies would only be replaced by new ones over time and that behaviour by Century people needed to continually support the new ones that the company was attempting to create. The Century team would not include anyone who might have contact with Indigenous people who demonstrated negative values.

Based on Kate's assessment of areas of major community interest every endeavour would need to be made to identify early real employment opportunities for as many Indigenous people as possible at Century as a potentially positive driver.

SYMBOLS

A process was developed to start to identify symbols that were seen by the communities as demonstrating negative values.

The first one identified went directly to the provision of funding which would be necessary and which would be necessary for community consultation, not only for Century people to meet with residents but also for community people to meet together to discuss the project and its potential impacts and benefits. It was agreed that wherever possible this should be in the form of assistance with transport, meals and accommodation and that meetings should be held at Century to enable locals to see what was happening and to meet as many Century people as possible.

Direct cash funding for these activities would reinforce the view that the company was very wealthy and past community experience with cash grants suggested that distribution was in many cases based on family contacts and favouritism rather than the basic driver as to what work has to be done and who is best capable of doing it.

A different approach should also be taken to community visits and wherever possible Century people should drive rather than fly (an often time-consuming activity given the distances involved, obviously not possible at Mornington Island). Locals saw visiting aircraft as transport for police, politicians, government officers and visiting Indigenous dignitaries – very few of whom were held in high regard at that time.

Century people would also stay overnight where possible, a rare occurrence with outside visitors due to fairly difficult visitor accommodation.

By the end of 1994 a lot of work had been carried out by the team and members had started to develop a high degree of confidence that the models had particular application to the Century dilemma, particularly the concepts of

- application of values continua
- systems of equalisation and differentiation
- mythologies and
- associated symbols.

Meetings continued without much apparent success with the CLC but by August 1995 the company was able to table a comprehensive offer, which included

- phased transfer of pastoral properties

- annual funding for employment and training
- annual grant for businesses development purposes
- recognition of cultural and heritage issues and
- consultation on environmental issues.

This offer, valued at \$60 million, formed the basis of all negotiations which followed right through to the conclusion of the Gulf Communities Agreement pursuant to the Native Title Act in May 1997 some 21 months later, and while it evolved and developed in detail the essential structure and overall value remained intact.

Some of the non-Indigenous negotiators claimed that this approach to negotiations was 'bloody minded' by the Century team. The negotiating team had, however, determined that if the company was to be seen as 'fair, trustworthy and honest' the first offer must remain very similar to the last, as the company was going to be around for a very long time (in mining company terms) and the first offer had been (and was being) actively supported by many Indigenous people.

By February 1996 the company recognised a sense of frustration and a growing level of support and decided to bypass the CLC and accept invitations to attend meetings in the communities, which was seen as quite 'courageous' by many in the communities. Whilst this represented a major turning point and provided an opportunity to correct misinformation and address real issues of concern, work at establishing relationships had been going on in the communities, primarily focused on developing employment opportunities.

Many of these activities received strong criticism from the CLC and despite claims of breach of negotiating protocols the company insisted that discussions would continue.

Implementation

THE ARGYLE VISIT

In August 1994 an aircraft was hired and six Aboriginal elders were invited to visit Argyle Diamond Mines in Western Australia with Century people to provide them with exposure to a large open cut mining operation and to also let them talk to a number of Indigenous people who were working there in a range of jobs.

The visit was judged a great success by the people who went although a number were strongly criticised by the CLC upon their return to the communities.

THE FENCING CONTRACT

During 1994 a need had been identified to fence a very large section of the perimeter of the proposed mining lease to keep cattle out of the site for safety reasons. A local Aboriginal person from Doomadgee was identified who had had experience in this area and he was asked to put together a team to carry out the work.

The decision was also made to use the opportunity to train people and expose as many of them as possible to the Century environment. People would be engaged for two-week blocks and then new people would be introduced. This was a relatively expensive exercise, but the purpose of the project was not to construct the fence at the lowest possible cost.

Before work had commenced, a range of systems issues were identified, namely:

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- How would people be employed given that it was for maximum two-weekly blocks?
- How would people be paid?
- What if people arrived without any money to purchase toiletries and minor items?
- What about work clothes and safety footwear?
- What about camp rules regarding footwear in the dining room and alcohol consumption?

The first three issues were resolved fairly simply by using an employment agency in Mount Isa that had had a lot of experience with hiring Indigenous people on a short-term basis. They provided people with a small pay advance on commencement and made sure that people were paid before they went back to the communities.

Using the systems of equalisation model it was decided that everyone would be provided with two sets of Century work clothes with logos to keep and that safety boots would be provided for the duration of the work even though it was a contract job of very short duration.

