

= Palm Island , Queensland =

Palm Island is an Aboriginal community located on Great Palm Island , also called by the Aboriginal name " Bwgcolman " , an island on the Great Barrier Reef in North Queensland , Australia The settlement is also known by a variety of other names including " the Mission " , Palm Island Settlement or Palm Community .

Palm Island is often termed a classic " tropical paradise " given its natural endowments , but it has had a troubled history since the European settlement of Australia . For much of the twentieth century it was used by the Queensland Government as a settlement for Aboriginals considered guilty of such infractions as being " disruptive " , being pregnant to a white man or being born with " mixed blood " .

The community created by this history has been beset by many problems and has often been the discussion point of political and social commentators . Of significant sociological concern is a lack of jobs and housing . Since its creation as an Aboriginal reserve , Palm Island has been considered synonymous with Indigenous disadvantage and violence . At the same time it has been at the forefront of political activism which has sought to improve the conditions and treatment of Australia 's Indigenous peoples as well as redress injustices visited on them broadly as a race and on Palm Island specifically .

= = History = =

= = = Pre @-@ settlement = = =

In Manbarra folklore the Palm Island group were formed in the Dreamtime from the broken up fragments of an ancestral spirit , Rainbow Serpent .

The island was named by explorer James Cook in 1770 as he sailed up the eastern coast of Australia on his first voyage . It is estimated that the population of the island at the time of Cook 's visit was about 200 Manbarra people . Cook sent some of his men to Palm Island and ' they returned on board having met with nothing worth observing.'

From the 1850s locals were recruitment targets to leave the island to be involved with bêche @-@ de @-@ mer and pearling enterprises with Europeans and Japanese .

By the end of the 19th century the population had been reduced to about 50 . In 1909 the Chief Protector of Aborigines visited the Island , apparently to check on the activities of Japanese pearling crews in the area , and reported the existence of a small camp of Aborigines .

In 1916 Queensland 's Chief Protector of Aborigines found Palm Island to be ' the ideal place for a delightful holiday ' and that its remoteness also made it suitable for use as a penitentiary ' for ' individuals we desire to punish ' .

= = = ' Penal settlement ' 1920s ? 60s = = =

In 1914 the Government established an Aboriginal settlement on the Hull River near Mission Beach on the Australian mainland . On 10 March 1918 , the structures were destroyed by a cyclone and were never rebuilt . Subsequently , the settlement relocated to Palm Island with the new population referred to as the Bwgcolman people . In the first two decades of its establishment the population of Indigenous inmates increased from 200 to 1 @, @ 630 . People from at least 57 different language speaking regions throughout Queensland were relocated to Palm .

By the early 1920s Palm Island had become the largest of the Government Aboriginal settlements . Administrators found its location attractive as Aboriginal people could be isolated , but Palm Island quickly gained a reputation amongst Aborigines as a penal settlement . They were removed from across Queensland as punishment ; being " disruptive " , falling pregnant to a white man or being born with " mixed blood " were included in infringements which could lead to the penalty of being sent to Palm Island . New arrivals came after being sentenced by a court , or released from prison ,

or were sent by administrators of other missions wishing to weed out their more ill @-@ mannered or disruptive Aborigines . These removals to the Palm Island Mission continued until the late 1960s .

On arrival , children were separated from their parents and then segregated by gender . Aborigines were forbidden to speak their language and from going into " white " zones . Every day activity was highly controlled by administrators including nightly curfews and the vetting of mail .

In the 1930s a local doctor highlighted malnutrition on the island , and demanded that the Government triple rations for the islanders and that children be provided with fruit juice , but the request was denied .

A bell tower was built to dictate the running of the mission . It would ring each morning at eight ; a signal for everyone to line up for parade in the mission square . Those who failed to line up had their food allocation cut . At nine each evening the bell would ring again signalling the shutting down of the island 's electricity . The bell tower still stands in the local square to this day , a relic of Palm 's history . It was recorded at the time that there was almost military @-@ like discipline in the segregation between white and black , and that inmates " were treated as rather dull retarded children " .

In 1927 a hospital was built at nearby Fantome Island ; Aborigines were sent there mainly for treatment of sexually transmitted diseases . In 1936 Fantome Island became a medical clearing station where people sent to Palm Island were examined and treated if necessary . A leprosarium was established on Fantome in 1939 . After World War II the hospital was closed , and by 1965 only the leprosarium remained on Fantome , it was administered by a Roman Catholic nursing order until 1973 when the inhabitants were moved to Palm Island .

The administrators had complete and unaccountable control over the lives of residents , punishments included the shaving of the girls ' heads . On a surprise inspection of the Palm Island Prison during an official visit in the late 1960s , Senator Jim Keefe and academic Henry Reynolds discovered two 12- to 13 ? year ? old schoolgirls incarcerated in the settlement 's prison by the senior administrator on the island (the superintendent) , because " they swore at the teacher " .

The following letter was written to a new bride by the ' Protector ' ;

" Dear Lucy , Your letter gave me quite a shock , fancy you wanting to draw four pounds to buy a brooch , ring , bangle , work basket , tea set , etc , etc . I am quite sure Mrs. Henry would expend the money carefully for you , but I must tell you that no Aborigine can draw 4 / 5 of their wages unless they are sick and in hospital and require the money to buy comforts ... However , as it is Christmas I will let you have 1 / 5 / ? out of your banking account to buy lollies with . "

= = = ' Path to self governance ' 1986 ? present = = =

On 26 October 1986 ownership of the island was transferred to a newly formed Palm Island Community Council under a Deed of Grant in Trust from the Queensland government .

