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The Committee Secretary
House of Representatives Standing
Committee on Aboriginal and Torres
Strait Islander Affairs
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

CAPACITY BUILDING
INQUIRY
Submission No.25.....

Dear Sir/Madam

Please find attached a submission prepared by Dr Will Sanders and myself to the Inquiry into capacity building in Indigenous communities. This submission aims to succinctly summarise a considerable body of research published by the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research in the last five years.

The submission refers to a number of exhibits that are also provided.

As noted in the submission, researchers would be happy to meet with the Committee to discuss aspects of our submission and/or research.

Yours sincerely

Professor Jon Altman
13 September 2002

**Submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and
Torres Strait Islander Affairs Inquiry into Capacity Building in Indigenous
Communities**

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Introduction

1. The Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research (CAEPR) is an interdisciplinary research centre at The Australian National University (ANU) which has been working on many issues relating to Indigenous communities, economic development and public policy since its establishment in 1990.
2. How better to manage the delivery of services to, and within, Indigenous communities is an enormously challenging and difficult issue that has animated much of CAEPR's work. There are many issues of cross-cultural differences in perspectives and values, capacity building or development, as well as more mundane organisational and structural issues to be addressed.
3. Staff at CAEPR have been undertaking research on many of these issues not just since the Centre was established, but also in some instances for some years previously. CAEPR research shows that there are no quick fixes or miraculous solutions in this area, but that informed investigation from a social sciences perspective can make a contribution. Past CAEPR published research has made such a contribution and future CAEPR work will continue to do so.
4. This submission begins by explicitly addressing the terms of reference of this Inquiry and then moves on to identify some strands of recent CAEPR work relating specifically to capacity building. The submission can be read with reference to the appended list of CAEPR publications provided as exhibits (marked with an asterisk in the list of references). CAEPR researchers would welcome an opportunity to amplify on any aspect of this submission in evidence before the Committee.
5. During the twelve years of its existence, CAEPR has published 240 CAEPR Discussion Papers, nearly 20 CAEPR Working Papers and 22 CAEPR Research Monographs. Another 400 publications have been produced in books, monographs, reports and scholarly journals. It is not possible, or even desirable, to refer to all CAEPR's published work here. Rather, this submission aims to provide a select summary of more recent research that CAEPR staff have identified as most pertinent to this Inquiry's terms of reference.

6. We do, however, draw to the Committee's attention an attempt to provide just such a synthesis from a historical and political science perspectives in the recently released book *Indigenous Futures: Choice and Development for Aboriginal and Islander Australia* by Dr Tim Rowse (2002) that was sponsored by CAEPR to summarise its research outputs since 1990.
7. It is important to highlight at the outset that while we refer here to CAEPR research, as a university-based centre there is no corporate centre position, something that is highlighted in all our publications. Rather, as is normal academic practice, views expressed in published outputs are those of individual authors or co-authors. Within CAEPR there is a healthy, and at times contested, diversity of views.

Statement Addressing Terms of Reference

8. The Terms of Reference for the Committee's inquiry identify three levels at which it wishes to address issues of capacity building: among individual community members; within Indigenous organisations; and within and among government agencies. All three levels of capacity building are important, although, in order of importance, CAEPR's research findings would probably rank them in the opposite way to that listed in the terms of reference.
9. CAEPR is often contracted by government agencies to undertake research work relating to Indigenous people and agency responsibilities. One reason for such commissioned research is that government agencies are aware of their own lack of capacity in fulfilling their responsibilities in relation to Indigenous people. While commissioning research from CAEPR and collaborating in such research on occasions can help to develop the capacity of government agencies to deal with Indigenous people and issues, it should not be seen as replacing, or as an alternative to, internal agency capacity building.
10. It is recognised that internal capacity building for government agencies is not an easy task. It requires staff exposure to, and empathy with, the circumstances of daily lived reality in Indigenous communities, which is not always easy to gain. The employment of Indigenous staff by government is one way to acquire such empathy and understanding, but it is not the only one. Non-Indigenous staff members in general policy and administration jobs also need to gain understandings of the cross-cultural complexity and diversity of Indigenous circumstances in Australia today. Otherwise Indigenous issues within government agencies risk being marginalised.
11. Commonwealth government agencies with which CAEPR researchers have collaborated over recent years include the Department of Family and Community Services, the Department of Education, Science and Training, the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations, the Department of Health and Aging, the Australian Bureau of Statistics, the Australian National Audit Office, the

Australian Competition and Consumer Commission, and Centrelink. In all cases CAEPR was conscious that the agency was drawing on CAEPR's capacity in Indigenous research to supplement, and hopefully also to develop, its own capacity in this area. There is an enormous amount of work which needs to be done to build up the capacity of government agencies in dealing with Indigenous issues. Many government agencies are genuinely trying to deal with these shortfalls, but experience and internal structures and personnel with a sufficiently high organisational profile are often lacking or are subject to high intra- and inter-departmental turnover.

