

## 6. OVERALL PERCEPTIONS OF CROC FESTIVAL™

This section provides feedback on overall perceptions of the Croc Festival™, and explores feedback on organisation and participation, the level of focus on Indigenous culture, benefits offered to students and parents, the possible effects for communities if they were to no longer host the event, feedback on the activities overall, and general feedback with regards to Indigenous Festivals Australia (IFA). The remainder of the report covers the health and education outcomes of the Festival, and the individual and community impact of these events.

Overall, satisfaction with the Croc Festival™ was extremely high across the research, with a strong perception expressed that the Festival offers a unique learning and social experience for students. The volume and variety of activities and experiences mentioned by participants is a testament to the Festival's ability to satisfy a wide range of interests of students.

**“It is a wonderful, empowering experience for the kids. Everyone is successful at the Croc Festival™, there is no failure.”**

### 6.1 ORGANISATION AND PARTICIPATION

In all locations a range of organisations had been involved in the organisation of the Festival, although there were some differences by area. In Port Augusta and Moree activity facilitators were more likely to be from local businesses and organisations, whereas in Alice Springs many facilitators were visitors. This can be largely attributed to the number of years that the Croc Festival™ has been held in the communities of Moree and Port Augusta, with Alice Springs holding the event for only the second time and under considerable time constraints in the lead-up to the Festival.

The commitment to the event was very strong in all communities, and those involved talked about the time, energy and resources devoted to the event. For small communities this was seen to create challenges and considerable pressure. However, the research demonstrates that these communities are very committed to the Festival, and are willing to dedicate the energy needed to make Croc Festival™ a success.

The research clearly demonstrates that it is *“the community volunteer involvement that makes it [Croc Festival™] happen”* and a few participants expressed concern that while IFA is paid, the community volunteers are not. In addition to this, a number of participants were sceptical about how funding dollars have been spent. There was also some concern that the appreciation of the volunteers and community involvement is not as great as it should be, and that there should be more recognition of the commitment and effort of volunteers and community members who help to make the Festival a success.

### 6.1.1 *Port Augusta*

For Port Augusta the community members supporting the Festival tended to be from the community service sector, and also the government sector (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Council). There was perceived to be a lower level of involvement of the business sector, as they were seen to be unaware of the event, what it offers and its relevance for the business sector, as well as being limited with regard to time. An Aboriginal health service (Pika Wiya Health Service) plays an important role in the Port Augusta Festival, and co-ordinates the health expo. The local Shire Council was also heavily involved, and some members of the general community questioned the relevance of Council providing so much support to the event. Once the nature of the Festival was explained by Council representatives these concerns were allayed, but there was a request for short and concise information that could be used to describe the events and what they offer the community.

Overall, community members spoke positively about the organisation of and their involvement with the Croc Festival™, and felt proud of what had been achieved. The success of the Festival, and the pride they felt in this success appeared to provide a significant reward for their involvement.

**“There is a positive energy in Port Augusta and it is great to see Indigenous and non-Indigenous people working together – it’s good for the community.”**

### 6.1.2 *Moree*

In Moree, a broad cross-section of the community are involved in organising the event, including the local service sector, school representatives and the government sector. The Aboriginal Employment Strategy plays a lead role in the management of the Festival, especially with the careers market. Moree Plains Shire Council supports the Festival by providing labour and grounds management and other in-kind support. Local businesses were involved in the Croc future skills workshop. As the Festival has been going for many years, the organisation of the event appeared to run smoothly, with similar organisations involved from year to year.

When asked if the Festival makes the community stronger and more supportive there was a range of different opinions but many people were very positive about the Festival and its ability to strengthen community relationships:

**“It shows the young people the unity in putting together an event.”**

**“Croc Festival™ brings people together for a week – it brings the community closer. I don’t come from here and being here in Moree, I’ve never seen so much racism in my life, but for one week it stops. Colour has no boundary at Croc.”**