Self @-@ appointed " president " of Palm Island , Jeremy Geia , symbolically declared independence from Australia in 2001 . The " Peoples Democratic Republic of Palm Island " was an expression of grievances against the Australian and Queensland Governments for neglect of Palm Islanders . There were concerns at the time that this activism would interfere in a major Government investigation into sexual abuse by making victims too uncomfortable to come to the mainland for examination .

In 2001 The Palm Island State Emergency Services Cadet Group was formed .

The Palm Island Community Council became the Palm Island Aboriginal Shire Council in 2004 under the Queensland Local Government (Community Government Areas) Act . Like the other Aboriginal Shire Councils that were created , this Act gave the Council full status as a Local Government on a par with other Councils in Queensland .

= = Notable events = =

== 1930 Palm Island Tragedy ==

In 1930 , the Superintendent of the settlement shot and wounded two people , and set fire to several buildings , killing his two children . Later in the day , the Superintendent was shot dead . An official inquiry by the Queensland Attorney General followed . Those involved in the shooting of the Superintendent , including the Deputy Superintendent and the Palm Island Medical Officer , were charged with murder . During the trial the Crown Prosecutor was directed by the trial judge to drop the charges , stating that the shooting was justified .

== World War 2 use as a Catalina airbase ==

In July 1943 the US Navy built a Naval Air Station at Palm Island , with facilities to operate and overhaul Catalina flying boats and patrol boats . The air station was built at Wallaby point , an isolated area of Palm Island , overlooking a large stretch of sheltered water in Challenger Bay , which was ideal for flying boat operations . The station was built by two officers and 122 enlisted men of Company C of the 55th Naval Construction Battalion (Seabee) that arrived 6 July 1943 , and a similar detachment that left Brisbane later with 1 @, @ 500 tons of construction material .

A 1 @, @ 000 man camp was constructed at the point . Concrete flying boat ramps to the ocean were built with a tarmac parking area for up to 12 flying boats . Moorings for 18 flying boats were provided in Challenger Bay , and 3 nose hangars were also built . Coral aggregate from coral reefs at low tide was used to manufacture concrete .

A series of fuel tanks were constructed to hold 60 @, @ 000 barrels of aviation fuel . Steel rail lines were installed to launch the PBY Catalinas back into the water .

By September 1943 the majority of the facilities were finished , and large numbers of operational and maintenance personnel began to arrive to commission the station . The Palm Island US Naval Air Station was fully operational from 25 October 1943 , and could repair an average of four aircraft per day . The last personnel of the 55th Seabees left Palm Island on 8 November 1943 .

US Navy Patrol Squadron 101 , Patrol Wing 10 , with 8 PBY Catalinas as briefly stationed at Palm Island in December 1943 , before relocating to Perth .

US Navy Patrol Squadron VP @-@ 11 arrived at the station in late December 1943 where they were taken off combat duties . The squadron comprised 13 PBY @-@ 5 Catalinas , 46 officers and 99 enlisted men . They carried out training and routine flights between Port Moresby , Samarai and Brisbane . They were assigned to Fleet Air Wing 17 while at Palm Island , and left in February 1944 .

The Naval Air Station closed in May 1944 . On 18 June 1944 one hundred seventy seven men and four officers of Company B , 91st Naval Construction Battalion (Seabee) , arrived from Milne Bay to dismantle station 's buildings and facilities , removeing and crating over 5 @, @ 000 tons of materials and equipment and loading it aboard ship before departing 31 August 1944 and their return to Brisbane .

The remains of the steel rails and submerged wrecks of a number of Catalinas can still be seen today . Live ammunition is occasionally found by locals .

== 1957 Strike ==

All Islanders were required to work 30 hours each week , and up until the 1960s no wages were paid for this work . The catalyst for the strike was the attempted deportation of Indigenous inmate Albie Geia who committed the offence of disobeying the European overseer . The strike continued for five days and was broken with dawn raids to remove the families involved by boat to the mainland .

Seven families were banished from the Palm Island in 1957 for taking part in a strike organised to protest against the Dickensian working conditions imposed by the Queensland Government under the reserve system . Athlete Cathy Freeman 's mother , Cecilia Barber , and the family of strike ringleader Frederick William Doolan including Billy Doolan Jnr. were among those banished from the

island .

In a 2007 commemorative ceremony the Queensland Government apologised to the surviving wives of two of the strikers for the actions of the Government in the 1950s .

= = = Wilson 's criminological analysis = = =

In 1985 then Associate Professor of Sociology Paul Wilson published a criminological analysis of criminal statistics averaged over the period of January 1977 to May 1984 .

Wilson considered the Palm Island rates to be a gross underestimate , as the figures provided by the Legal Aid Office only counted cases that went to court , whereas the Queensland rates , provided by the Australian Bureau of Statistics , were based on reported incidents .

