



Evaluating governance and government performance:

Case studies of Aboriginal councils

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Overview

1. **The problematic concept of ‘good governance’**
2. **A focus on government performance**
3. **Measuring Aboriginal Council performance**
4. **What works? Explaining Council performance**



The importance of governance

- Ascendancy of governance agenda in diverse contexts
 - international development
 - corporate governance
 - public sector management
- Indigenous governance
 - shift in focus from national and regional governance structures (e.g. ATSIC) to community governance
 - expectation that community councils will deliver services that will “close the gap” re Aboriginal disadvantage



Aboriginal councils in Queensland

- Granted self-management in the mid-1980s but have struggled
- How can they succeed?



Good governance

- In my early research on Aboriginal governance, two bodies of work:
 - generic ‘good governance’ literature
 - ethnographic/anthropological literature about culturally appropriate governance (or lack thereof)
- Neither very helpful:
 - good governance focuses on importance of following a set of broad principles (e.g. rule of law, accountability, transparency, participation, consensus, equity) → assumption that this will lead to success
 - anthropology often argues that Aboriginal councils will never work (cultural incompatibility thesis)



Focus on government performance

- ‘Government performance’ seems to me a more useful concept
- Focus on govt performance is not new
 - World Bank attempts to measure government performance in developing nations
 - New Public Management agenda –early 1990s
 - Osborne & Gaebler 1993, Kaplan & Norton 1996
 - Putnam 1993: *Making Democracy Work*
 - performance measurement – Industry Commission, local government sector



Focus on government performance

- Definition: The extent to which a government is achieving its constituents' desired outcomes
- Two aspects:
 1. What outcomes do constituents desire?
 2. To what extent is government achieving them?
- Key points in measuring performance
 - different constituents desire different outcomes – mediated by democratic political process
 - different societies desire different outcomes
 - desired outcomes include both deliverables and desired processes (*what* is achieved and *how*)
 - a government's sphere of influence is constrained

Research on Aboriginal Councils

- Case studies of three Aboriginal councils in north Queensland
- Analytical model had three focus areas:

