



18 October 2019

Mr Ray Griggs AO, CSC
Chief Executive Officer
National Indigenous Australians Agency
Charles Perkins House
Woden ACT 2606

INDIGENOUS EVALUATION COMMITTEE – 2018-19 ANNUAL REPORT

Dear Mr Griggs

I am pleased to present the Indigenous Evaluation Committee's (the Committee's) Annual Report 2018-19.

This report reflects the matters dealt with, and key areas of advice provided to the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, now National Indigenous Australians Agency (the Agency), by the Committee as at 30 June 2019.

The Committee was established in June 2018 with the objective to strengthen the quality, credibility and influence of the evaluations of policies and programs affecting Indigenous Australians led by the Agency.

The Committee comprises [four members](#), three independent members external to the Agency (including the Chair) and the Deputy Chief Executive Officer of the NIAA. Committee members are all experienced in evaluation.

Committee Work to Date

In its first year, the Committee met four times and considered a broad range of work being undertaken by the Agency. We developed a thorough understanding of the complexity and scale of the programs and activities that fall under the Indigenous Advancement Strategy (IAS) Evaluation Framework. Key areas of advice provided to the Agency in 2018-19 were in relation to:

- the development of the Annual Evaluation Work Plan;
- selected evaluations and evaluation strategies planned, underway or completed in 2018-19; and
- a range of activities planned or underway to strengthen evaluation capability and practice.

Annual Evaluation Work Plan

The Committee discussed and endorsed the 2018-19 Evaluation Work Plan in August 2018 and the 2019-20 Evaluation Work Plan in June 2019. The Agency has committed to an ambitious program of evaluations, with approximately 40 new or ongoing evaluation activities included on the 2019-20 Evaluation Work Plan. We worked with the Agency to ensure the Evaluation Work Plan includes activities that will increase the evidence base in key policy areas. However, we see the need to develop a more refined process for prioritising evaluations in the future, and support the Agency's plan to create a structured tool to assist with this task.



Evaluations

The independent Committee members provided feedback and advice on a number of evaluations and evaluation strategies in 2018-19, including in the following areas:

- Community Development Program (CDP)
- Strengthening the System Effectiveness of Early Childhood Investments
- Testing the Impact of Youth Through-care Program Models for Improving Community Safety and Justice Outcomes
- Remote School Attendance Strategy Reforms
- Mental Health First Aid Training
- Murdi Paaki Lessons Learned
- Our North, Our Future: White Paper of Developing Northern Australia:
 - Township Leasing
 - Pilot Land Reform Projects
 - Prescribed Bodies Corporate Capacity Building.

At our first meeting we commented on the evaluation of the first two years of the CDP, published in February 2019. This evaluation was presented in two separate reports, one containing analysis of administrative data on participation and employment outcomes, and one describing community views on CDP from eight remote fieldwork communities. We noted that the reports represented a substantial piece of work and included both fieldwork and rigorous analysis allowing valuable insights about the Program. However, we felt the evaluation could be strengthened by having a theory of change discussed at the beginning, which the evaluators could return to in the conclusion. In addition, we felt that cross-referencing of community views throughout the administrative data report would strengthen the voice of the communities and support the fieldwork findings with analysis of the data collected from all regions. The Agency subsequently prepared a summary of the evaluation drawing together community views and key findings from administrative data analysis.

The independent Committee members also gave significant attention to reviewing evaluation strategies in 2018-19, seeing this as an appropriate stage in the evaluation cycle to advise on how to strengthen evaluations. Evaluation strategies reviewed to date have had significant methodological strengths, and in some cases, effort has been made to ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have had a voice in both monitoring of policy implementation and evaluation. However, there is still work to do to ensure that all evaluations are designed with a central understanding of the socio-cultural realities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in mind. We strongly encourage the Agency to ensure Indigenous voices continue to be prioritised in the design and conduct of evaluations. We have advised the Agency to develop guidelines that support Indigenous Evaluation Strategy developers in this task.

Other engagements and practice improvements

In addition to our review of evaluations, the Committee considered the current evaluation capabilities of the Agency and a range of activities planned or underway to lift evaluation capability, capacity and use. This includes the development of evaluation process guidance materials and new requirements, for example, that an evaluation strategy be developed for every new policy or major policy reform.

The Committee also raised the importance of publishing all completed evaluation reports, or summaries, in a timely fashion to support transparency, build a publicly available evidence base and support shared learnings. We are pleased to note that the Agency is working towards embedding this requirement into practice. The Agency has published completed evaluations that commenced prior to the implementation of the IAS Evaluation Framework.

Prior to the first Committee meeting, I met with the Chair of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's (DFAT) Independent Evaluation Committee. DFAT's Committee has been in place since 2012. We are looking to learn from their experiences where possible.



I also met with the Co-Chair of the Indigenous Advisory Council, Cr Roy Ah See to discuss respective roles and how we can add value to each other's work. The rising importance of Indigenous framed evaluations to Indigenous policy deliberations was also discussed. Going forward we will advise the Advisory Council on our work and progress and see how the work of the Committee can complement the work of the Advisory Council

I have invited Productivity Commissioner Romlie Mokak, who is overseeing the Productivity Commission's Indigenous Evaluation Strategy project, to attend future Committee meetings as an observer. This will provide Commissioner Mokak with an insight on the Agency's evaluation practices. These insights may assist the Productivity Commission in developing a whole-of-government evaluation strategy for policies and programs affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians.

Key priorities for 2019-20

The Committee has several key priorities for the 2019-20 financial year. We will:

- continue to support the Agency to build its evaluation capability and knowledge and ensure that the implementation of the Evaluation Framework is effective. This will include further feedback on a structured tool for prioritising evaluations, and the development of evaluation guidance materials
- provide focused feedback to the Agency on the design of selected planned evaluations
- oversee the Agency's implementation of the ANAO recommendations in the 2018-19 ANAO Performance Audit on Evaluating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Programs.

The Committee looks forward to continuing our productive working relationship with the Agency in the coming year.

Yours sincerely

Distinguished Professor Maggie Walter
Chair