The Palm Island figures demonstrated that 86 % of violence involved the offender exhibiting heavy drinking patterns and in most cases the victim was also drinking . 38 % of incidents involved people who were married or in a de facto relationship , and , of those , 90 % of the offenders were male .

Wilson attributed the extreme crime rates to historical , social , economic , housing and educational factors , and an " alcohol culture " that perceived not drinking to be antisocial . Further contributing factors were the employment circumstances of Palm Island and the destruction of society and traditional culture and structures . He cited research rejecting an Aboriginal propensity for violence and contrasted the Aurukun community where no homicides had been recorded in the period from the 1950s .

At the time alcohol was limited to beer sold in the canteen between the hours of 5 pm and 9 pm . Spirits were banned , however there was a flourishing sly @-@ grog trade .

= = = Kukamunburra remains returned = = =

A burial site and headstone is located in the " Mission " area of Palm Island . It tells the story of a young Palm Island man of the 19th Century called Kukamunburra who was renamed " Tambo " by a circus agent for the " Barnum , Bailey and Hutchinson 's Greatest show on earth " . He was toured along with eight other Murris , three of whom were from Hinchinbrook Island and five from Palm .

In 1884 Kukamunburra died at 21 years old of pneumonia in Cleveland , United States of America . The rest of the circus group carried on to the European leg of the tour ; by the end of 1885 only three of the Murris were still alive .

Kukamunburra 's body was embalmed ; 109 years later , in 1993 , the body was discovered in a local funeral parlour . His remains were returned to his homeland and buried on Palm Island in February 1994 .

= = = Palm Island Vision Plan = = =

In December 1997 Queensland Health and the Palm Island Council initiated the Palm Island Public Mental Health Project aimed at overcoming serious social problems , particularly the suicide rate .

This Project led to the May 1998 community development of a planning document , Palm Island Vision Plan . The planning document contained a series of visions and objectives as well as the nominated action group responsible for actioning each of them .

Objectives included strategies to address a broad range of issues such as ; significantly ' Aboriginalising ' the local hospital within ten years , establishing a whole @-@ of @-@ government forum , economic development strategy and a program to combat youth suicide .

The Queensland Health initiative gained momentum and support throughout 1998 and 1999 implementing a consultative process and it was met with optimism from a cross section of the community . Unfortunately the project did not gain full support from other Departments and had objectives and timeframes which were in retrospect seen as unrealistically ambitious . The project failed to secure funding for training for the community ? facilitators ? and key people were forced to withdraw . The project became unsustainable by the end of 1999 due to ad hoc funding and high demand on human resources .

A subsequent Federal (Dillon) report alleged that Queensland Health employees appeared to question the program 's worth and began to undermine it . In response to a perception of this undermining , community leaders reaffirmed their commitment to the Vision Plan and requested the Department to instruct their Palm Island employees to ? cease denigrating it ? in November 1999 . By February 2000 Queensland Health withdrew from the project .

The Dillon Report acknowledged that both the community and Queensland Health had invested a considerable amount into this project to provide developmental support to residents . However it observed that the project was overly ambitious and the strain this placed on staff and resources meant that it was not likely to succeed . Particularly where the projects objectives came into conflict with government bureaucracy which presented conflicts for Queensland Health .

= = = Compensation by Queensland Government for underpaid wages = = =

In 1999 the Queensland Government apologised and gave \$ 7 @,@ 000 compensation each to former Indigenous Palm Islander employees in recompense for underpaid wages between 1975 and 1986 . The payment was ordered by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission in a case first brought to the Commission by seven Palm Islanders in 1986 .

= = = Guinness Book of Records controversy = = =

The 1999 edition of the Guinness Book of Records brought international attention to Palm Island when it named the island the most violent place on earth outside a combat zone . To support this claim it stated statistics such as a murder rate 15 times higher than that of the entire state of Queensland , a life expectancy of 40 years , the highest rate of youth suicide per capita in the world , and a total of 40 suicide fatalities over a period of only five years .

The Australian newspaper hypothesised that the Guinness Book of Records statement was based on an article in a London newspaper . The article from The Sunday Times stated that Palm Island had one of the highest crime rates in the world and that " boys ride bareback on horses through the near @-@ derelict civic centre as infants ambush passing cars with slingshots . " It referred to violence statistics and stated that " the white overseers " left the island in 1985 removing most of the island 's assets and resources , only allowing a pub to remain . The Sunday Times claimed that up to 30 people live in each house , without sufficient drinking water .

The Guinness Book of Records figures were strongly disputed at the time by the Queensland Government , the Police Commissioner and the Palm Island Community Council . However , it was conceded by the Queensland Aboriginal Policy Minister , Judy Spence , that Palm Island " can be violent at times " , particularly for women and children , but that the situation was being improved .

= = = Legal action in relation to pearl farming = = =

Zen Pearls Pty Ltd and Indian Pacific Pearls Pty Ltd (both controlled by Michael Crimp) established pearl farms in 1998 with the permission of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (which controls the sea waters around the islands) , despite the opposition of , at least some , of the people of Palm Island . On 24 September 1998 the Manbarra elders passed a resolution opposing the farms on the basis of ;

" the historical and cultural significance of the Juno Bay site for both the Manbarra and Bwgcolman Peoples , the sense of trespass on traditional ownership rights , concerns that the cultural connection to the area would slip away and a strong feeling that the provision of a small number of employment opportunities offered by the pearling operations would not adequately compensate the damage to cultural values . "

Subsequently the Park Authority refused to extend the pearl farming permits and Crimp took action before the Administrative Appeals Tribunal to have this decision reversed . On 15 March 2004 the Tribunal agreed that the permits should be terminated but allowed the existing pearling operations to continue to 1 December 2005 . This decision was substantially upheld by the Federal Court on 21

October 2004 .