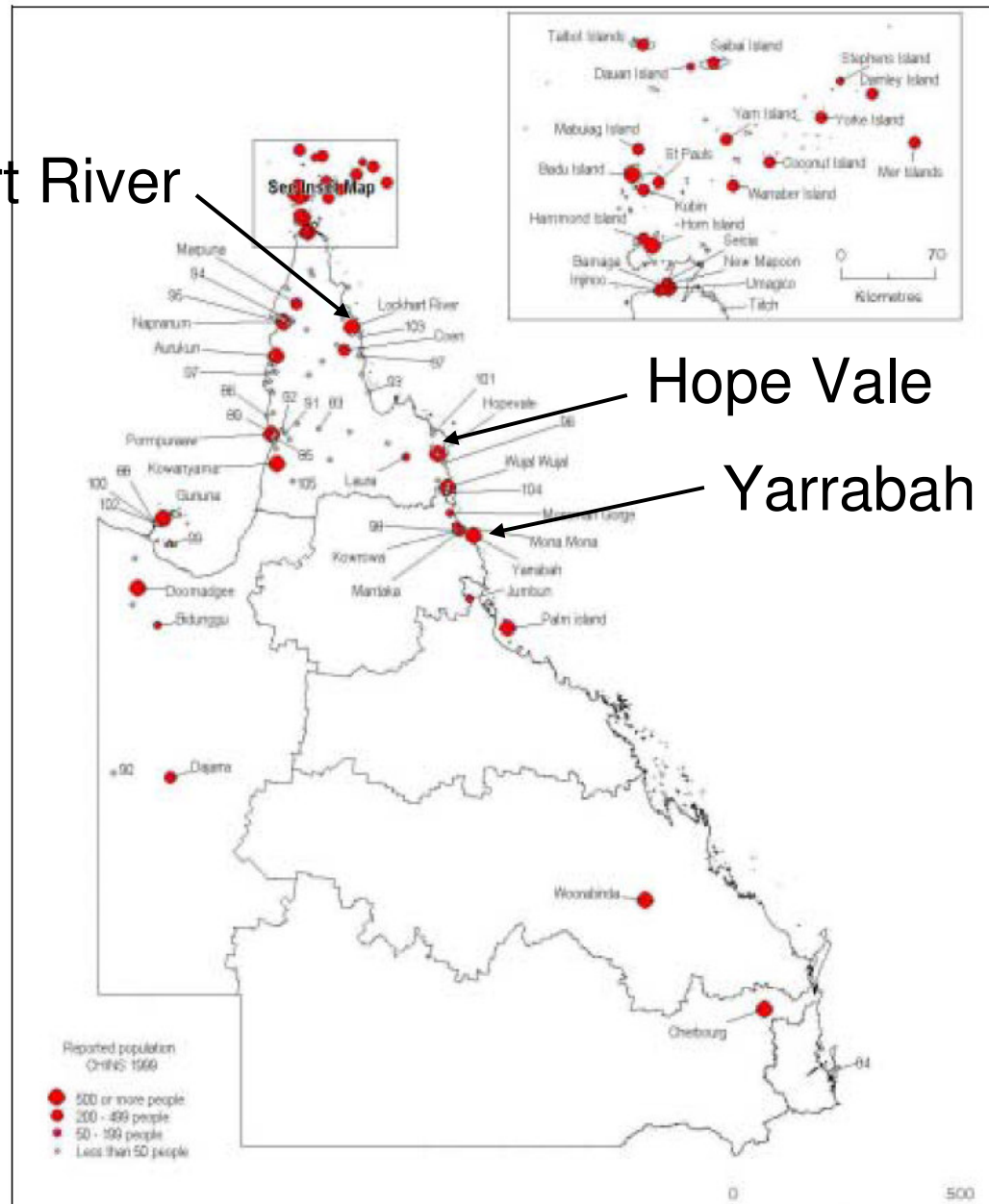


Location of case studies

Lockhart River

Hope Vale

Yarrabah





Measuring Council performance

1. Identifying constituents' desired outcomes
 - not possible to survey the community but looked at multiple data sources (interviews, focus groups, council minutes & correspondence, previous consultations)
 - Council's vision, mission statement and plans are a good proxy
 - high degree of congruence within and between communities



Outcome areas for Aboriginal councils

Services and programs:

- Public housing management
- Provision of community infrastructure and facilities (libraries, parks, recreational facilities, halls)