Footwear would be required in the mess and normal rules regarding alcohol purchase and consumption would apply.

People were to be treated as normal Century employees in all respects even though they technically were employed by the agency for periods of about two weeks.

There were a few interesting lessons from this exercise. After the first week's work one employee did not return and despite an initial view that he had decided just not to come back, enquiries were made and it was discovered that his boots had been stolen and he was too embarrassed to return. After that all boots stayed at camp. Employees were, however, encouraged to wear shirts home as it was felt that they would become good 'ambassadors' for the project. Century shirts were to become prized possessions throughout the Gulf by people who worked on this first project and were worn with great pride. It would not be at all unusual over the next year or so to see people wearing Century uniforms at anti-Century rallies throughout the Gulf which provided the Century team with considerable encouragement.

THE FIRST OFFICIAL VISIT TO CENTURY

Whilst the fencing contract was proceeding it was decided that an invitation would be issued to senior people from throughout the region to visit and talk to people who were working on site. Visits were to be overnight so as not to interfere with the progress of the work, another decision based on the models. This was to be the first of many visits to come.

The first group arrived and the first thing that was noted was that most didn't have any footwear. Again, on the basis of systems of equalisation and as far as company policy was concerned, an urgent request was issued to Mount Isa and a consignment of rubber thongs was dispatched by light aircraft at short notice. In the absence of knowledge of the importance of the models and symbols in particular it would have been very easy to create a 'new' rule for the short visit.

The next decision to be made was whether alcohol would be provided at a BBQ to be held that evening with the visitors and indigenous employees. Alcohol could not be consumed in the dining room but it was normal practice to provide alcohol at BBQs.

A fairly easy decision could be taken and alcohol was provided. Alcohol consumption has never been an issue at company functions with Indigenous people.

These functions and visits were strongly opposed by the CLC but were continued by Century on the basis that the meetings and visits would not be used to circumvent the formal negotiation process. They were, however, invaluable as 'relationship builders' and provided

the company people with the chance to provide 'lots of clarification' to many senior people from within the communities, as far as the formal offer was concerned.

These visits also then provided community leaders with the opportunity to provide return invitations to Century people to visit their communities.

1996 and beyond

Following the decision to start to become involved directly with the communities a first visit was organised to Doomadgee at the invitation of the local council.

When news of this impending visit became public, the police sent a message that they could not guarantee protection for visitors and strongly suggested that the visit be cancelled. The Doomadgee police force numbered 16, which gave it the dubious distinction of having the highest police-to-population ratio in Queensland and probably all of Australia at that time.

Given that the council chair had extended the invitation it was decided that the visit must go ahead. It would be very low key and would involve a group of three people who had not at that time been involved in the negotiations, including Kate George – who had continued to visit the communities throughout the period.

The visitors arrived to be told that the council chair was not available and that the CLC were holding a big meeting in town. Nevertheless the visitors decided to go to the Community Development Employment Program (CDEP) office, which was part of the agreed visit programme.

After a period of time enough people were organised (using contacts with people who had been involved on the fencing contract and people who had visited the site) to hold a meeting and the meeting ultimately commenced. At this time a large group of people arrived from the CLC meeting and some considerable debate ensued as to 'what to do to the visitors'. This was also accompanied by considerable abuse of the people who had decided to come to the meeting. At a most appropriate moment the chair arrived armed with a large club and the meeting proceeded with the people who were present – the first real sign of 'dissonance'. This was to be the start of many visits by Century people throughout the Gulf, much to the anger of the CLC and other 'interested' parties external to the Gulf.

IAN WILLIAMS' VISIT TO DOOMADGEE

The CLC at this time decided that the only way to regain control was to step in and organise a meeting that would show Century people that neither they nor their project were welcome in the Gulf. An invitation was issued to Ian Williams and others to attend a meeting at Doomadgee in April 1996.

Despite much internal advice and advice from concerned locals not to attend Ian decided that the meeting must proceed.

On the day of the meeting it had become obvious that the Indigenous visitors from areas external to Doomadgee had been 'handpicked' by the CLC because project supporters had been calling in to say that they had been refused transport to the meeting by the CLC.

The police met the Century plane at the airport (decision to fly for security reasons) and offered to provide transport to the meeting. This decision was refused for the obvious symbolism reasons and a request was sent to the CLC for transport, which ultimately arrived.

It also became obvious that whilst many of the external people had been handpicked the entire Doomadgee population had turned out (including many strong supporters). The meeting turned into a 'fiasco' and Ian was heckled and abused for some hours. The supporters stayed silent in the main.

