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RE: Australian Government, Productivity Commission – Productivity Inquiry

Dear Productivity Inquiry,

Thank you for your hard work on producing the 5-year Productivity Inquiry series of 5 interim reports.

As noted across the interim reports, inclusion of First Nations within productivity assessments and evaluations is important for Closing the Gap.

I offer the following comments on how to potentially enhance the recognition and inclusion of First Nations within productivity planning and policy considerations.

The Australian Government’s Productivity Commission report *Transitioning Regional Economies* includes information on employment choice and mobility being related to Indigenous preference for staying on Country (2017: 185). The report notes that adaptive capacity to national and global economic trends may be slowed by Indigenous population in some of the metrics – “as the proportion of Indigenous population gets higher, each additional percentage of Indigenous population has a smaller influence on the region’s adaptive capacity” (240–241). It appears that First Nations’ growth capacity as understood through more complex modeling such as hybrid economies (as found in the work of Professor Jon Altman) may not be applied in evaluating Indigenous populations. This is despite “58 per cent of Indigenous businesses” being “located outside major cities

— 32 per cent are regional and 26 per cent in remote locations as outlined in the *Indigenous Businesses Sector Snapshot Study, Insights from I-BLADE 1.0*. This compares with the non-Indigenous sector where most businesses are in major cities (74 per cent)” (Evans et al., 2021: 18). There is potential to include more diverse modelling to recognise the benefits of First Nations staying on Country.

An innovative case study of education involving Elders is mentioned in interim report no. 5. Elders occupy developmental roles in relation to productivity and are a demographic of the labour force rarely include in economic modelling. Elders have instrumental development roles in Aboriginal community controlled health organisations and education initiatives such Aboriginal Education Consultative Group. While these roles have been valued in terms of social and human capital and wellbeing measures, there is scope to more fully account for the role of First Nations social and cultural structures as inherently designed for ageing well (by keeping Elders active and employed) and their direct labour contributions Indigenous and non-Indigenous business and development domains.

Interim report no. 2 could consider the role and growth industries associated with Indigenous Data Sovereignty. The OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) Rural Policy Reviews report, *Linking Indigenous Communities with Regional Development* highlights Indigenous Data Sovereignty as a key component of addressing socio-economic inequalities. I have also outlined how Indigenous Data Sovereignty is integral to First Nations smart and digital development in my report *‘It just works!’: Regional and rural consumer understandings of smart technologies in North West New South Wales*: <https://smartregions.csu.domains/>. Some of the CBA issues identified in interim report no. 3 with respect to First Nations could be addressed through data sovereignty capacities.

There is also scope to recognise Indigenous land management practices and remaining on Country as growth contributors to sustainability in interim report no. 4, for instance, the role of land assets as carbon offsets is potentially underexploited. Firesticks Alliance and

the Aboriginal Carbon Foundation are both engaging in training and enabling carbon farming enterprises through skills-upgrade and employment programs.

In summary:

- More diverse modelling and data related to growth capacities of First Nations remaining on Country will help provide a clearer contribution of First Nations to productivity
- Recognition of the developmental and productivity role of Elders across health, education, and sustainability domains will assist productivity planning
- Indigenous Data Sovereignty is a growth area and enables First Nations smart planning and development
- The economic benefits of Indigenous land management will continue to contribute to productivity gains for all

Kind regards,

Dr. Holly Randell-Moon