### 6.1.3 Weipa

In Weipa there is a small team of dedicated community members who organise the Croc Festival™ committee and all other committee members recognise their dedication and support. Queensland Health have a long-standing involvement with the planning of Croc Festivals™ in Weipa, particularly with the Health expo. Queensland Health also conduct visits to schools in Far North Queensland both prior to and after the Festival as part of their health promotion strategy. They felt that without these people the community would really struggle to host the Croc Festival™. The committee also included parents and people from Council, the business sector, government, and Comalco provided in-kind support to set-up the Croc Village and other facilities. Given the significance of Comalco in Weipa, there was a commitment from this organisation to *“support programs that help create social cohesion and help break down stereotypes”*. The only groups that were felt to be missing were the council representatives of other Western Cape Communities (Napranum, Mapoon and Arakun). Weipa was also happy with the alternating arrangement with Thursday Island, which means that they host the event every second year. They feel it would be difficult to host the Croc Festival™ every year, as it requires considerable resources and dedication. Weipa also hosts a big event on the “off year” (such as a fun day, dancing or fishing competition) that *“still provides something for the children to look forward to.”* They also mentioned that only those students who were performing go to the Thursday Island event, as it is too much of a financial commitment for the schools to be heavily involved every year.

### 6.1.4 Thursday Island

Although the Croc Festival™ was not held in Thursday Island in 2004, this community was included in the post-Festival research to assess community impact. In these consultations community members expressed a strong interest in taking ownership of the Croc Festival™ and there was some scepticism about how funding is used for the Festival, particularly as local businesses also contribute a considerable amount of funding. While participants expressed a desire to localise the organisation of the Festival, all community members were positive about the benefits that the Croc Festival™ offers students. The Festival was seen to offer many opportunities that students would otherwise have to travel to the mainland for, such as career information, recreational activities as well as the chance to perform on stage. The community did not really talk of the community impact when they were not the host community, except in reference to students travelling to Weipa and the chance to have a break from hosting the event. This was similar in Weipa with the majority of people from both communities feeling that hosting a Festival every two years was appropriate.

### 6.1.5 Alice Springs

The Alice Springs Festival did not have the same lead-time as other events, and because it was the second time the event was held in the community, the committee had to work extremely hard in the lead-up to the Festival (particularly as the Festivals were not consecutive). The Alice Springs Town Council took a leading role in organising the community, with representatives from a range of areas including Congress, the Heart Foundation, Footprints Forward, and representatives of the traditional owners. The majority of criticisms in

relation to the community involvement were linked to the shorter lead-time, and it was felt if this time was increased these issues would be addressed. Despite this, there was positive feedback from community members about networking opportunities offered by the Festival:

**“Working together like this makes you want to continue to work together.”**

Overall, across all locations, community members spoke positively of their involvement with the Croc Festival™, and while many dedicated a considerable amount of time and energy to the Festivals, most felt rewarded by the success of the Festivals themselves. There were some criticisms with regard to the lead-time in Alice Springs, the level of ownership by the community, and recognition of the volunteers, but in most cases these concerns were outweighed by the satisfaction they felt in hosting a successful Croc Festival™ in their community. Section 10 explores in more detail the impact on the community of hosting the Croc Festival™.

## **6.2 OTHER EVENTS**

All members of the community could nominate other events that were celebrated in their community (such as NAIDOC week, Show Day, Christmas festivals, etc), but all acknowledged that the Croc Festival™ was the only festival that is drug and alcohol free, has an Indigenous focus, and is specifically targeted at young people. It is clear that this is a unique experience that is not replicated in any other community event, although a few communities identified youth activities that operate regularly in their town.

In particular, it was felt that the Croc Festival™ was unique in providing a safe, drug and alcohol free environment. One participant had this to say when asked if Croc Festival™ was successful in being an alcohol and cigarette free event:

**“It was successful as I witnessed community members “growling” at people who wanted to smoke and bring alcohol into the event.”**

This positive reinforcement of the cigarette and alcohol free environment by the community is important in order to demonstrate a united stand to students.

One school in Moree holds a “mini-croc” annually and invites representatives from a number of organisations such as Police, emergency services, health and a few local businesses. These organisations hold a number of workshops and information sessions for students and this was viewed to be very successful with students. However, it was acknowledged that the Croc Festival™ inspired the idea for this event.

