

INQUIRY INTO ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN ABORIGINAL COMMUNITIES

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The Director
Standing Committee on State Development
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
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Dear Director

INQUIRY INTO ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN ABORIGINAL COMMUNITIES

The Australian Research Council (ARC) is pleased to provide a brief submission to the NSW inquiry into economic development in Aboriginal communities. The submission provides an overview of the role of the ARC in supporting Indigenous researchers and research and some examples of ARC-funded research projects directly relevant to the inquiry.

The Australian Research Council

The ARC is a Commonwealth entity that provides advice to the Government on research matters, administers the National Competitive Grants Programme (NCGP) and manages Excellence in Research for Australia.

Through the NCGP, funding is awarded to individuals, research teams and large-scale research centres through two broad programmes—Discovery and Linkage. The funding schemes of the Discovery Programme have a primary focus on supporting individuals and small teams, while the funding schemes of the Linkage Programme aim to create links outside universities, with industry and other partners. Funding under the Discovery and Linkage programmes is awarded through a competitive peer review process to support the highest quality fundamental and applied research and research training, including Indigenous research, in all Australian states and territories.

The ARC is committed to ongoing support for Indigenous research and researchers and the promotion of the outcomes from these research projects.

ARC support for Indigenous researchers and research

Indigenous researchers

The ARC's *Discovery Indigenous* scheme provides funding specifically to support research programmes led by an Indigenous Australian researcher and to build the research capacity of higher degree by research and early career researchers. The scheme provides funding of between \$30 000 and up to \$500 000 per year, for a Project, over three years. Approximately \$4 million is allocated to new Discovery Indigenous grants annually.

The ARC also administers a *Special Research Initiatives* (SRI) scheme which provides support for one-off initiatives considered to be a priority. In 2012, the ARC funded the National Indigenous Research and Knowledges Network (NIRAKN) through the SRI scheme, providing \$3.2 million over four years. The Network is successfully building the capacity of Indigenous Australian researchers at all career stages through mentoring, training and providing opportunities to undertake cross-institutional and multidisciplinary research that will benefit communities. Further information about NIRAKN is provided in **Attachment A**.

Indigenous research

Indigenous research is supported across all schemes of the NCGP. A diverse range of projects focussed on Indigenous issues are funded each year by the ARC across all disciplines, including: education, performing arts, health, policy, law, economic development, history and languages. The ARC estimates that over the period 2011 to 2015 it has allocated over \$89.9 million to 207 projects involving Indigenous-related research.

Projects include:

- work with Aboriginal communities to develop a framework for sustainable futures
- shared learning about sustainable and effective Indigenous governance to achieve more effective economic, social and cultural outcomes
- identifying challenges facing Indigenous enterprises
- facilitating engagement by remote communities in projects for improved wealth creation and social wellbeing
- understanding the dynamics of crime rates in Indigenous communities
- health priorities and outcomes for Indigenous people.

Information about all of the Indigenous research projects supported by the ARC is available on the ARC website: <http://www.arc.gov.au>.

Project participants in NCGP schemes can include university researchers and collaborators from government, private companies, overseas institutions and Aboriginal companies and research centres. Collaborating organisations under ARC schemes provide both cash and in-kind contributions to support research projects leveraging the Government's investment in, and support for, research affecting Aboriginal communities.

Examples of ARC-funded research

Research relevant to NSW Aboriginal communities

Research projects funded by the ARC in the past five years include a number specifically relevant to NSW Aboriginal communities.

In 2015, Professor Fabri Blacklock from the Australian Catholic University was awarded \$419 000 for three years under the *Discovery Indigenous* scheme to document Koori Elders' wisdom and knowledge, perspectives and experiences:

Project summary: Sharing the wisdom and knowledge of New South Wales (NSW) Koori Elders is imperative for the continuation of Koori culture and for the understanding of all Australians of the country we share. By recording oral histories and illustrating them with historical and contemporary records, images, and commentary, by insider-interview, recording and collaborative editing with participants, the project aims to document Koori Elders' wisdom and knowledge, perspectives and experiences, for use in school and community education. Expected outputs include a scholarly book, refereed-journal articles, conference presentations, and preparation resources for NSW school students, and academic publications. The proposed outputs will make it accessible to schools and communities.

In 2014, Professor Larissa Behrendt from the University of Technology, Sydney was awarded \$600000 for three years under the *Linkage Projects* scheme to research models of Indigenous governance. The project involves a number of partner organisations in addition to universities including: Gunditj Mirring Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation; Ngarrindjeri Regional Authority Inc; University of Arizona, USA; Berg Lawyers; Synergistiq Pty Ltd:

Project Summary: Based on evidence that effective governance is a necessary precursor to Indigenous communities' economic, social and cultural outcomes, this project aims to strengthen Australian Indigenous communities by learning and sharing lessons about sustainable and effective Indigenous governance. In collaboration with three Aboriginal communities in Victoria, South Australia and New South Wales that are differentially engaged in Indigenous governance processes, the project aims to identify innovation in community governance, test the usefulness of Australian governance assessment tools, and foster an Indigenous Australian and global network to share successful strategies. In doing so, the project contributes to an emerging theory of Indigenous nation building.