12. The second most important level of capacity building is, according to CAEPR research, within Indigenous organisations. These organisations are relatively new, having only emerged in the last thirty years as ways of delivering government-funded services to Indigenous communities. They are also extremely complex 'hybrid' organisations which have to try and balance and mediate Indigenous social norms of personal reciprocity and support with more impersonal bureaucratic norms emanating from the government funding context. Indigenous land council, native title representative bodies and royalty associations are prominent examples with whom, and on which, CAEPR researchers have undertaken significant amounts of practically-oriented work (see, for example, ATSIC 1995; Altman, Morphy and Rowse 1999; Finlayson 1998; Altman and Pollack 1998; Finlayson 1999; Altman and Smith 1999; Altman and Levitus 1999; Levitus, Martin and Pollack 1999; and Mantziaris and Martin 2000). These organisations often face considerable conflicting pressures to be, at once, more large scale and systematic and externally accountable and also more local and personalised and internally accountable to their constituents. CAEPR researchers have attempted to assist with ameliorative organisational capacity building solutions to such tensions.
13. Land councils and native title representative bodies are in fact quite large scale organisations compared to many other Indigenous community-based service delivery organisations, such as community councils or outstation resource agencies (see Altman, Gillespie and Palmer 1998). The latter organisations are often of such a small scale that staff changes can dramatically affect institutional memory and system maintenance. Yet the pressures for retaining small-scale autonomous organisations emanating from the Indigenous domain are very considerable. So again the balancing of organisational scale and institutional hybridity is no easy task.
14. Any increase in scale of Indigenous organisations brings with it issues about the representation of various constituent Indigenous interests on their governing bodies and the ongoing involvement of, and accountability to, those constituent interests. These too are not easy issues with which to deal, so the desire for organisations to remain locally autonomous is understandable. But there are important issues of scale which do affect the capacity of many Indigenous organisations and do need to be incrementally and innovatively addressed.

15. In the above list of Commonwealth government agencies with which CAEPR has worked, we have not included the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC). This is not because CAEPR has not worked with the Commission—indeed it is CAEPR’s major research partner and fiscal stakeholder outside the University and hence its most significant organisational collaborator—but rather that CAEPR research is a little ambivalent whether ATSIC should be regarded as just another Commonwealth government agency. While created by Commonwealth statute, ATSIC, through its elected arm, also takes on some the characteristics of an Indigenous organisation. It too is a genuine hybrid organisation which has to mediate between the two very different worlds of small-scale Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander societies and massive government bureaucracies. This again is no easy task.
16. The capacities of individual Indigenous community members can certainly be increased, through education, training, and experience, and much CAEPR research has direct or indirect relevance to these pressing needs and problems (see below). However, it should also be noted that in our experience it is often the case that many Indigenous community members have enormous capacities, acquired from past experience and training, but they are somewhat reluctant to use those capacities in difficult organisational environments. Community members get burnt out in such environments and end up withdrawing from them, either as employees or active members of governing bodies. It is for this reason that CAEPR research highlights that most effort in capacity building needs to be directed at the level of government agencies and Indigenous organisations, which will in turn facilitate the better utilisation of the capacities of individual Indigenous community members.