In most cases community members spoke of the Croc Festival™ as an event that was unlike any other in the community in the way it brought the whole community together in both organising and participating in the

event. For example, a representative from the Moree Plains Local Shire Council felt that the community was able to “*draw upon the successes of the Festival*” when arranging a food festival for the first time last year called “Moree on a plate”. In this way, the Croc Festival™ supports the notion of social capital as it refers to “*the relationships, networks and norms that support collective action*” and is “*created when people come together out of a shared purpose or goal*.” Others also spoke of the networking opportunities within the community that the Festival provides.

All communities included in the research spoke of the ability of the Festival to bring the community together in this way, and the perceived benefits of working together. Section 9 and 10 provide more detailed analysis of this area.

### 6.3 EFFECT ON COMMUNITY OF NOT HAVING A CROC FESTIVAL™

Teachers and community members were asked in the post-Festival research what the effect would be on the community if the Croc Festival™ was not held in their community any more. Most people identified a negative impact to their community should they cease to host the Croc Festivals™, and these are summarised below:

- People would wonder why, and it would affect the morale of the community: As mentioned previously community pride and identity is at a peak at the time of the Festival and the loss of this event could adversely affect community morale;
- Networking opportunities would be limited: Often the Croc Festival™ offers the only opportunity to interact with organisations and community members that people would ordinarily not come into contact with;
- Children would miss out on the event: As the Croc Festival™ is the biggest and often the only youth-focussed annual event, many people acknowledged that students would be affected by the loss of the Festival;

**“Kids would have withdrawal symptoms from not attending the performances”**

- Money coming into the town would reduce and business would suffer: It was felt that the loss of the financial benefits brought by visitors to the Croc Festival™ would have a significant effect on the local economy;
- Increased crime rate: A few people in the community felt that crime could increase as a result of not hosting the Festival due to boredom and students having less to do.

The only benefit identified in relation to not hosting the event was that for host communities, a change would provide an opportunity for these students to travel to another community. Students from Thursday Island who

had been to the Weipa Croc Festival™ said that they preferred the Weipa Festival as it was a chance to visit a new place and meet new people. Similarly, students from Weipa said that they preferred the Thursday Island Festival for the same reason.

A few felt that not hosting the Croc Festivals™ for the community would “*not leave much of a dent*”, but it was acknowledged that the children and the community would miss the event. This sentiment was summarised by a committee member in Weipa:

**“It [not hosting the Croc Festival™] would take away a thread from the tapestry of the town”.**

## **6.4 INDIGENOUS FOCUS**

It was clear that the Indigenous focus of the Croc Festivals™ is a major attraction, and all participants included in the research felt this focus should not be reduced, and there was some concern that this could happen as the Festivals grow. Most felt that the current balance of Indigenous-specific events and mix of Indigenous students to non-Indigenous students was appropriate. A few suggested that the chairperson of the community committee should be Indigenous, and that this would be one way of ensuring the Indigenous focus is maintained. Several people felt that a 50/50 focus was appropriate.

A number of students and teachers made reference to the link between Indigenous culture and the Festival, either through lead-up activities at school, through their performances or through shared activities at the Festival:

**“Before we came here we learnt about Indigenous people and how to respect their culture. We learnt about their culture, what they believe in and were told dreamtime stories.”**

**“I like performing the best because you feel really proud that we are friends with Aboriginals now.”**

**“We’re proud to be representing our culture. We’re happy and excited – it’s cool meeting new people.”**

**“It is great seeing different cultures come together in a positive way and experience positive things together like sport, education and health.”**

However, there was some criticism that there was not enough Indigenous culture displayed as part of the Festival:

**“We were a bit disappointed because we did a lot of fundraising to get here and our big selling point was learning about culture, but we haven’t done anything like that today.”**

Many teachers and students mentioned the importance of the involvement of Indigenous members of the community within the school in arts, history and dance as part of the lead-up to the Festival and this was also seen to be one of the benefits of the Festival for the community.

The Indigenous focus of the Festival is particularly important for Indigenous students as an outlet to celebrate their own cultural heritage. Torjman<sup>iii</sup> writes “culture and recreation provide the means to build social capital. They can take the form of arts, recreational programs or festivals.” In this way the Croc Festivals™ are vitally important as a tool for building social capital, as well as a celebration of Indigenous culture. Again, the notion of social capital and the Croc Festival™ is discussed in more detail in Section 10.

