

SUBMISSION to the Indigenous Evaluation Strategy Productivity Commission

This submission is based on 20 years volunteering in remote Indigenous communities mainly in the Northern Territory but also in the Kimberly.

My background is in film and television. I was Professor of Film & Media at Griffith University before I retired. Since the 60s I have worked in television for education. In the US I worked at an education television station, in the UK I produced a pilot project for the Open University and trained teachers to use television and at Griffith University we produced, with the ABC, the early Open University courses. In 1984 as a Member of the Australian Broadcasting Tribunal we conducted a government inquiry, taking evidence from many remote community members, using interpreters, into the affect that the launch of the domestic satellite would have on their communities

My major concern in submitting to this Inquiry is to alert the Commission into **the lack of English first speakers in communities**. A fact that few inquiries, consultants, NGOs and governments take into account when making policies.

The issues paper for this inquiry identifies,

“the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, cultures and experiences means outcomes can vary markedly by geography, age, sex, employment status and other factors.....” **NO MENTION IS MADE OF LANGUAGES SPOKEN AND THAT STANDARD AUSTRALIAN ENGLISH IS NOT UNDERSTOOD**

Elements of an Indigenous Evaluation Strategy

QUESTION ON COMPONENTS OF THE INDIGENOUS EVALUATION STRATEGY

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

The issues paper states “to facilitate and enable greater involvement by indigenous peoples in setting priorities and making decisions about policies and programs that affect them.”

Nowhere is the Question of Language addressed in this issues paper.

The lack of English comprehension needs to be separately identified with culture and recognised that many people in remote communities do not understand Standard Australian English. This must be taken into account in order for correct information to be collected.

ENGLISH IS NOT A FIRST LANGAUGE in many remote communities in the NT and WA.

QUESTIONS ON OBJECTIVES

What objectives should a strategy for evaluating policies and programs affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people seek to achieve?

Any strategy for evaluation must recognise that many Aboriginal and Torres Strait islanders living in the Northern Territory DO NOT HAVE ENGLISH AS A FIRST LANGUAGE and do not understand or speak Standard Australian English.

Any evaluation in remote communities NEEDS TO BE CONDUCTED THROUGH INTERPRETERS if there is to be meaningful information collected. The reason that the health and education statistics are so poor is that this is often not recognized by consultants who visit these communities. They usually rely on information supplied by an English speaking employee. I have witnessed this many times in a range of remote communities over 20 years of volunteering in these communities.

Question on Objectives

*To what extent are the evaluation practices of Australian Government agencies consistent with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples? How could practices be improved in this respect?
participate in decision-making (article 18)*

This policy cannot be improved until it is recognized by the Federal and State governments particularly NT, WA and Qld , that

- Many of their Indigenous peoples do not understand Standard Australian English.
- Tests for LANGUAGE, namely SPEAKING AND ORAL COMPREHENSION, NOT JUST LITERACY AND NUMERACY are instituted.
- ADEQUATE INTERPRETER TRAINING IN COMMUNITIES is provided
- COMMUNITY INTERPRETERS need to be used when any EVALUATION OR CONSULTATION is undertaken
- SPECIALIST ESL TEACHERS need to be employed IN SCHOOLS and CLINICS

QUESTION ON APPLYING THE STRATEGY TO MAINSTREAM PROGRAMS

What is the best way to address mainstream programs in the Indigenous Evaluation Strategy?

Main stream programs without ESL context and interpreters are **useless in communities where English is not the first language**

Closing the Gap

“The Indigenous Advancement Strategy reflects the Australian Government’s objective of achieving better results for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in three priority areas – **school attendance**, employment

QUESTION ON GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS

What lessons from these and other major Australian Government programs impacting on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people would be useful in developing an Indigenous Evaluation Strategy?

THERE IS NO MENTION OF LANGUAGE IN THIS ISSUES DOCUMENT

All government programs must understand that **ENGLISH IS NOT A FIRST LANGUAGE** in remote communities and **many people do not understand Standard Australian English**

If you do not train and use interpreters in remote communities or train teachers and health workers in ESL you cannot hope to close any education or health gaps.

Education

The Education Departments do not use **School of the Air**, to give lessons in remote schools by qualified ESL teachers or to train teachers in ESL. **The REACT software used for NT School of the Air is the most sophisticated in the country.** It could be used in remote schools through existing satellite dishes.

Health

Very few remote clinics employ interpreters. They could use **the sophisticated REACT software for consultations and training staff.**

Financial Information Needed

A cost benefit analysis of providing REACT teaching into schools v the cost of providing teachers, visiting tutors, consultants and professional development of teachers.

A cost benefit analysis of providing REACT consultation and training into clinics v the cost of travel either by or to visiting clinicians and professional development of clinic staff.