Many people who attended subsequently expressed great shame and embarrassment at the treatment of the Century people but Ian's courage was clearly recognised by all. This meeting became a major turning point.

From then on

Legal proceedings continued, but considerable community dissonance saw various changes to negotiating team members from within the Indigenous communities with a number of supporters being able to now secure positions on the Indigenous negotiating team.

The legal situation regarding the standing of the negotiations continued to be very confused and it had become obvious to all that Century had become a 'test case' for the legislation and many advisers were convinced that an early settlement at Century had implications for Indigenous land rights nationally.

In June 1996 a meeting of Indigenous negotiators had voted 12–11 to accept the agreement. An urgent meeting was convened by the CLC involving some people who were not present at the first vote and a new vote rejected the offer 19–0 'due to confusion'.

Negotiations continued, with two issues being given much prominence, namely:

1. The decision by the project to ship through the Gulf rather than agree to ship concentrates through Townsville (a major CLC claim which would have put the project economically at risk, given that Townsville Port would have involved product transport for a further 800 kilometres before being able to be loaded onto a ship). Given the mythologies that Kate had identified a large amount of work was going to be necessary in the communities (particularly Mornington Island) to convince people that this was not really a financial option. In addition to the disinformation that had been circulated regarding pollution and health risks some interested non-Indigenous people had prepared a questionable economic case that supported the Townsville option.

However relationships had been developed to the point that ultimately the communities were prepared to believe and trust the company to the extent that this opposition was overcome. (One initiative taken by the company was to engage a respected medical practitioner to conduct community information sessions of the benefits of zinc to human wellbeing.)

2. The second issue was much more difficult and related to the company's proposal of a gradual handover of the pastoral properties as opposed to the handover of 100 per cent at the time of signing. This was a major issue for the traditional owners – the Waanyi people – and was probably not fully accepted by them at the time of signing but decided to sign on the basis that they trusted the company to respect their long-term interests.

The major issue for the Century team was the fact that the properties of Lawn Hill and Riversleigh to a lesser extent had become the backbone of the emerging live cattle export trade to Asia. The removal of these properties from the trade had the potential to destroy a new industry for the region with an immediate impact on the non-Indigenous residents (who were

relying on this industry to survive economically) and a potential long-term impact on the Indigenous population who would ultimately become major landowners.

The situation was that the stock valued at about \$8 million belonged to the lessees and were not included as part of the package. Even if stock were included an absence of property management skills amongst traditional owners was also identified. The 'tough' decision was taken that a gradual handover would be made and that training would be provided, in the hope that the properties would continue to be viable and to provide further economic benefits to Indigenous people when they would ultimately assume full control. It would be fair to say that this decision had internal dissenters both within Century and the wider CRA group.

In April 1997 the Native title claimants and Century, followed by the Queensland government in May of that year, finally signed the Gulf Communities Agreement.

Summary

The Century project was clearly a very good mining deposit that some would say was found in the 'wrong place at the wrong time' (CRA sold the project to Pasminco in 1997).

It did however become an example as to how the establishment of direct relationships could be established using the 'models' for the benefit of all.

At the time of writing of this case study the following has been achieved:

EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING

- Current employment of over 100 local people (20 per cent of total) with an average length of employment at 122 weeks (non-local average less than 100 weeks).
- Forty per cent of local employees are female.
- Over 500 local people have had employment exposure at Century since construction commenced.
- Unsubsidised income to locals exceeds \$20 million.
- Company contribution to employment and training are at plus \$6 million (includes subsidised training income).
- Community relations officers are employed in the communities of Doomadgee, Normanton and Mornington Island.

BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

- An Aboriginal business development trust has been established to administer funds provided by the company for these purposes. Funding to date exceeds \$7 million, with the majority of the funds being invested by the trust at this time due to a general lack of skills within the communities; an issue which is being addressed.
- Four businesses have been established to supply services to the mine and port, which employ a further 20 local people.
- Funding has also been used to establish a new bakery in Doomadgee that is leased to a contractor.
- Trust funds will be allocated as commercial loans rather than grants with full accountability.

PASTORAL PROPERTIES

- A joint venture pastoral company has been established and commenced operations during 2000.
- The company has purchased 2000 head of cattle through a standard bank loan, which are being run on Riversleigh with the intention to expand the herd over the next five years and move onto Lawn Hills.
- Training programmes have been established in pastoral management to enable local people to assume greater accountability for property management as skills are developed.

Murandoo Yanner has been elected to the ATSIC National Council and has become a strong supporter for the project: 'They did what they said they were going to do'.