Romlie Mokak

Commissioner, Indigenous Productivity   20 08 19

KALACC Response to the June 2019 Issues Paper - Indigenous Evaluation Strategy

Dear Romlie,

Many thanks to yourself for meeting recently with Wayne Barker of KALACC to discuss the *Indigenous Evaluation Strategy*. That recent engagement between yourself and Wayne continues a history of intermittent contact between the Productivity Commission and KALACC dating over the last decade.

As a follow up to your recent meeting with Wayne Barker the Productivity Commission has now sought comment from KALACC about the design of the next *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage Reports* and the *Indigenous Expenditure Reports*. We have provided detailed responses to the Commission on those matters. In that context we note the key questions being asked by the Commission:

"previous feedback on the OID has led to changes including:

•   a more strengths-based approach for indicators and context

•   prioritising the governance, leadership and cultural indicators — in recognition that they are drivers for other outcomes

•   improving the quality of the 'things that work' case studies by applying a more rigorous selection criteria."

These questions are equally critical in terms of developing and implementing an *Indigenous Evaluation Strategy*. As a nation we are currently undertaking a pivot away from a decade or more of failed deficits discourses in which we have consistently asked 'what is wrong with Aboriginal people?' Since 2005 Aboriginal culture has been entirely peripheral to Government policy and planning. But now as we pivot towards a strengths - based approach to Indigenous Affairs, KALACC can identify documents at Commonwealth; State [soon to be publicly released] and Regional [Kimberley] levels which all employ a diagram of concentric circles with Culture placed in the middle circle.

If this is the new policy paradigm, in which culture has been relocated from the outside circle [if it existed anywhere] to the inside circle, then how do we measure and evaluate outcomes relating to culture? This is the key question which KALACC hopes to respond to in this present short submission to the Productivity Commission.

Kind regards

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Facts, Observations and Key Points About the Measurement and Evaluation of Aboriginal Culture

1. National Indigenous Arts and Cultural Authority, December 2019

The establishment of a NIACA has been discussed for over 10 years. In the second week of December 2019 a national summit will be held, leading to the formal establishment of NIACA.   https://niaca.com.au/2019-summit/

2. AIATSIS – Reporting on the Status of Aboriginal Culture

AIATSIS is a Statutory Authority and its Governing Legislation now requires it to report to Government on the Status of Aboriginal Heritage and Culture.

3. Binarri-binyja yarrawoo Language and Culture Indicators Framework

BBY is the Empowered Communities backbone organisation for the East Kimberley region. BBY has now developed a *Language and Culture Indicators Framework* which can be used to assist the reporting of language and culture outcomes.

4. Cultural Development Network

Measuring culture is not overly problematic. It is done all the time in all manner of ways. This can be achieved through proprietary, for – profit systems such as Culture Counts https://culturecounts.cc/ But KALACC is more enamoured of community - based methodologies such as those developed by the Cultural Development Network https://culturaldevelopment.net/outcomes/about-measurable-outcomes/schema/

5. The World Values Culture and The World Measures Culture
UNESCO tells us:

> "Culture is who we are and what shapes our identity. No development can be sustainable without including culture.
> In September 2015 the United Nations General Assembly adopted the "2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development", with 17 ambitious, universal goals to transform our world.
> UNESCO ensures that the role of culture is recognized through a majority of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including those focusing on quality education, sustainable cities, the environment, economic growth, sustainable consumption and production patterns, peaceful and inclusive societies, gender equality and food security. From cultural heritage to cultural and creative industries, Culture is both an enabler and a driver of the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development."
>   https://en.unesco.org/themes/culture-sustainable-development

6. The Pacific Values Culture and The Pacific Measures Culture

The Pacific region has a long history of valuing and measuring culture. One of the key documents within these processes is Vanuatu's *Alternative Indicators of Well-being for Melanesia*.
http://www.christensenfund.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/Alternative-Indicators-Vanuatu.pdf

Beyond the above, KALACC has in recent weeks shared considerable material with the Productivity Commission and we ask that you give consideration to the material which we have provided to the Commission.

The views and concepts flagged in this brief submission are not in any way new to KALACC. Nor are they in any way new to the Productivity Commission. We attach now FYI a copy of the very short Productivity Commission *Staff News* of August 2012. In that short article you will see the comments from the then Chair of the Productivity Commission, Mr Gary Banks AO, about the importance of community based, culturally embedded programs, such as the Yiriman Youth Project. And you will see Mr Banks' comments about the role of evaluation in developing better Indigenous policies. Progress on these matters between August 2012 and August 2019 has been glacial at best. Clearly if we as a nation are serious about developing better indigenous policies then we need to be serious about developing better evaluation strategies. And as the then Chair of the Productivity Commission highlighted in this article, and in other articles that he wrote at around that time, a key plank and platform for evaluation has to be the evaluation and measurement of culture.