In 2014, Professor Marina Papic from Macquarie University was awarded \$270 000 for three years under the *Linkage Projects* scheme to research ways of increasing participation of Indigenous families in early childhood education and health services. Participating organisations include Maari Ma Health and Gowrie NSW:

Project summary: This project aims to assess the impact of a range of initiatives to improve Indigenous children's numeracy achievement. It aims to enable the increased participation of Indigenous families in remote NSW in early childhood education and health services, and promote social inclusion in remote communities. An innovative mathematics and science program will engage the community in collaborative planning and implementation. This intends to raise the quality of early education, and connect families with their children's learning. At the same time vital access to health information and services will be aligned with the education programme.

In 2012, Professor Sonya Pearce from the University of Technology, Sydney was awarded \$104 000 for three years under the *Discovery Indigenous* scheme to research the experience of Aboriginal women in Indigenous enterprises. At the time the grant was announced Professor Pearce said 'My research will focus on understanding Indigenous socio-economic disadvantage and the role of women in changing this. The ARC grant gives me the ability to do more in-depth research and actually get out and talk to women about their experience in enterprises. I hope to document their aims and aspirations within a critical framework of broader society, gaining insight into the nature of success of Indigenous business enterprises.' (UTS media release, November 2011):

Project summary: This research will provide an understanding of the experiences of Aboriginal women in Indigenous enterprises (private and social) in urban, regional and rural New South Wales and investigate the economic and social contributions that they and their enterprises make to Aboriginal communities and Australian society.

In 2011, Professor Richard Howitt from Macquarie University was awarded \$322 047 for three years under the *Discovery Projects* scheme to research ideas for sustainable Indigenous futures in NSW:

Project summary: This project works with three rural NSW Aboriginal communities to reframe ideas for sustainable Indigenous futures in NSW. By building both academic and community understanding of economic and social change since the mid-1960s it offers a framework for action at several geographical scales to improve outcomes for rural Aboriginal communities.

Building robust and sustainable community futures in Aboriginal communities in rural NSW requires improved understanding of both past failures and the foundations for alternatives futures. This project will simultaneously enhance community capacity and rigorously assess the social consequences of conditions prevailing in three communities (Coffs Harbour, Deniliquin and Griffith). It will document and analyse Aboriginal experience of social, economic and environmental change since 1965. Integrating both newly-identified archival and contemporary data, the project will provide a powerful framework for community action and policy changes at several geographical scales to support improved outcomes for rural Aboriginal communities. (Source: Macquarie University website).

Research relevant to the economic development of Aboriginal communities

In 2013, a research team led by Professor Ian Williamson from The University of Melbourne was awarded \$150 000 for three years under the *Linkage Projects* scheme to research business education interventions). Partner Organisations included Victorian Employers' Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Australian Indigenous Minority Supplier Council:

Project summary: This project will provide evidence-based research and policy advice on effective business education interventions for Australian Indigenous enterprises and individuals. It will also explore the unique challenges Indigenous leaders face in owning or operating commercial enterprises.

In 2011, a research team led by Professor Mark Morrison from Charles Sturt University was awarded \$254 682 for three years under the *Linkage Projects* scheme to research challenges facing Indigenous enterprises. In addition to Charles Sturt University, The University of Newcastle and University of Technology, Sydney, other partner organisations involved with the research included Indigenous Business Australia and Cultural and Indigenous Research Centre Australia:

Project summary: The main benefit of this project is a thorough understanding of the challenges facing Indigenous enterprises in a range of geographical, economic and social settings. The research will identify and determine the importance of a broad range of factors which influence the success of Indigenous enterprises. (Source: ARC website).

A final report of this project is published on the web

http://www.csu.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0004/1311484/Final-Report-to-IBA-and-ARC-Linkage-LP110100698-Morrison,-Collins,-Basu-and-Krivokapic-191214.pdf. It reported:

The key outcome of this research partnership between IBA, CIRCA, CSU and UTS is that we now have the clearest picture of complexity, diversity and vitality of the Indigenous small business sector in Australia ever to emerge. We have a much better understanding of the dynamics of Indigenous enterprises and the critical contributions that they make not only to Indigenous employment generation and economic growth but also to community development because Indigenous entrepreneurs care as much about their social contribution as they do about their business profits and sustainability. We also have a much clearer picture of the pathways to Indigenous entrepreneurship, the personal and business barriers that they face and the successful strategies that Indigenous entrepreneurs have employed to overcome these barriers. New insights into new strategies to improve the vitality of the Indigenous business sector have emerged.

