

Freedom!

Now that I have your attention this is what today is all about! For Weipa residents to have the freedom of self determination for the way forward of their town!

It is hard to imagine that 60 years ago there was no town here at its present site. This does not mean that there was not movement around the area. Traditional Owners had camped all over the lands around Weipa for thousands of years, and in the late 1800s a mission was established at 20 Mile, south of Weipa. This was eventually moved to the site of Weipa South (now Napranum)

Slide 1 of Village

The elders have told me how they would walk from Weipa South along the family wells, around Horneybrook, following the coastline to the Mission River for hunting and fishing hence the name "Waypa" which literally means "Hunting ground."

Slide 2 Hands with bauxite

Times were about to change when in 1955 John Evans realised the significance of Weipa's reddish cliffs at Red Cliffs. The Commonwealth Aluminium Corporation was formed COMALCO and an exploration camp set up in Pera and at Weipa South

Slide 3 Top Camp

Drilling and building of mining infrastructure began in earnest Here we have a picture of the first mine plant and wharf which was originally built at Evans Landing moving to Lorim Point in the late 60's.

Slide 4 Frank Isenbert

Significant events occurred in 1957. The site of the town of Weipa was excised from Cook Shire (It is a pity they did not excise more!) Qld Parliament passed the Comalco Act Comalco Act was which is still adhered to today with the ramifications it entails. This gave the company the power to act as the local authority over Weipa Town.

Slide5 signing of Comalco Act

At first there were only single men camps but gradually as the mining expanded a town began to develop, the first houses being built at Rocky Point in 1966 and later at Trunding in 1970.

Slide 6 - Houses

The official opening of the town occurred in 1967 with reportedly there being over 500 people in attendance with representatives from England, Japan, Holland and USA. There is no mention of Traditional owners being invited or Chinese!!!

Slide 7 Opening

Now at this stage Comalco owned, managed and controlled everything within the town boundaries with the exception of the hospital, school and police station. The very building we are in now was the supermarket complex which also housed a butcher, paper shop and chemist.

Slide 8 shops

All housing was owned by Comalco and the furniture in it. They provided all essential services and some unessential. Town Office gave out garbage bags and light bulbs for free.

To all intents and purposes Weipa at this stage was a closed town. You could not camp here but rather 20 kms out of town at the site of the old Saw Mill

The town was beautifully maintained and Heaven help anyone caught littering or graffiti. Comalco enforced its own rules and if these were broken the culprit would have his house taken off him necessitating the family to leave town.

Contractors did not live in Weipa itself but out at the Landing

All this was about to change. In 1991 Comalco decided to outsource much of its work to contractors. These included Building Services, light vehicles, Parks and gardens and Town Services. Miscellaneous services such as the bus runs were scrapped altogether. Houses became available for contractors and business people in Weipa and the first houses were free held and sold.

There had always been provision in the Comalco Act for a Town Commission to be formed that could eventually lead to a full local government.

As a first step the Weipa Citizens Advisory Committee was formed in 1993 to establish and structure Town Office functions along local government lines. This was set up with 3 appointed non-Comalco residents and 3 Comalco appointees. An independent chair was appointed by the State Government. His name was Chris White, a non resident, who flew in and out.

In 1995 the first elected members together with Comalco appointed members made up the Advisory Committee.

Twice in the 1990s Comalco and State Government almost came to an agreement to bring Weipa under a recognised Town Commission at which point the State Govt had said they would recognise Weipa for purposes of grants and recognition of the Commission as the legal entity managing the town. Both attempts failed.

In 1999 a more democratic, process was put in place with elections being held to vote for a chair and 3 members, with Rio Tinto to nominate 2 appointees and the traditional owner group, one. We have operated in this way for the last ten years.

Slide 9

Weipa of today is a far cry from 50 years ago
It has grown and grown and grown

Slide 10

I will now hand over to the deputy chair to explain how we now operate.
In conclusion let me say "From these little pisolites big things grew!"

Slide 11

Carrie Gay
WTA Chair