## 6.5 INDIGENOUS FESTIVALS AUSTRALIA

Community opinion toward IFA varied depending upon a number of factors such as the length of time the Festival had been in the community, level of contact with IFA and the organisation the individual came from. Community members, teachers and facilitators all commented on the sound organisational skills and professionalism displayed by IFA, and in most cases participants spoke positively about IFA's support and commitment.

**“The kids are having a great time and it is very well organised.”**

One teacher from Port Augusta was particularly impressed by IFA when they took on suggestions made the previous year.

However, there were a number of criticisms toward IFA from community members. As previously mentioned there was some criticism that while IFA were paid the large number of volunteers who were responsible for facilitating and organising the activities were not. Specifically, a number of people were sceptical about the amount of funding provided to IFA and the financial benefits of this for the community. Several people were concerned that IFA received money from Commonwealth and State government agencies, as well as from local businesses, and yet the community did not receive any financial assistance for their contributions. The community in Thursday Island were particularly concerned by this, prompting the desire for the community to run the Festival thus keeping money within the community.

One teacher in Port Augusta felt that IFA had not consulted properly with the Aboriginal communities in regards to the traditional welcome at the Festival. Historically, Port Augusta is the meeting place for a number of different Aboriginal groups and it was felt that acknowledging only one of these groups was to insult other Indigenous communities. This comment has been made in previous research.

IFA was also criticised for a perceived lack of appreciation towards the community and in particular the volunteers. It was felt that the community worked extremely hard in the lead-up to the Festival and that when IFA arrived they were kept out of proceedings. This is also consistent with previous research. A number of people also expressed their disappointment with IFA's assistance with cleaning up after the Festival. One participant said that it was mainly the community volunteers arranging the clean up with one or two IFA staff assisting.

## 6.6 ACTIVITIES

Overall, the reactions to the activities of the Festival were extremely positive, particularly towards the ‘I want to be’ workshop and the Croc future skills as they combined interactive, practical activities with career information.

However, it was felt that many of the children were too young for some of the activities, as the relevance of the activities was limited given their age. This was especially the case for the careers market, and it was suggested that this should concentrate on those in years 10, 11 and 12. A number of teachers and activity facilitators mentioned this as an issue, and some activity facilitators suggested IFA provide information on the range of ages of each group before the workshop so that they could tailor the workshop to suit that age group. Indeed, a number of activity facilitators mentioned the need to be flexible as the age range, volume and occasionally scheduling of students was fairly unpredictable.

Similarly, English language proficiency was also an issue, particularly in Alice Springs. A number of facilitators felt that they were unprepared for some students’ level of English language proficiency and that much of the information was lost on children that were not proficient in English. Facilitators in Alice Springs often had to rely on school helpers to translate the information and this often slowed the proceedings.

**“Some of the activities present a huge barrier because they are presented only in English.”**

**“Some activity facilitators obviously weren’t used to teaching ESL. They were great speakers but didn’t have the right skills for this. It would be good to get an Aboriginal person to teach ESL to the activity facilitators.”**

An activity facilitator from Alice Springs felt that the pace of the activities was too fast, particularly for younger students and those from remote communities:

**“In remote schools, kids are used to receiving information quite slowly. This fast-paced way of receiving information only caters to a small number of kids in this region. The kids would absorb more and be more engaged if they only completed two or three activities a day.”**

A few activity facilitators themselves requested feedback on how they are going:

**“We’d like some feedback to see how we can make ourselves better – like some evaluation or feedback on what the kids say about what we are doing to make sure we are doing the right thing.”**

A number of teachers stressed the importance of the activities being able to engage on a personal level with the students and it was felt that students needed to be able to apply the lessons of the activity to themselves in some way:

**“The kids need to see some correlation with the bigger picture and themselves, otherwise the activities are just ten minutes of entertainment.”**

**“I think the ‘Don’t do drugs’ could have been more powerful, it needed to be more hands on. It would have been better if they had a real-life example of someone who had been on drugs giving their own experience. That would have been more relevant to the kids than someone just talking about drugs.”**

While these criticisms were made, they should not overshadow the fact that overall teachers, students and community members felt that students engaged strongly with the activities, they were relevant and added to the wider learning experience of the students.

Sections 7 and 8 discuss the results of observation research in relation to the health, careers and ‘I want to be’ activities.