

Submission Mach Energy

This submission supports the Mount Pleasant Optimisation Project. Not only will this project reinforce community certainty with the continuation of mining in the Hunter, but also increase employment opportunities for up to 830 people in the Upper Hunter region. This project will also ensure continued financial support for local projects that are implemented by Aboriginal communities. These projects improve Aboriginal outcomes in education, health, culture and employment.

As part of fulfilling their part of a Native Title Agreement with the local Wonnarua community, Mach Energy was committed to the improvement of Aboriginal Peoples in the Upper Hunter. An Aboriginal Community Development Fund (ACDF) was established in 2006. This Community Fund is comprised of Aboriginal peoples chaired by an independent chairperson and administered by Mach Energy. Currently approximately \$4 million has been invested into supporting Aboriginal projects in the Upper Hunter, projects that would not receive support from any other institution government or non-government.

Projects the ACDF support in the Aboriginal community fall into the following categories: Health, Education Economic Development, Cultural Development and Administration. In 2020 the Fund spent \$289,106 on programs designed and managed by Upper Hunter Aboriginal Peoples. These funds are approximately evenly spread across the three local government areas of: Singleton, Muswellbrook and the Upper Hunter.

NSW Department of Education as part of their Aboriginal Education Policy have set targets of improving Aboriginal learning outcomes (particularly literacy and numeracy), the promotion and understanding of culture, attendance and completing Year 12 and then smoothly transitioning into employment. The ACDF through their support of Aboriginal education programs has enabled schools to meet and improve their Aboriginal literacy and numeracy results, attendance, to successfully complete schooling. The Committee provides Aboriginal school children the opportunity to take pride in their local culture through language, dance, music and understanding of their local environment.

This year the ACDF has supported educational programs across the Upper Hunter region. The promotion of culture, they have funded dance groups for Aboriginal children in Singleton Heights and St Catherine's College the creation of bush tucker garden and a yarnning circle at St Mary's Primary School Scone. To create an environment whereby Aboriginal girls, complete school and receive post schooling support the ACDF has supported the Girls' Academy in Singleton High School through the employment of Aboriginal personnel. To provide support for Aboriginal students to complete their HSC the fund has supported the Polly Farmer Foundation at Muswellbrook High School. Outside of school funds have supported programs to empower Aboriginal youth through the local Police Citizen Youth Club.

As health consumers Aboriginal people have been provided with empathetic medical care that is supportive and communicative to the needs of Aboriginal people. In Singleton the ACDF has supported Aboriginal health through the Ungooroo Aboriginal Corporation. This has allowed Ungooroo to move to state-of-the-art medical facilities located in the CBD of Singleton. As a result of ACDF financial support Aboriginal health consumers feel comfortable and supported through a health system, that addresses their needs. The ACDF has also enabled Aboriginal people in the region to have free dental support and advice, to address and ensure Aboriginal people have healthy teeth.

To promote Aboriginal culture and to celebrate in our communities the Fund supports NAIDOC celebrations in each of the local government areas of the Upper Hunter. This funding ensures students can perform in their communities, recognise individual achievements, and other cultural events, like art exhibitions and sporting events. To preserve Aboriginal culture and stories the ACDF supported an oral history project has recorded “the individual stories of our elders”. To help our Elders further enhance culture the Wanaruah Land Council Elders Group has received support to make individual possum skin cloaks. The fund also promotes and supports Aboriginal art through the creation of the WUPA art trail. This provides an opportunity for Aboriginal artists to display their work, however this year due to CoVid the projects were displayed online.

A key area that Mach Energy has supported is to develop projects for Aboriginal inmates at St Heliers. The aim of these projects is to provide a culturally welcoming space for Aboriginal inmates to learn about their culture. To also provide skills to allow Aboriginal inmates prepare for release and shift smoothly into employment, by certification in building and construction and other related skills. This project also provides mentors to assist with accommodation and any additional training. The ACDF has continued to support the very successful Blackrock Industries with cultural awareness programs, to build a better understanding of Aboriginal peoples in the workplace. The ACDF also supports Aboriginal entrepreneurs establish small businesses. To help Aboriginal artists go into the classroom the Fund has supported Budbudda Dreaming with the construction of didgeridoos. Mach Energy has also assisted to establish a home maintenance and repair business for the local community.

The Mount Pleasant Optimisation Project if approved will not only ensure mining continuity and more jobs. But this continuity will also enable Upper Hunter Aboriginal community the opportunity to plan and improve their educational, health, cultural, history and employment outcomes. Without Mach Energy’s establishment of the Aboriginal Community Development Fund, one should ask the question. Who would have provided the opportunities for our local Aboriginal communities, “To Close the Gap?”

Regards,

Mr Tony Jarrett – Independent Chairperson ACDF.