KALACC has intentionally kept this present document to three pages in length, plus attachments. There are much more detailed documents relating to the evaluation and measurement of culture which we would be happy to share with the Commission. And we note that in coming weeks KALACC will publish the *Kimberley Caring for Culture Plan*. We will ensure that we share that important document with you once it is finalised.

Warning: Photographs on the following pages include images of some persons now deceased.
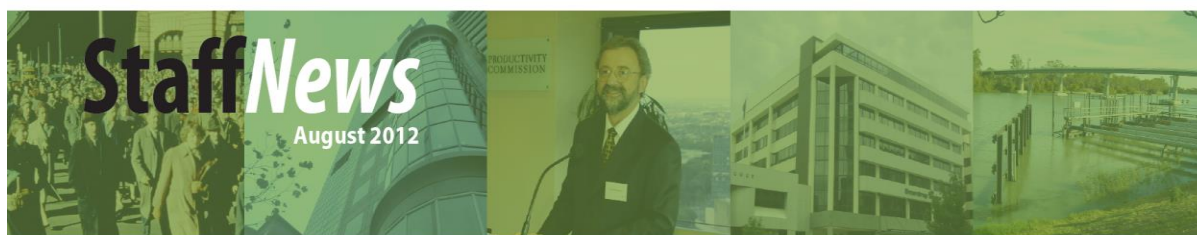
Message from the Chairman

Dear colleagues

In August, I took a few days out of the office to travel to the Kimberley region of WA, as a member of the judging panel for this year's Indigenous Governance Awards. Mick Dodson (the Chairman on this occasion!) and I went there to visit an organisation at Fitzroy Crossing. You may recall that this small settlement on the (mighty) Fitzroy River, received national press coverage a few years back when a formidable group of aboriginal women successfully pressed for the Indigenous community to become 'grog free'.

About twelve years ago, some of these same women, along with a number of male elders, established the 'Yiriman Project'. This is an innovative organisation devoted to addressing the malaise among aboriginal youth in the region (including a high suicide rate) by taking them 'back to country' in the company of their elders, where they can begin to reconnect with their culture and strengthen their sense of identity.

It is a remarkable endeavour, in which a governing body of some 20 elders from four language groups have come together in common cause — and achieved great things with little financial support. In the terminology of our *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage* report, Yiriman is a 'thing that works', one that is worthy of being emulated in other parts of the country.

The OID Report has in fact drawn many of its case studies from the Indigenous Governance Awards (as well as many of the photos that adorn the overview volume). The organisations exemplify the beneficial impact of good governance, and demonstrate what is possible even in the most challenging settings.

The OID Report has become a success story in its own right. It is widely utilized across the country and recognised internationally. A recent arms-length review we commissioned was very positive about its contribution, while also suggesting some areas for improvement.

The OID process has helped build the Productivity Commission's skills and credibility in this sensitive and important area of public policy. We have also done some useful research of our own on Indigenous labour market participation. As you know, our ambition is to get more deeply involved still, through studies commissioned by government in key areas where our processes and expertise could make a strong contribution.

With this in mind, the topic we have chosen for this year's *Policy Roundtable* at Old Parliament House is 'Better Indigenous Policies: the role of evaluation'. We have an impressive list of attendees from among Indigenous organisations (including the Co-Chairs of the National Congress), government agencies and research bodies — including from Canada and New Zealand. As with the previous Roundtables, it promises to generate useful ideas that can be carried forward to produce better outcomes, in a policy area that sorely needs them.

Gary

A meeting with Elders and Cultural Bosses in Fitzroy Crossing, 16 August.

Gary with Mick Dodson (IGA Chair) and award-winning photographer Wayne Quilliam.

Appendix – Provided With the Express Permission of the Author:

Patrick Sullivan, Professor Nulungu Research Institute, University of

Notre Dame Australia.

Evaluating programmes where culture is a significant element of programme success

A Short Discussion Paper

Patrick Sullivan, Professor Nulungu Research Institute, University of Notre Dame Australia.

Culture matters

In the only study of its kind, a team of researchers from Melbourne and La Trobe universities demonstrated that culture matters. They reviewed thirteen peer-reviewed scholarly articles covering eleven studies 'that reported quantitatively expressed health and wellbeing outcomes involving Indigenous Australian participants'. They found 'evidence that interventions that include opportunities for expression of cultural identities can have beneficial effects for Australian Indigenous peoples'. Eight of the eleven studies 'showed significant improvement in at least one psychosocial, behavioural or clinical measure, with two showing a positive direction of effect and one showing no improvement'.[1]

This simply confirms what field staff already know. Culture is good for people. Yet, the cultural component of a programme is often neglected because programme planning and evaluation methods have not yet evolved enough to deal with complex, value-laden, behaviour. Evaluations focus, instead, largely on stats and money, because these are easier to measure.