= = = 2004 death in custody controversy and riot = = =

Australian Aboriginal Palm Island resident , Mulrunji (known as Cameron Doomadgee while alive) , aged 36 , died in November 2004 in a police cell on Palm Island , one hour after being picked up for allegedly causing a public nuisance . The family of the deceased were informed by the Coroner that the death was the result of " an intra @-@ abdominal haemorrhage caused by a ruptured liver and portal vein " .

A week after the death the results of the autopsy report were read to a public meeting by then Palm Island Council Chairwoman Erykah Kyle . A succession of angry young Aboriginal men subsequently spoke to the crowd and encouraged immediate action be taken against the police . Mulrunji 's death was repeatedly branded " cold @-@ blooded murder " , and a riot erupted . The local courthouse , police station and police barracks were burned down and 18 local police and their families were forced to withdraw and barricade themselves in the hospital . Later the same day approximately 80 police from Townsville and Cairns were flown to Palm to restore order .

In April 2005 , in response to the riot , Premier Beattie established the Palm Island Select Committee to investigate issues leading to the riot and other problems . Their report was tabled on 25 August 2005 , detailing 65 recommendations which seek to reduce violence and overcrowding , and improve standards of education and health . In achieving these objectives , issues such as drug and alcohol abuse and unemployment would also be addressed .

In late September 2006 , coroner Christine Clements found that Doomadgee was killed as a result of punches by the Senior Sergeant arresting officer . Despite the finding of the coroner , Leanne Clare , the Queensland Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP) , announced on 14 December 2006 that no charges would be laid . After media and public pressure , the Queensland Attorney @-@ General appointed former Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of New South Wales , Sir Laurence Street to review the decision . The Street Review resulted in the overturning of the DPP 's decision , with a finding that there was sufficient evidence to prosecute for manslaughter . A high profile trial in the Townsville Supreme Court ensued . In June 2007 the jury found the Senior Sergeant not guilty of manslaughter and assault charges . On 24 October 2008 , a jury found Lex Wotton , a two @-@ time councillor on the Palm Island Aboriginal Shire Council , guilty of inciting the 2004 riot that resulted in the destruction of the island 's police station , the courthouse , and an officer 's residence . Wotton then was sentenced to seven years in prison , reduced to six years for time already served .

= = Governance = =

Local government on the island is provided by the Palm Island Aboriginal Shire Council , created under the Local Government (Community Government Areas) Act (2004) . Previously , Palm Island was a community council without the same powers as other Queensland Shire Councils . It was constituted under the authority of the Queensland Community Services (Aborigines) Act 1984 as the Palm Island Aboriginal Council and had a Deed of Grant in Trust (DOGIT) for ten islands in the Palm Island Group .

The Current civic Cabinet consists of the Mayor , Deputy Mayor and three Councillors :

Mayor : Alfred Lacey (Administration & Finance , Alcohol Management , Youth Affairs , Health , Government Coordination & Community Engagement)

Deputy Mayor : Raymond Sibley (Education , Land , Sea & Environment , Housing)

CEO : Ross Norman

Councillors (undivided council without divisions) :

Ruth Gorrige (Commerce & Economic Development , Education , Employment & Training , Health)

Zina Prior (Commerce & Economic Development , Sports & Recreation , Land , Sea & Environment , Housing)

Mick Thaiday (Community Justice , Cultural Heritage Events & Planning , Emergency Services , Planning & Infrastructure)

The structure of the Aboriginal Shire Council (or Community Council as it was previously) has been criticised for the following reasons :

Comparatively broad responsibility : it holds responsibility for policy portfolios which go far beyond what is expected of other Local Government Authorities , such as being the trustee of the DOGIT land , the provision of housing infrastructure , previously the running of the canteen and currently the running of the general store , law and justice , health , maintenance of culture and language , etc . The Council is designed under the model of a mainstream Local Government Authority which structurally does not provide the latitude to address those functions which are not normally expected of mainstream Councils .

Culturally inappropriate decision making : The Organisation is not designed to deal with cultural issues or complex social problems ; the normal Indigenous decision @-@ making processes and protocols such as consultation and input from family groupings are not structurally accommodated .

Unrealistic local expectations : It is of concern that even greater expectations are put on the Community Council by their own constituents . The Council is seen to have responsibility for all the community 's needs and issues , ignoring the legislative limitations of the Council , the complexity of issues impacting on the community , the impact of past and present governments ' policies and the skill level of respective Councillors . This leads to Palm Island Councillors having far higher expectations put on them than mainstream Councillors and deflects responsibility away from Government Agencies , which could lead to Councillors considering that their role was a do ' what @-@ ever ' was required to meet the diverse needs of residents .

Red tape : The Council is overburdened with accountability and reporting requirements which detract from the role of consulting with constituents over their needs and aspirations and strategies to address them .