Recent CAEPR Work

17. Among recent CAEPR publications, there are a number which point to the capacity building potential of the Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) scheme (Morphy and Sanders 2001; Gray and Thacker 2000; Altman and Johnson 2000; Madden 2000, Sanders 2001b; Champion 2002; Arthur 2002) and of community participation agreements under the welfare reform agenda (Smith 2001). These publications tend to focus on capacity building within Indigenous organisations and, to a lesser extent, among government agencies in their relations with Indigenous organisations. Some other recent CAEPR publications have engaged conceptually with national-level debates about Indigenous people and the welfare system (Sanders 2001a; Martin 2001) while others have focused more empirically and at the local level on Indigenous families and their relations with the welfare system (Smith 2000; Henry and Daly 2001; Musharbash 2001). All suggest that there is considerable further potential for improving relations between Indigenous people and the welfare system.
18. Another group of recent CAEPR publications, associated predominantly with the work of Dr John Taylor, looks at Indigenous population dynamics and baseline

social indicators, often at regional geographic levels (Taylor 2001; Taylor and Bell 2002; Taylor 2002a; Taylor 1999; Ross and Taylor 2000; Taylor, Bern and Senior 2000; and Taylor and Westbury 2000). Martin, Morphy, Sanders and Taylor (2002) critically assess the Indigenous enumeration and data collection of the 2001 Census in a number of remote, predominantly Indigenous regions, and continue this line of work. Their research finds that there are substantial issues of Indigenous data quality and enumeration in these regions in the census which need to be addressed on an ongoing basis. National-level work on Indigenous population dynamics and social indicators has, in the past, been an important element of CAEPR's work (see e.g. Gray 1997a; Taylor 1997; Gray 1997b; Daly and Smith 1998; Hunter 1998; Taylor and Hunter 2001) and will be so again, in the near future, with the release of 2001 Census data. Good understandings of population dynamics and their associated social indicators are clearly essential to any informed analysis of service delivery and capacity building in Indigenous communities.

19. The mobility of the Indigenous population, and the challenges this creates for service delivery and capacity building, is a theme which emerges repeatedly from both the work on Indigenous people and the welfare system and the work on Indigenous population dynamics and social indicators (Taylor 1998; Taylor and Bell 1999). Some recent CAEPR work has focused specifically on the mobility issue (Hunter and Smith 2000) and a recent staff recruit, Dr Ben Smith, has a particular interest in this area, having recently completed a PhD on mobility and territoriality in the Coen region of Cape York (B. Smith 2002). Dr Smith is undertaking research on the usefulness of ideas of 'social capital' in analysis of local community development and capacity building, while Dr Boyd Hunter recently used this concept to examine the social costs of unemployment among Indigenous people (Hunter 2000). Dr Hunter uses a threefold typology of social capital derived from the international literature, covering bonding, bridging and linking capital, and argues that while Indigenous families and community organisations often have much of the former, they can be somewhat lacking in the latter two forms of social capital. Social capital and mobility impacts on capacity building are areas in which CAEPR researchers can, and will, do more work.
20. Mr Bill Arthur is also undertaking important ongoing research on career aspirations among Torres Strait Islanders, some early results of which are already published (Arthur and David-Petero 2000a, 2000b, 2000c). Mr Arthur and Dr Sanders have also utilised the concept of autonomy in describing the more political and communal aspirations of not only Torres Strait Islanders, but other Indigenous people as well (Sanders and Arthur 2001; Arthur 2001; Arthur 2002). More political and communal aspirations of Indigenous people are also the subject of Dr Sanders recent work on an Indigenous order of Australian government (Sanders 2002) and Ms Diane Smith's work on jurisdictional devolution (Smith 2002).

