



Australian Government
Productivity Commission

Better Indigenous Policies: The Role of Evaluation

Roundtable Proceedings



Canberra, 22-23 October 2012

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The Productivity Commission

The Productivity Commission is the Australian Government's independent research and advisory body on a range of economic, social and environmental issues affecting the welfare of Australians. Its role, expressed most simply, is to help governments make better policies, in the long term interest of the Australian community.

The Commission's independence is underpinned by an Act of Parliament. Its processes and outputs are open to public scrutiny and are driven by concern for the wellbeing of the community as a whole.

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Foreword

The Productivity Commission’s 2012 policy roundtable, held at Old Parliament House in Canberra on 22–23 October, examined the topic ‘Better Indigenous policies: the role of evaluation’. Participants included representatives of Indigenous and non-government organisations, government officials, academics and consultants.

As secretariat for the Review of Government Services, under the Council of Australian Governments (COAG), the Productivity Commission is responsible for the development and publication of the regular *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage* report. The report has demonstrated that, despite several decades of good policy intentions and effort, there remain unacceptable disparities between outcomes for Indigenous and other Australians.

As noted at the roundtable by Gary Banks, then chairman of the Productivity Commission, ‘it is said that the greatest tragedy of failure is failing to learn from it. But that seems to be the predominant history of Indigenous policies and programs’. Yet the situation is not hopeless; the roundtable discussed several examples of good practice in evaluation of Indigenous programs, from both Australia and overseas.

Our aspiration for this roundtable was to identify principles and practices to guide the better use of evaluation in Indigenous policy in the future — so that more high-quality evaluations will be undertaken and the evidence gained from them will drive policy improvements that benefit Indigenous people and the wider community. While we found genuine, broadly based support for better processes and outcomes, and confidence that we do know at least some of the key problems and potential responses, there was general agreement that an overarching policy review was required to address fundamental issues of ‘government governance’: the way governments work with, and in, Indigenous communities.

Mike Woods
Deputy Chairman

April 2013

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