

Minister for Human Services
Minister for Housing
Minister for Disability Services and Community Development
Minister for Planning
Minister for Aboriginal Affairs



Level 5 4 Salamanca Place, Parliament Square Building HOBART TAS 7000 Australia
GPO Box 123 HOBART TAS 7001 Australia
Ph: +61 3 6165 7686
Email: minister.jaensch@dpac.tas.gov.au

19 SEP 2019

Indigenous Evaluation Strategy
Productivity Commission
Locked Bag 2, Collins Street East
MELBOURNE VIC 8003

Subject: Tasmanian Government submission in response to Indigenous Evaluation Strategy Issues Paper

Dear Chair

On behalf of the Tasmanian Government, I thank you for this opportunity to make an initial submission to the Productivity Commission's Indigenous Evaluation Strategy project. The Tasmanian Government has chosen to focus on those questions and topical issues that we believe are particularly relevant to Tasmania, and where the Tasmanian Government's experiences may be particularly instructive.

The Indigenous Evaluation Strategy provides an opportunity for the Productivity Commission to identify issues and improve measures in relation to established reporting systems and localised data issues across agencies and service providers. The proposed Indigenous Evaluation Strategy will ideally acknowledge the differing demographic and resource circumstances between jurisdictions to allow for flexibility in the approach to evaluation.

Most importantly, the Tasmanian Government highlights the importance of collaboration and co-design with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as a key enabler of success for program and service delivery. The below responses to specific questions have been prepared with this in mind.

What objectives should a strategy for evaluation policies and programs affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people seek to achieve? (p.4)

There is a range of potential objectives for an Indigenous Evaluation Strategy that the Productivity Commission may wish to consider. The Tasmanian Government suggests that the Indigenous Evaluation Strategy aim to ensure that evaluation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-specific policies and programs adopts a 'do no harm' approach to individual and community health and wellbeing by avoiding practices that may entrench negative stereotypes and deficit models. The purposes of evaluation could include advancing the redress of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander inequality, and the continued enhancement of the inherent rights, cultures and traditions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Key objectives of the Indigenous Evaluation Strategy should include involvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the evaluation process, use of evaluation methods that are culturally appropriate

and historically aware, and recognition and respect for cultural and social differences among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' knowledge and experience should be recognised and used to guide evaluation activities.

Lastly, the Tasmanian Government suggests that a key objective of the Indigenous Evaluation Strategy should be that evaluation is purposeful and effective, and that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are able to access the data collected through evaluation activities.

Do you agree with the main components of an Indigenous Evaluation Strategy suggested by the Commission? Should other components be included? If so, why? (p.5)

In addition to the components put forward by the Productivity Commission, the Tasmanian Government considers there may be value in including a component to guide agencies on what activities and structures they can put in place to enable effective evaluations. This would build on the proposed third component of the Indigenous Evaluation Strategy as outlined in the Issues Paper, by not only identifying the processes and institutional characteristics needed to promote the adoption and success of the Indigenous Evaluation Strategy but also encouraging and helping agencies to implement them.

Alternatively, the Productivity Commission may wish simply to expand the scope of the proposed third component in the Issues Paper to include this element.

How can the challenges and complexities associated with undertaking evaluation be overcome – both generally, and in Indigenous policy specifically? (p.18)

There are a range of potential methods for overcoming the challenges and complexities associated with the evaluation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-specific policies and programs. The Productivity Commission should consider the use of local knowledge and networks, which is particularly relevant for the formulation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander policy. As noted earlier, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people need to be involved in evaluation processes that relate to them. The use of plain language will help to ensure effective engagement.

Challenges and complexities associated with undertaking evaluation may be addressed by investigating prior evaluations of similar programs, or of programs with similar components. Identifying opportunities for sharing data and minimising duplication of effort will create more effective evaluation opportunities while reducing the overall impost on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Evaluative questions and priorities should be framed in a way that demonstrates the successes and strengths of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities, as well as the challenges they face. This includes a deeper exploration of the 'causes of the causes' of such issues as poor health and wellbeing among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. This is necessary to avoid reporting solely on negative outcomes without context and an explanation of the social determinants of negative outcomes, including the effects of inter-generational trauma, discrimination and racism.