- Employment programs (e.g. CDEP)
- Essential services (roads, water, sewerage, waste)
- Social services (aged care, child care, family support, local justice initiatives)
- Environmental health & animal control
- Community/town planning
- Land and natural resource management
- Local law-making
- Business management
- Fostering economic development
- Community policing

Other priorities:

- Advocacy and representation
- Financial accountability
- Respecting/supporting indigenous culture

Measuring Council performance

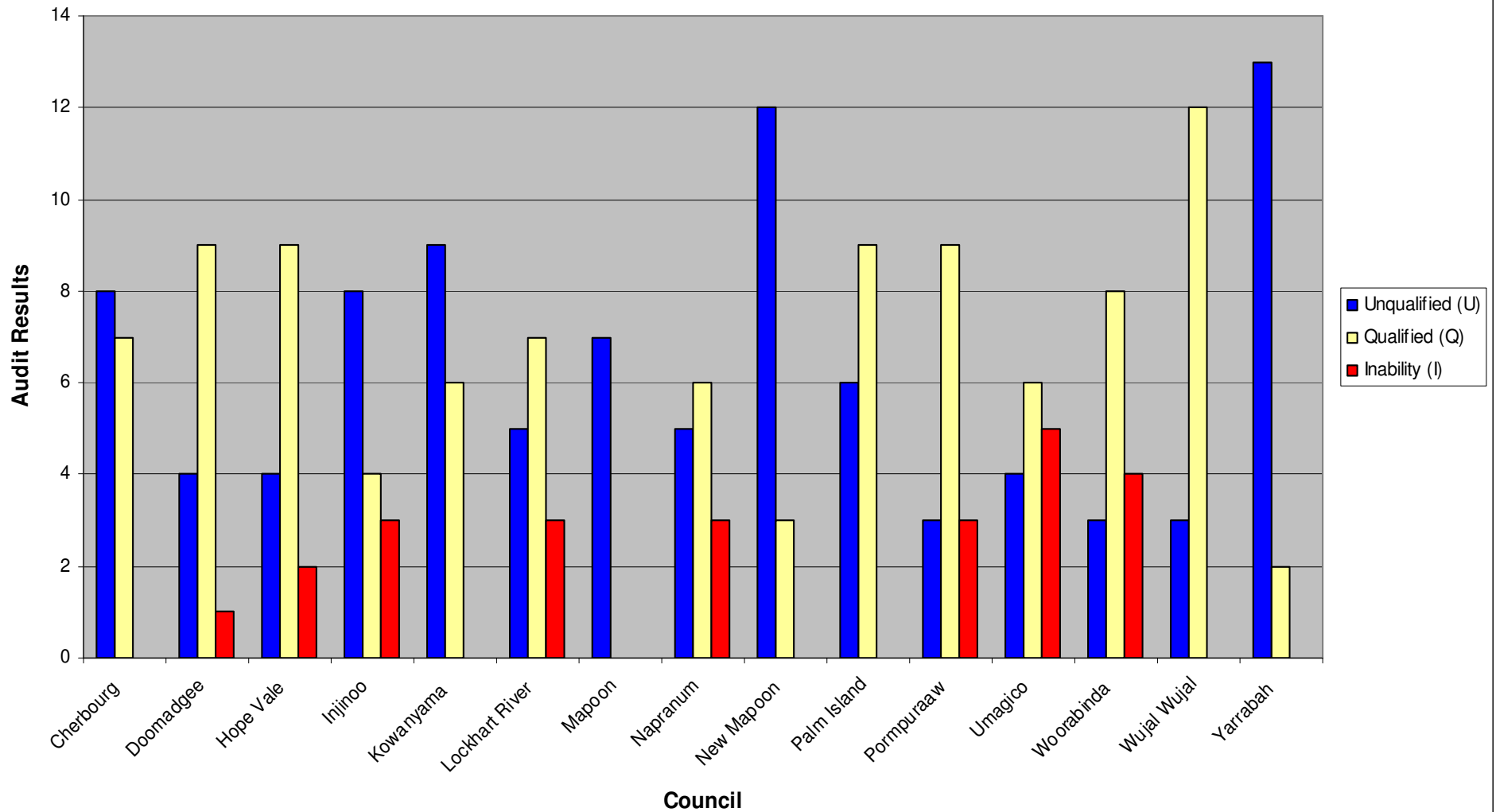
2. Evaluating whether Council is achieving desired outcomes