Final transition to full Shire Council status was completed in January 2007 . The Shire 's core business is the provision of housing . It recently conducted an audit of its houses and the people living in them ; the audit found that 120 new homes were needed , however the Council primarily relies on income from rent and Government subsidies and can only afford to build one or two new houses a year . The Council has jurisdiction over the islands of the Palm Island Group other than Orpheus and Pelorus Islands .

Palm Island falls in the federal Division of Herbert and the Electoral district of Townsville . Peter Lindsay (Liberal Party of Australia) is the Federal Member and Mike Reynolds (Australian Labor Party) is the State Member .

Peter Lindsay has claimed that Palm Island is a hopelessly dysfunctional community and that either the Island economy / landholdings should be mainstreamed or the Indigenous population should be relocated to the mainland . The Palm Island Council and Mike Reynolds reacted with outrage calling the idea racist and lacking cultural competency , the Queensland Government has ruled out forced relocation .

= = Economy = =

There is no freehold land title on Palm Island , with property owned by either the Local or State Government . More than 90 % of the adult population is unemployed . There is no industry on the island despite rich natural resources such as crayfish worth \$ 150 each and enormous tourism potential .

Carpentaria Land Council chief executive Brad Foster in 2004 summarised their economic standing thus ; " This island has 4000 residents , and the services applicable to a community with 500 people . That has to change and businesses have to be able to invest here , make profits , employ and train locals ? get part of the real world . "

Cost of living is relatively very high on Palm Island due to the remoteness of island living and the general lack of private enterprise . At the island store bread costs approximately \$ 4 @. @ 20 a loaf , about twice the average in Australia . Goods in general , particularly essential food items , cost

considerably more than similar products in mainstream Queensland , sometimes two to three times higher . The cost of living issue is exacerbated by economic loss to alcohol , drug dependence and gambling , and the fact that crops and livestock are not cultivated locally on the island .

Around the island there are failed or abandoned ventures , the relics of which are still there ; a piggery , chicken farm , disused stockyards , market garden and a joinery works .

A presently abandoned oyster farm is an example of one of the failed ventures on Palm Island . The natural environment of Palm Island and adjacent Halifax Bay is ideal for the aquaculture of oysters , shrimp , prawns and mackerel . Over a five @-@ year period in the 1970s Applied Ecology Pty Ltd (an organisation designed to assist Aboriginal communities to develop sustainable industries , funded by the Government) established an oyster lease on Palm Island . At one point the lease had \$ 600 @,@ 000 worth of oysters . Unfortunately due to alleged poor management and lack of interest among the community the oyster lease fell into disrepair . The farm is purported to have cost \$ 20 million .

Research by the Centre for Tropical Urban and Regional Planning at James Cook University has concluded that Palm Island has most of the resources it needs to be largely self @-@ sufficient through housing , agriculture and tourism . However Barry Moyle the Chief Executive Officer of the Palm Island Aboriginal Shire Council and former Mayor of Johnstone Shire Council suggests that the tourism potential of the island is hindered by the negative reputation that Palm Island is considered to have . Moyle asserts that once potential tourists get past that negative image " they will find really nice and beautiful people , with a rich culture , living on this untouched tropical gem of North Queensland " . Further , according to Moyle , " it could be considered a big ask that people will get past the perception that the people are all no @-@ hooper alcoholics and perpetrators of domestic violence , which is considered to be the general reputation that Palm Islanders have in broader Australia . Locals say that there are bad eggs , but that is the same in all communities . "

= = = Land title = = =

Native Title claims do not apply to most residents as they are not the original inhabitants of the land , the general community (Bwgcolman people) do have a strong historical connection to the land , most having been born there . Having historical (as opposed to traditional) rights recognised is a legally grey area . Free hold title does not apply either ; most land is controlled by the Palm Island Aboriginal Shire Council . The land is held by the Council for the benefit of the community in trust , through a " Deed of Grant in Trust " (DOGIT) . This in practice means that , for example , a third party would not be able to lease and develop land on Palm Island without the permission of the community and even then leases are limited to 30 years .

A basic three bedroom house costs approximately \$ 350 @,@ 000 to \$ 400 @,@ 000 to build on Palm Island (not including sewerage , power , phone and water , and the cost of the land) . Federal Minister Mal Brough has stated that building prices on Palm (or in indigenous communities in general) are over inflated and that it could be done for half the cost . All homes are on crown land and are owned by the Palm Island Aboriginal Shire Council and are rented at a Government @-@ subsidised rate of \$ 44 to \$ 60 a week to residents . There are 320 rental houses under this arrangement .

Most businesses are owned by the Council and land title restrictions hinder private investment ; approval to build a house or start a business can take up to three years .

There is widespread frustration with the land title system . Privatising home ownership and the creation of a market economy with long term leases is seen by some commentators as the best option to move forward on Palm . This proposal is described as giving Indigenous people " skin in the game " and empowerment . In the period 1999 to 2007 35 houses were replaced due to damage . Noel Pearson of the Cape York Institute for Policy and Leadership argues that housing degradation in these communities has more to do with overcrowding and poor construction than it does with poor tenancy . However he adds that Aboriginal people naturally take much better care of property that they have constructed or paid for themselves , than they do that which has been handed to them ' on a plate ' and which they have had little personal engagement in . The push for privatisation of title

was led by the Australian Government (through Mal Brough , Indigenous Affairs Minister) , Noel Pearson , and some families on the island (the community is very divided on this issue) . The proposal had partial (or cautious) support from the then Federal Australian Labor Party Opposition .