Value in Evaluation

Don Nutbeam is an expert in evaluation techniques. He says:

> The word 'evaluation' has at its core, both literally and metaphorically, the concept of 'value'. The value we place on a particular action and its outcome defines its importance, how we interpret information and, in many cases, how we assess success or failure. These values are contestable … Policy makers, academic researchers, frontline staff and the wider community may all have different views on what represents 'value' from public investment.[2]

Aboriginal people in remote areas such as the Kimberley value traditional culture. This is true even of the educated youth of the towns and large settlements. This observation leads to two questions: How can we build cultural support into development programmes; and how can we evaluate programmes with a significant cultural component?

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[1] MacLean, S, Ritte, R, Thorpe, A, Ewenc, S and Arabena, K Health and wellbeing outcomes of programs for Indigenous Australians that include strategies to enable the expression of cultural identities: a systematic review, *Australian Journal of Primary Health* http://dx.doi.org/10.1071/PY16061 Page 311.

[2] Nutbeam, D 2017 *What's in a word? Finding the value in evaluation* https://www.themandarin.com.au/76565-whats-word-finding-value-evaluation

These are really aspects of the same question, because programme evaluation must be planned and carried out as programmes are devised and implemented.

The mainstream evaluation literature offers only a partial solution, since it is mainstream, and Aboriginal people are not. Nevertheless, it can offer insights and point to various ways forward, that can be built on by more culture-centred techniques, such as the well-being schema outlined at the end of this short discussion paper.

Coalface versus Centre

Nicholas Gruen, a management expert who has written on 'the travesties of "evidence-based" policy making', says:

> To establish a good monitoring and evaluation regime you need to work methodically from general objectives to delivery at the coalface. But here's the thing. Those at the centre of the system need to listen to those at the coalface every bit as much as those at the coalface need to listen to those at the centre. After all, those at the coalface are where the action is … So the coalface and those at the centre of the system must listen conscientiously to each other to jointly serve the wellbeing of the whole system. Yet the centre and the coalface of the system are also respectively, the top and bottom of a hierarchy. Now those at the bottom of the system listen intently to the wishes of those at the top as if their career prospects depend on it (they do). But when it happens at all, those at the top listen to those below as an act of noblesse oblige.[3]

This is unfortunately true of much Indigenous programme evaluation, and it must change. Sara Hudson, from the Centre for Independent Studies, tends to be typecast as supporting the villains in the drama that Gruen has outlined, but there is a counter-narrative in the paper on Indigenous evaluation she recently produced for CIS that can offer useful pointers to improved evaluation.

Mainstream versus Slipstream

At first glance, she favours the laboratory 'rats and stats' approach, saying that she considers a 'strong' evaluation programme to be

> a mixture of qualitative and quantitative data with evidence of triangulation of data. Evidence the program is having an impact through the use of pre and post data or other benchmarking data. The use of experimental design/random control trials/ or control group. Or in the absence of that, evidence the evaluation utilises in addition to triangulation of data and benchmarking one or more of the following: an economic component through either a cost benefit or cost effective

[3] Gruen, N 2016 *Why we accept travesties of 'evidence-based' policymaking*, https://www.themandarin.com.au/64557-nicholas-gruen-evidence-based-policy-part-one

analysis or some mention of the financial impact of the program and or meta-analyses — reviews of multiple evaluations. [4]

Later in the paper she gives more credence to qualitative and process aspects of a good evaluation. She produces a table, [5] which follows in summary form:

Methodology	Mixed methodology is important, not just qualitative data. Case studies or reviews can be as rigorous, or even more robust, than many evaluations. Participants should not receive a benefit.
Data	Data collection must be consistent across all programme locations. The right administrative data must be collected if changes in behaviour are to be measured. Strategies for accessing and recording administrative data must be mapped out before the programme starts, particularly where there are privacy concerns.
Analysis and reporting	Strong analysis can overcome the limitations of a small sample. The operating environment of the programme is important, lack of appropriate authority may minimise the impact of a programme. Evaluations must be clear about whether they are reporting on the process of delivery of the programme or on the outcomes.
Program design and delivery	Policy-making and programme delivery must be aligned. The general model of a programme may be transferable, but its success may depend on a combination of people with knowledge and skills. Up-to-date training in best practice approaches is important. When programme staff make an effort to establish positive relationships with participants their feedback is more likely to be honest.

These are sound guidelines, but they are not tailored to Indigenous circumstances (despite the topic of Hudson's paper), and they do not offer any insight into how to design

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[4] Hudson, S 2017 Evaluating Indigenous Programmes: a Toolkit for Change, Page 12
https://www.cis.org.au/publications/research-reports/evaluating-indigenous-programs-a-toolkit-for-change
[5] Hudson, S 2017 Evaluating Indigenous Programmes: a Toolkit for Change, Page 14
https://www.cis.org.au/publications/research-reports/evaluating-indigenous-programs-a-toolkit-for-change

appropriate interventions where Aboriginal culture is a significant component. Indeed, these guidelines can lead to evaluation of a programme as successful (meeting its objectives), even where it makes matters worse for the people on the ground.