What can we learn from evaluation systems at the state and territory level? (p.22)

The Tasmanian Government does not have a formalised evaluation framework for policies and programs affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people; rather it approaches the evaluation of such policies and programs individually. This allows for stakeholders to provide qualitative feedback on their needs and experiences, and for the Tasmanian Government to tailor policies and programs based on the stated priorities and desired outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

For example, when determining priorities for the Tasmanian Government's Aboriginal Affairs policy agenda, in 2015 the Premier initiated extensive high-level consultations with Tasmanian Aboriginal people to identify opportunities and hear issues of concern. The feedback from these consultations inspired the Tasmanian Government to increase the focus on Tasmanian Aboriginal history and culture in its delivery

of the Australian Curriculum and has included development, in collaboration with Tasmanian Aboriginal people, of an online multimedia platform known as The Orb, which was launched in August 2018.

The Orb provides teachers with a bank of resources to assist in the teaching of Tasmanian Aboriginal histories and cultures but is also publicly available via the World Wide Web, where it has been well received by Tasmanian Aboriginal people, national Indigenous education forums, and education departments in other jurisdictions and overseas. The Tasmanian Department of Education welcomes user feedback on The Orb, as it is designed to be a dynamic resource responsive to user needs and expectations. The Tasmanian Government continues to refine existing components and develop new components for The Orb based on consultation with and feedback from Tasmanian Aboriginal people.

More broadly, the day-to-day delivery of the Tasmanian Government's Aboriginal Affairs policy agenda is overseen by a whole-of-government interdepartmental committee (IDC). This IDC provides a conduit for those delivering services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Tasmania to relay feedback from service users to policy makers and program designers. Regular meetings and communication between the IDC members allows for this feedback to contribute to iterative learning and adjustment of policies and programs based on the real-time needs and experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Tasmania.

The Tasmanian Government understands that qualitative approaches to policy and program evaluation will not always be practical in the Australian Government context. However, the Tasmanian Government would encourage the Productivity Commission to consider the value that qualitative approaches can offer in developing policies and programs that are responsive, flexible, and fit-for-purpose.

In what ways are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and organisations contributing to policy and program evaluation? (p.22)

Due to Tasmania's small size, it is relatively easy for the Tasmanian Government to engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in face-to-face meetings. As the Tasmanian Government Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, I am continuing the initiative begun by my predecessor, the Hon Jacquie Petrusma MP, of hosting regular forums where Tasmanian Aboriginal community organisations and individuals have the opportunity to speak directly to Heads of Tasmanian Government Agencies. These forums allow for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Tasmania to provide direct feedback and high-level input to policy direction and program design.

This provides a practical demonstration of the Tasmanian Government's overarching objectives when consulting with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people; namely that consultations involve meaningful engagement with relevant stakeholders, and that stakeholder feedback be managed and responded to in a way that builds stakeholder support and improves service delivery.

What are the barriers to further increasing engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people during Australian Government evaluation projects? (p.31)

There are numerous potential barriers to further engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people during evaluation. One example is over-consultation, which may lead to consultation fatigue. Further, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander may not view evaluation processes as meaningful or valuable if improved outcomes are not delivered successfully. Ineffective communication with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people may lead to inefficient outcomes, which is why the use of plain language, as noted earlier, will be valuable.

Other barriers to effective engagement include evaluation that is not clearly aimed at delivering improvements for, and working in collaboration with, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities, or evaluation that results in negative reporting about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people without acknowledging or explaining the context and causes of poor outcomes. The Productivity Commission should also consider the difficulties Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people may face in

engaging in multi-stage consultations, which could for example be driven by family or cultural commitments, desire to remain on Country, or disadvantage and poverty.