Conclusion

In summary:

- Through its research funding schemes, the ARC supports Indigenous research and research undertaken by Indigenous researchers across Australia.
- By supporting Indigenous researchers, the ARC is helping to build Australia's research capacity and to build the capacity of Indigenous researchers to meet the research needs of their communities.
- The ARC's *Discovery Indigenous* scheme is specifically targeted at supporting Indigenous researchers. In 2012, the ARC also funded the National Indigenous Research and Knowledges Network (NIRAKN) under its *Special Research Initiatives* scheme.
- By supporting Indigenous research, the ARC is helping to support the delivery of outcomes relevant to Indigenous communities. This includes the possible benefits arising from the involvement of universities and other partner organisations in the research being conducted.
- The ARC estimates that it has funded over 200 projects in the past five years that involve Indigenous issues, across the full range of disciplines, including: culture, education, health, history and economic development.
- The outcomes of ARC-funded Indigenous research will have the potential to make an important contribution to policy deliberations across a range of areas. ARC-funded research includes a number of projects specifically targeted at NSW Aboriginal communities.

I hope this information is useful.

Yours sincerely

Professor Aidan Byrne
Chief Executive Officer

NATIONAL INDIGENOUS RESEARCH AND KNOWLEDGES NETWORK
(Source: NIRAKN website)

Vision

NIRAKN's vision is to develop a critical mass of skilled, informed and qualified Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers, who can address the urgent needs of our communities, through the delivery of culturally appropriate research. NIRAKN will endeavour to facilitate a national Indigenous research agenda for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and the nation.

NIRAKN's premise is that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge systems inform and frame our research. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge systems are understood as continuing and living, embodied, and culturally situated within our respective Indigenous nations, communities and the broader Australian society and includes Indigenous ethics and protocols. As such NIRAKN's multi-cultural research programme seeks to facilitate and encompass a wide range of research topics and projects, reflecting that the production and application of our respective knowledge systems requires a comprehensive agenda as well as a robust engagement with disciplinary knowledges.

Description

The National Indigenous Research and Knowledges Network (NIRAKN) is a national, inclusive, multidisciplinary hub and spokes model network of Indigenous researchers at various stages of their careers.

NIRAKN members represent over fifty Aboriginal nations, as well as twenty-one collaborating universities, the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) and five partner organisations: Ninti One Ltd, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Healing Foundation, South Coast Women's Health and Welfare Aboriginal Corporation – Waminda, the United Nations University, and the National Congress of Australia's First Peoples. The network is led by Indigenous senior scholars with strong research track records who bring extensive experience in collaborative and community-based research.

NIRAKN provides a platform for cross-institutional and multidisciplinary research designed to build the capacity of qualified Indigenous researchers to meet the compelling research needs of our communities. NIRAKN seeks to work strategically with our international, national and community based partner organisations to ensure NIRAKN's multidisciplinary research and capacity building programme benefits our communities.

NIRAKN's Research Capacity Building Programme mentors, trains, supports and engages new and emerging researchers across disciplines and institutions through skills, information and knowledge transfer. NIRAKN provides opportunities for the application of those skills within multi-disciplinary, cross-institutional research collaborations.

Structure

NIRAKN comprises a hub and four nodes.

The Hub, through the Director, has overall responsibility for the administration, coordination and delivery of NIRAKN's Research Capacity Building Programme as well as undertaking research and other research related activities.

The key role of the nodes is developing and conducting research, delivering research capacity building workshops as well as providing professional advice and support to NIRAKN members. The four nodes are:

- Indigenous Sociology and Knowledges
- Indigenous Health and Wellbeing
- Indigenous Law
- Yuraki–History, Politics and Culture.

Indigenous Sociology and Knowledges

Building empirical knowledges around key social phenomena including education, labour market, socio-economic and demographic position, social policy and family are the foci of this Node's research activities. The Indigenous Sociology node's initial research programme is a set of three pilot projects. These are: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ICT usage, official Indigenous issue enquiries 1983-2013, and education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Indigenous Health and Wellbeing

Indigenous health remains the poorest in the country. A holistic gendered approach to health via a social and emotional wellbeing theoretical lens is the driver of this node's research activity. The strong links between gender and social and emotional wellbeing and heart disease, diabetes, and reproductive health underpin this node's initial research project.

Indigenous Law

Indigenous people have a different legal status from other Australians which impacts on everyday lives. Domestic and international laws prescribe the constitutive elements of this legal status. This node's research agenda will be shaped by public law, constitutional and human rights law, civil and family law needs, governance, crime prevention, treaties, agreements and negotiated settlements, legal research, and critical Indigenous legal theory. The initial research project will investigate factors that impact on rates of crime in Aboriginal communities building on the work recently completed in NSW which linked higher levels of social cohesion with lower levels of crime.

Yuraki–History, Politics and Culture

Yuraki is a traditional AWABAKAL word meaning long ago, past, history. Yuraki grounds the Indigenous history, politics and culture node within an Indigenous practice framework. Yuraki research project is trans-national Indigenous constitutional reform in Australia and USA.