- Developed performance indicators for each outcome area and identified data sources
- Lack of statistical performance data in some areas

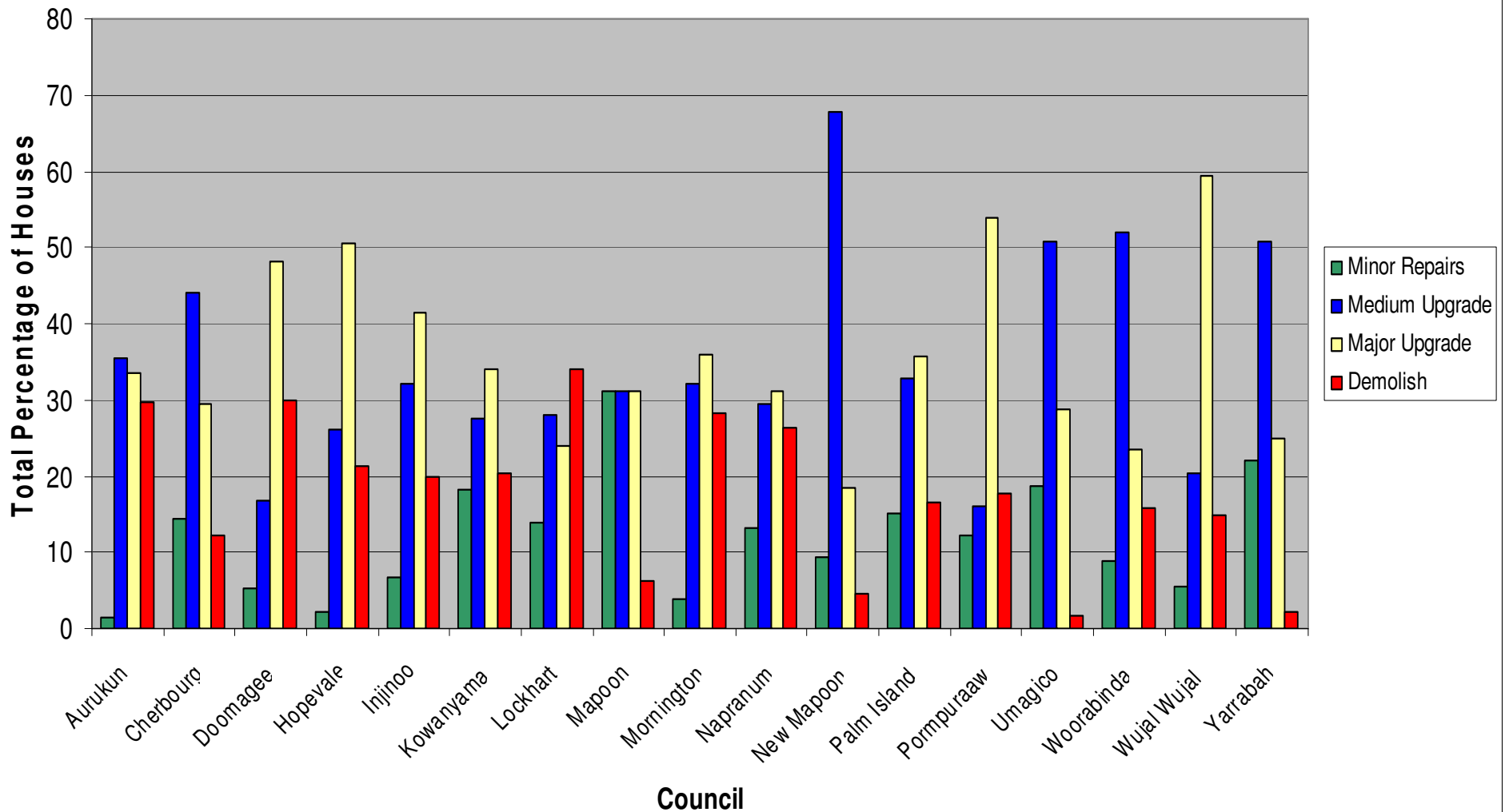
Council audit results

Historical Audit Results for Aboriginal Councils (1992-2005)



Housing management

General Conditions of Housing Structures for Aboriginal Councils (2003)





Measuring Council performance

- Other sources of performance data:
 - Government officers' expert opinions
 - Program reviews/evaluations
 - Acquittal records
 - Letters from funding agencies
 - Audit reports
 - Council plans & minutes
 - Monthly managers' reports
 - Direct observation
 - Letters to Council
 - Interviews and focus groups
 - Previous community consultations
- Arrived at a performance rating on a scale from Low to High for each Council for each outcome area



Findings re council performance

- On most indicators, Yarrabah Council's performance was considerably better than the other councils (and Aboriginal councils generally)
- The performance of Lockhart River and Hope Vale Councils was generally poor



Evaluating governance practices

- Second key research question:
 - What governance attributes determine this level of performance?
- Reviewed the literature on:
 - good governance
 - Indigenous governance
 - anthropology
 - local government
 - management
 - public administration
 - social capital



Evaluating governance practices

- Relevant governance factors suggested by the literature as determining government performance:

- separation of powers
- rule of law
- equity and fairness
- strategic vision
- effective administration
- community engagement
- openness and transparency
- strategic engagement
- organisational culture



Evaluating governance practices

- Data collection about governance
 - 78 semi-structured interviews and focus groups with Council staff, councillors, workers, residents, community organisations, Government stakeholders
 - review of audit reports, Council minutes, plans, reports, correspondence, policies, etc
 - review of previous reports, studies, papers, books
- Coding and analysis of data using Nvivo qualitative data analysis software

Governance attributes that determine Council performance

Successful governance attributes

Separation of powers

Rule of law

Strategic vision

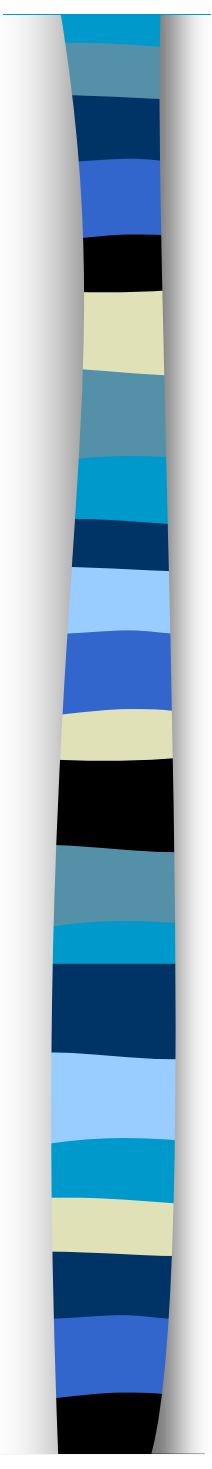
Effective, stable and supported administration

Community engagement

Strategic engagement with government



Council performance





Contextual factors

- Third key research question:
 - What contextual factors shape a Council's approach to governance? (i.e. why do some Councils adopt successful governance attributes while others do not?)
- Factors suggested by the literature:
 - education
 - resources and size
 - genuine decision-making power
 - sense of 'community'
 - kinship and family influences
 - cultural match
 - gender
 - social capital
 - welfare dependency and social norms

Summary of research findings

Contextual factors

Education and skills

Exposure to outside world

Overcoming dependency (take responsibility)

'Whole of community' egalitarian norm

Successful governance attributes, practices

Separation of powers

Rule of law

Strategic vision

Effective, stable and supported administration

Community engagement

Strategic engagement with government

Council performance