The Wellbeing Approach

The internationally-recognised development economist, Joseph Stiglitz, has tackled this problem. He is supported by development philosopher Amyrta Sen, and their views adopted by the OECD.

Stiglitz and Sen tell us:

- Material improvements in human life are not an end in themselves, they must sustain and improve human wellbeing
- Some material improvements may be detrimental to wellbeing
- Ways of measuring material development (economic and statistical data) are not sufficient for understanding human wellbeing, they must be refined and new metrics must be found.[6]

Their focus on wellbeing is common sense. What is the point of material development if it reduces wellbeing? More controversially, where is the need for material development if wellbeing is already high? The authors of the *World Happiness Report* have resolved these questions by pointing out that material development and wellbeing are not binaries, but interlinked in a surprising way. Wellbeing comes first. It does not follow from material development.

Assessing the 'Objective Benefits of Subjective Wellbeing' they find that research tends to increasingly show 'levels of subjective well-being are found to predict future health, mortality, productivity, and income, controlling statistically for other possible determinants'.[7]

In other words, if you can raise Aboriginal wellbeing they will better engage with education, employment, health systems, criminal justice and all of the other things the wider society desires. Focusing on these things in a piecemeal fashion in a situation of low wellbeing will fail.

The OECD supports these findings, producing *Guidelines on Measuring Subjective Well-being.* It defines wellbeing in three dimensions. These are*:* life evaluation (reflection), affect (feelings), and eudaimonia, an Aristotelian concept, perhaps the most important of the three, indicating a sense of meaning in life or good psychological functioning. [8]

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[6]Stiglitz et al 2009, Report on the Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress, passim. http://www.stiglitz-sen-fitoussi.fr/en/index.htm

[7] De Neve, J-E., Diener, E., Tay, L., Xuereb, C., 2013 The Objective Benefits of Subjective Well-being, Chapter 4 in Helliwell, J., Layard, R., and Sachs, J. (eds) *World Happiness Report*, Sustainable Development Solutions Network, New York:70.

[8]http://www.oecd.org/statistics/guidelines-on-measuring-subjective-well-being.htm

This brings us closer to the possibility of welding together the hard-headed measurement proposals of the CIS's Sara Hudson, and the perceived urgency of building culture into programme delivery and evaluation of those at the coal face. It can be done by adapting the work of ANU scholar Mandy Yap with the Yawuru people of Broome.

Yap's ground-breaking PhD thesis, *In pursuit of culturally relevant indicators of Indigenous wellbeing: Operationalising the 'recognition space',* came out of hours of painstaking interviews with Yawuru people, in partnership with the Nyamba Buru Yawuru native title organisation, and it is based in her own significant expertise in statistical data analysis.

The following schema for programme design, delivery and evaluation, has been adapted from Yap's methodology:[9]

A Wellbeing Schema for Programme Design and Evaluation

- Assess the current, or baseline, state of wellbeing of the target group or community by asking qualitative questions. Add to this contextual data from the local clinic, police, school, pastoral care professionals etc.
- Interview a representative sample of the target group or community about life events/activities that contribute to wellbeing, and/or detract from it. Label these strong, moderate or weak contributors, if possible.
- Construct a matrix of potential interventions that would assign a place on a grid to these wellbeing contributors with one axis reflecting 'low/high wellbeing potential' and the other axis 'easy/difficult to achieve'.
- In consultation with the target group/community, service providers and funders, discuss the practicalities of delivering a programme that meets the needs of the provider while addressing an appropriate wellbeing marker on the grid. If, for instance, an activity is easy to achieve and produces high wellbeing, but is not built in to the proposed programme, discuss ways that it could be. If, on the other hand, a programme does not address any of the activities on the grid, question the merits of the programme.
- Through interviews, surveys (consider using social media), and other data, monitor the wellbeing indicators at the various milestones of the programme or its activities and adjust these accordingly.
- Measure wellbeing at the conclusion of the programme.

This a cross-cultural methodology for the design and evaluation of development programmes that is adapted to distinct Aboriginal cultural and material circumstances. It allows for the inclusion of cultural goals, where these will contribute to wellbeing. In the Kimberley achieving cultural maintenance goals will contribute to wellbeing in the majority of cases. In regions where culture is valued, such as the Kimberley, this schema allows for culture to be built-in at the heart of programme delivery and evaluation.

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[9] It is based on a reading of Yap's work. It is not her methodological schema nor has it been endorsed by Yap.