Effective partnerships between governments and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations will help in breaking down these barriers and increasing engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

To what extent does a lack of high-quality, accessible data, including data gaps, act as a barrier to undertaking effective evaluation of policies and programs affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people? (p.35)

From a Tasmanian Government point of view, the lack of high-quality, accessible data is a significant barrier to effective quantitative evaluation of policies and programs affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. As Tasmania is a small jurisdiction, statistical analyses of data-sets specific to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population in Tasmania have limited power and reliability, and often result in volatile time-series that are not useful representations of progress or outcomes. For example, Tasmanian data on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mortality rates and causes of death is not of reportable quality due to small sample size. Therefore, the annual National Indigenous Reform Agreement (NIRA) Performance Reports cannot report figures for Tasmania against Performance Indicators 1, 2 or 6.

Taking a 'one-size-fits-all' approach to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-specific policy and program evaluation across all Australian jurisdictions may be problematic in areas where substantial differences in demographics and policy approaches exist. For example, differences in mandatory school starting ages across jurisdictions mean that the figures given for individual jurisdictions in the annual NIRA Performance Reports against Performance Indicator 10 are not directly comparable.

The Tasmanian Government has found that qualitative approaches to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-specific policy and program evaluation are useful in compensating for lack of high-quality, accessible quantitative data, with the added benefit of providing for a deeper understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's unique experiences.

What supporting features and arrangements are important for the successful implementation and operation of a principles-based Indigenous evaluation framework and accompanying list of evaluation priorities? (p.37)

The Tasmanian Government recognises that the immediate purpose of the Productivity Commission's Indigenous Evaluation Strategy project is to develop an evaluation framework for use by Australian Government agencies. However, effective evaluation of policies and programs affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people will require ongoing collaboration and sharing of information between governments at the national and state levels. It would therefore be valuable for any national evaluation framework to be built on a foundation of data sharing arrangements between the Australian, state and territory governments. These arrangements should also aim to avoid duplication of effort and reporting as much as possible.

Ideally, a national Indigenous Evaluation Strategy will incorporate a level of inbuilt flexibility to account for the differences in demographics and policy approaches across jurisdictions, and any differences in evaluation priorities which may arise between jurisdictions and between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. This will help to ensure meaningful review outcomes that can clearly feed into policy and program development and lead to practical change for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people at both the community and personal level.

What principles should be used to determine evaluation priorities? (p.38)

The Tasmanian Government agrees that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander input will be essential in the development of an effective national Indigenous Evaluation Strategy, and that evaluation priorities should

therefore be decided in conjunction with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders. The Tasmanian Government would also suggest that evaluation priorities align with and support the intent and targets of the refreshed Closing the Gap framework wherever possible.

It may be useful in developing evaluation priorities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-specific policies and programs to look both at policies and programs that appear to be working well, and those that appear to be working poorly. This should lead to a greater understanding of the underlying drivers of success, and enable formulation of evaluation priorities that can effectively test for and measure these drivers.

One point that the Tasmanian Government would raise is that evaluation priorities should be based around desired outcomes, and if necessary specify the development of new measures and datasets that will allow these priorities to be accurately and appropriately assessed. It may be tempting to develop evaluation priorities that can be measured using existing datasets and tools, but this will not necessarily result in the best outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. If there is a commitment to evaluation, there should also be a commitment to ensuring that these evaluations produce meaningful, useful results that can help to improve the design and delivery of policies and programs across Australia.

Thank you again the opportunity to comment on the Productivity Commission's Indigenous Evaluation Strategy project. The Tasmanian Government looks forward to working further with the Productivity Commission, with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and with other jurisdictional governments to ensure the Indigenous Evaluation Strategy will be a valuable tool for improving the effectiveness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-specific policies and programs across Australia.

Yours sincerely

Hon Roger Jaensch MP
Minister for Aboriginal Affairs