However other Islanders are suspicious of these moves as an opportunity for the more powerful families to gain more power through land ownership or even worse a way of taking land off the Palm Islanders , who in desperation may sell to the highest bidding developer even if that bid significantly undervalues the land in question . Professor Mick Dodson , director of the Centre for Indigenous Studies at the ANU , argues that the people on Palm Island do not have the financial capacity to compete in the housing market on a commercial basis : He asserts that the only solution to the problem of overcrowding lies in increasing the level of public housing , there are not the jobs to build capacity among locals to become home owners .

There is an alternative option under the push for privatising landholdings which addresses fears of the land being lost from the community : a closed market system where caveats restricting ownership to members of the community are placed on 99 @-@ year leases . This would mean that land could be bought and sold but only between Palm Islanders . It is unclear whether this arrangement would allow for mortgages as the banks who give the loans are outside the community and would require security for their loan that they can legally collect .

Traditional ownership of the Manbarra people complicates debate about Palm Island land title . There is no registered Native Title claim and only seven traditional owners still live on the island , however there could be a valid claim . Professor Dodson argues that the historical international experience is that once communal title is extinguished then the indigenous people lose the land permanently . Minister Brough argues that 100 @-@ year leases will not extinguish Native Title over the land .

The Queensland Government , which has constitutional responsibility for land tenure , holds the position that this issue is extremely complex and that it will not be bullied by the Commonwealth . The former state Minister for Indigenous Affairs , Warren Pitt , in 2007 said that all parties have matured since Native Title was introduced and can recognise that while the issues are complex , the betterment of Aboriginal people can be realised .

= = Law and order = =

Palm Island has an extreme level of theft , domestic violence , sexual assaults against children and abject drunkenness . This behaviour is attributed locally to boredom , aimlessness , lack of education , absence of role models and a complete loss of self @-@ worth . Another important factor is bitter family divisions which rule the social fabric of the island and a complex web of historical disputes between those families , some going back decades . Criminologist Dr Paul Wilson found Palm Island to have one of the highest rates of violent crime in the world . He suggested that the problems could be tied to repression of the past and colonial practices . In the December 2004 to December 2005 period there were 76 admissions to the hospital for assault involving residents , 26 times the standard Queensland rate .

These figures do not necessarily reflect the war @-@ like violence that is commonly associated with Palm Island . St Michael 's Catholic School Principal , Lil Mirtl , has stated that people visiting or living on the Island just need to take sensible precautions such as not walking alone at night , similar to precautions that people should exercise in most places .

The most successful program implemented to reduce the high levels of crime is the Palm Island Community Justice Group . The Justice Group has existed since 1992 ; it is a committee of elders on the island who , it is said , have far more influence over young offenders on the island than the police or courts . The Justice group has a statutory role within the judicial system in administering justice on the island . The group is funded by the Queensland Government to administer the program , created in response to the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody , with the aim of keeping indigenous children on Palm out of the criminal justice system . Under the program , the Palm Island community is encouraged to devise their own systems for dealing with offenders . In

the three years after the Community Justice Group was established , Palm Island juveniles appearing before magistrates courts fell by a third . Police and the courts often refer offenders to the Community Justice Group .

" These older ones have the wisdom and knowledge , and they can sit around the table and talk , and bring feuding parties together . .. When they come before us they can 't bluff us , because it 's black on black . " Peena Geia , Chairwoman of the Community Justice Group , 2001

In December 2001 , the Community Justice Group assisted a five @-@ day investigation by a team of Queensland police and Department of Families officers . The investigation discreetly collected information from islanders about suspected child sexual abuse in the community , resulting in a number of arrests . The investigation was accompanied by a series of allegations suggesting that almost 100 % of girls between 13 and 16 years old had contracted sexually transmitted diseases . It was also alleged that girls as young as 12 had been trading sex for cigarettes and alcohol and that children as young as five were being molested .

There are various other local programs which have assisted with lowering the crime rate of Palm Island : The Men 's Group , coordinated by former Mayor Robert Blackley , runs a prison cell visitors program , a support service , and a children 's night patrol . In 2000 , the Palm Island Council used a \$ 40 @,@ 000 state government grant to establish a community @-@ run re @-@ orientation program for youths to help reduce youth crime and suicide , by relocating wayward youths to a new youth and cultural camp where they would be taught their culture , language and art on neighbouring Fantome Island , a former leprosarium . The Coolgaree nippers club is the first indigenous club in Surf Lifesaving Queensland ; Coolgaree is affiliated to Arcadian surf lifesaving club in the first year of the nippers club operating (1999) juvenile crime rates on Palm Island dropped from 186 offences to 99 .

Tony Fitzgerald QC investigated alcohol abuse in indigenous communities and was shocked by the extent of the statewide problem . He recommended to the Queensland government that unless things improved dramatically within a period of three years , that alcohol should be banned in consultation with the communities . Like other community councils (in 2001) , the Palm Island Community Council relied on revenue generated by alcohol sales at the hotel ; the investigation report recommended this perceived conflict of interest end .

The Queensland Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy commissioned a further report in 2005 and , as a result of its recommendations , the islands in the Palm Island Aboriginal Shire Council became the 19th Queensland community to become a restricted area for possession of alcohol from 19 June 2006 . These restrictions include a limit of one carton of beer disembarking from the ferry service . The alternative source of alcohol is the Palm Island Hotel / canteen , for either on @-@ site consumption or on a retail basis . Alcohol sales from the canteen are again restricted to one carton per person , or per vehicle .

= = Demographics = =

At the 2006 census Palm Island had 1 @,@ 984 residents , 93 @.@ 4 % of whom are of indigenous origin . However , there are various conflicting estimates of the population size ; 3 @,@ 000 ? 3 @,@ 500 residents is a figure which has been regularly quoted by local , state and federal politicians . There is controversy over the common practice of referring to Palm Island as the largest Indigenous community in Australia , with census figures from 2001 and 2006 showing the Yarrabah community as slightly larger .

The indigenous population generally identify with either the Bwgcolman (historical connection with Palm Island) or Manbarra (traditional connection) people . Compared with other parts of Australia , the Palm Island community is young with 35 @.@ 6 % under 15 and only 6 @.@ 4 % over 55 . Only 5 @.@ 1 % of the population describe themselves as being non @-@ religious compared with 18 @.@ 7 % of Australians , 42 @.@ 6 % are Catholic (25 @.@ 8 % Australia wide) , 23 @.@ 2 % Anglican and 11 @.@ 2 % being other Protestant .

The community , consisting of approximately 42 mainland and Torres Strait Islander clan or family groups , suffers from chronic alcohol , drug and domestic abuse , has an unemployment rate of 90

% and an average life expectancy of 50 years , thirty less than the Australian average .

The 2006 census was conducted on 8 August ; unlike mainstream Australia , Palm Island figures were not be based on forms filled out by each household on census evening . Instead Palm Island was singled out for the population to be verbally interviewed individually over a ten @-@ day period due to past controversy about the accuracy of census details for Palm Island . Between ten and fifteen Indigenous census interviewers took the households ' details from one adult from each house , interviews took between an hour and an hour and a half each and were conducted during business hours .

= = Culture and sport = =

Many residents consider that the introduction of Western culture and the subsequent Mission policies of prohibiting the expression of traditional cultural has seriously eroded the cultural base of Palm Island . Many of the contemporary issues of substance abuse , law and order problems and the high suicide rate have been attributed in part to this absence of culture .

Amongst sporting activities on Palm Island boxing features prominently (both men 's and women 's) in 2006 11 young Palm Islanders represented Queensland at national boxing championships for the first time . The Barracudas are the local rugby league team , with Vern Daisy as a notable ex @-@ player . In June 2005 the inaugural 3 on 3 Basketball competition was held , attracting over 300 locals .

Many of the sporting activities are actively supported by or managed through the Queensland Police Citizens Youth Welfare Association facility ; the Palm Island Community and Youth Centre (PICYC) . The Centre was opened by the then Premier Peter Beattie in February 2005 over strong community objections due to animosity towards the Queensland Police following the November 2004 death in custody and the Police response to the subsequent riot . Having moved on from a dispute between the State Government and the Palm Island Council over who should run the facility , the situation has become very positive and cooperative , the Centre is used for its intended purpose of youth and community engagement through sport and education . Adults and youth use the facility heavily , including a gym for boxing training , facilities for ; women 's aerobics , ballroom dancing , Indoor Volleyball , 5 on 5 Indoor Soccer , Old @-@ time Dancing , and a mix of conventional and traditional games .

The PICYC , home to the Palm Island Police Citizens Youth Club , is considered to be a great success story , especially considering its controversial beginnings soon after the 2004 death in custody and riot . The Centre is mostly staffed by community members who teach the younger generation both traditional and life skills such as weaving and cooking in a safe and comfortable environment . The Centre has an atmosphere of respect and traditional culture which tries to build children 's confidence and self @-@ esteem . Additionally to the sporting activities , the Centre hosts community growth projects , services and facilities such as a radio service (Bwgcolman Radio) , an Internet Café , TAFE cooking classes , after @-@ school and vacation care , monthly discos , drumming groups (\$ 8 @,@ 000 worth of drums donated by the Queensland Police) , Family Movie Nights , and Bingo . The PICYC employs a paid staff of nine locals and one volunteer .

= = Infrastructure = =

Palm Island has no urban planning to speak of (most of the town has not been surveyed) , although they officially have names there are no street signs or even traffic signs which are standard on most other Queensland roads .

Facilities operated by the State Government on the island include a hospital , a Prep to Grade 10 school , the Palm Island Community and Youth Centre (PICYC) , a sewage treatment plant , a local supermarket store and (new) police station and courthouse .

The Palm Island Council operates the Palm Island Hotel (also known as the Coolgaree Bay Hotel and previously known as the canteen) , the community 's only outlet with a liquor license . The Council owns various other local services and businesses such as the garage and the

Commonwealth Bank agency .

Private retail enterprise on the Island is limited to a butcher , a fish @-@ and @-@ chip shop , a clothes shop , the Post Office and a BP service station that sells petrol at about \$.50 a litre more than Townsville . Non @-@ Government services which are standard for population bases of this size in Australia are absent on Palm Island include a baker , hairdresser and newsagent .

In 2004 the army completed \$ 10 million worth of work constructing a permanent water @-@ supply dam on the island and upgrading a number of roads . Other transport infrastructure includes Palm Island Airport on the South @-@ West of the Island from which Skytrans flies to and from Townsville up to four times each day . Palm Island 's pier is in Challenger Bay , a ferry @-@ boat service operated by Sunferries makes a return trip from Townsville four times a week . A barge service operates twice a week from Townsville operated by Palm Island Barge Services bringing food , machinery and fuel to the island . Also there is another barge that operates from Lucinda .

Transport on Palm Island is primarily walking with few private cars on the island , in 2005 the Police Citizens Youth Club (PCYC) , with Queensland Transport , purchased a 23 @-@ seat community bus which runs a school bus service and transport to PCYC events .

= = Education = =

Education infrastructure is comparatively high on Palm Island for a remote low population base . There is State and private primary education locally and secondary education offered up to year twelve on the Island and a campus of the Barrier Reef Institute of TAFE . Some students chose to board on the main land at private schools .

However educational outcomes are adversely affected by problems faced in home life , particularly ; being exposed to serious alcohol and other substance abuse , family violence , exposure to suicides and attempted suicides , balancing cultural and educational demands , living with poverty , child abuse and overcrowded housing . These problems can result in high rates of absenteeism , low self @-@ esteem and little concentration on education . Alternatively , school can be a haven from these external problems ; there are many dedicated educators and concerned parents interested in contributing to an effective , viable and culturally appropriate education system on Palm .

The island has two schools ; St Michael 's Catholic School (Prep to grade 7) and the Education Queensland Bwgcolman Community School (Prep to Grade 12) . The Bwgcolman Community School includes the Bwgcolman Community Library which is jointly managed and funded by the Council and State Government .

The Bwgcolman Community School has 350 students with 50 Indigenous and 27 non @-@ Indigenous staff . Palm Island , like most Aboriginal communities , has difficulties with school attendance , the Principal of St. Michael 's has stated that absenteeism averages about 30 % among their 160 students . A 2005 test at Bwgcolman school (leaked to the media) showed that the primary school students score " significantly less " than Queensland average in literacy and numeracy . St Michael 's have a program of teaching students " dainty " (Australian English) as a third language in addition to the communally spoken " Island English " and the particular language group that the child belongs to .

= = Health = =

Palm Island is serviced by the Joyce Palmer Health Service based at the Palm Island Hospital , completed in 2000 , which has an emergency department and a 15 @-@ bed general ward . The service is named for Joyce Palmer , a health worker who commenced her work in the 1940s at the Island 's old grass hospital , and provided health care to the people of Palm Island for over 40 years .

The hospital provides a primary level of acute care services and provides secondary services such as community health , X @-@ ray , pharmacy , dental , child health , sexual health , and antenatal and specialist clinics . There are two doctors based on Palm Island . Critical patients are stabilised and transferred to Townsville Hospital by Royal Flying Doctors Service or the Air Sea Rescue .

There is a community mental health team based at the Palm Island Hospital with nurses and indigenous health workers . A consultant psychiatrist visits for one day every 6 weeks .

The Queensland Ambulance Service (QAS) began operations on Palm Island in 2000 and took over from the hospital based service . Presently staffed by two paramedics and three ambulance attendants , they average approx 2200 cases per year . One paramedic is qualified as a Paramedic Practitioner and practices under the guidelines of paramedic practitioners giving the community more health resources and options ? this officer assists with sexual health cases and general medical cases including suturing at the local Joyce Palmer Health Service . The QAS is also involved in teaching First Aid to the community , " Adopt an Ambo " programs with both schools , motivational camps for teenagers and local football competitions and works closely with allied health services on the island . The QAS has also started a stinger prevention program with stinger stations having been established in different locations around the island . Funding has been raised to provide stinger suits to the communities children and adults through the PCYC and through funding grants obtained for the cause with the main one being the medicare benefit fund . A Joint Emergency Services Complex has now been completed and is located opposite the CDEP and at the old piggery site at the Farm Area ? this complex house 's the Qld Ambulance Service , The Qld Rural Fire Brigade and the Local SES unit , and is fully functional .

Despite the healthcare facilities , a report tabled in the Queensland Parliament on 21 April 2006 claimed that conditions at Palm Island resembled those of a third world country .

In 1979 an outbreak of hepatoenteritis , also known as the Palm Island mystery disease , was reported and described a hepatitis @-@ like illness (associated with dehydration and bloody diarrhoea) in 138 children and 10 adults of Indigenous descent . This was proposed to have been caused by the toxin cylindrospermopsin , which was released from lysed cyanobacterial cells after the addition of excessive doses of copper sulfate to the water supply of Solomon Dam to target a bloom of *Cylindrospermopsis raciborskii* . A later report alternatively proposed that the excess copper in the water was the cause of the disease . The excessive dosing was following the use of least @-@ cost contractors to control the algae , who were unqualified in the field .

In December 1934 there was a major outbreak of Influenza with a large number of residents hospitalised .