21. A more economic capacity building focus is evident in CAEPR's recent collaborations with Reconciliation Australia on the delivery of banking and financial services to Indigenous communities (McDonnell and Westbury 2001; Westbury 2000; Altman 2002; Taylor 2002; Stanley 2002; McDonnell and Westbury 2002). In 2001–2002, CAEPR undertook a year-long project for the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) on trade practices issues relating to Indigenous people, particularly in remote community stores and on competition issues in the Indigenous arts industry (Altman, McDonnell and Ward 2002; McDonnell and Martin 2002; Altman, Hunter, Ward and Wright 2002). A consolidated report on this research *Consumer and Competition Issues for Indigenous Australians* is to be published by the ACCC in late September 2002. The work with the ACCC develops the important idea of the 'frontier economy' operating at the boundary or interface between an Indigenous domain, characterised by distinctive Indigenous economic and cultural values and practices, and the mainly non-Aboriginal market domain. A similar interface was identified in early research on the articulations between Indigenous communities and business (Altman 2001a) and the need for capacity building to facilitate engagement with the private sector.
22. Another conceptual contribution in the economic area is Professor Jon Altman's development of the 'hybrid economy' conceptual framework which can be of significance for people residing on the Indigenous estate in sparsely settled regions (Altman 2001b). This framework highlights that the economy has three sectors, the market, the state and the customary, with the last being more important and having far greater future potential than commonly recognised. Ownership of land is clearly central to Indigenous capacity building and hence to CAEPR's research agenda (Pollack 2001). So too is the reform and improvement of various land rights and native title regimes (Altman, Morphy and Rowse 1999; Altman and Pollack 1999; Smith 2001). A major ARC Linkage project 'Indigenous community organisations and miners: partnering sustainable regional development' (with Rio Tinto and Committee for Economic Development of Australia as Industry Partners) that has just begun is examining the capacity of Indigenous organisations to negotiate beneficial agreements and ensure positive outcomes from major resource development projects on Indigenous-owned land.
23. CAEPR research has addressed capacity development in the Indigenous health workforce (Schwab and Anderson 1998; Schwab and Anderson 1999). Through the work of Dr Maggie Brady, CAEPR is continuing to expand its research related to health capacity building and, along with Dr David Martin, alcohol management issues (Brady and Martin 1999; Brady 2002).
24. Work by CAEPR researchers has also been significant in addressing a range of education and training issues of direct relevance to capacity development in government agencies, Indigenous organisations and ultimately among individuals. Research has addressed Indigenous participation in schools (Schwab 1999; Schwab 2001a; Schwab 2001b) the VET sector (Schwab 1997; Campbell 2000;

Schwab 2001c) and higher education (Schwab1998) while analyses of Indigenous educational outcomes contributed policy advice on capacity development for agencies and communities (Hunter and Schwab 1998; Gray, Hunter and Schwab 2000). Specific studies have addressed capacity development in the context of CDEP training (Schwab and Campbell 2001) and the staffing and training of Outstation Resource Agencies (Altman and Schwab 1999). Recent research detailing options and models for developing Indigenous learning communities has direct relevance to the development of community and individual capacity in Indigenous communities (Schwab and Sutherland 2001). In addition, Dr Schwab and Ms Dale Sutherland are currently involved in a collaborative study of options for enhancing community literacy in the Katherine region as a means to develop community capacity. Their work builds upon research by Dr Taylor and Mr Neil Westbury's in the same region that addressed capacity for the successful delivery of nutrition programs (Taylor and Westbury 2000). Ms Frances Peters-Little's current work on Indigenous higher education centres, a project part-sponsored by an ARC Discovery—Indigenous Researchers Development grant, will also address capacity issues.

25. Ms Sutherland and Ms Peters-Little have been recruited to CAEPR recently, in order to add to the numbers of Indigenous scholarly perspectives in CAEPR publications. Earlier Indigenous contributors included Ms Lynette Liddle, Mr Noel Pearson, Dr Ian Anderson, Ms Elaine Thacker and Mr Mark Champion, the last two on inter-agency placements from ATSIC.
26. CAEPR regards secondments, staff recruitment and joint publication with external Indigenous authors as all part of its own contribution to researcher capacity building. With this aim in mind, in 2002 a sustainable CAEPR Endowment has been established, with significant contributions from the Rio Tinto Aboriginal Foundation, the Westpac Foundation and the ANU Endowment for Excellence, to underwrite a CAEPR Indigenous Visiting Fellowship Scheme that will aim to attract Indigenous leaders and researchers to the Centre to collaborate with other CAEPR staff. Similarly, Professor Altman and other CAEPR researchers have collaborated closely with the Vichealth Koori Health Research and Community Development Unit (University of Melbourne) and Professor Altman is on the Board of the Centre for Indigenous Natural and Cultural Resource Management at the Northern Territory University. Individual CAEPR staff have well-developed relationships with community-controlled Indigenous organisations that have also been assisted directly with practical research aimed at enhancing organisational capacity (e.g. Altman 1999)
27. This brief summary of CAEPR's recent work has not, for the most part, delved back beyond CAEPR publications of the last five years. Though these publications do not cover all CAEPR's research outputs, they do cover many of the major themes in CAEPR research and relationships to issues of capacity building. This brief summary has not covered recent work by CAEPR staff which has been published outside the CAEPR publication series. In particular, four

CAEPR staff members (Altman, Martin, Sanders and D. Smith) presented papers at the *Indigenous Governance: Good Governance for Indigenous Communities and Regions* conference organised by Reconciliation Australia in April 2002 which are presently being prepared for publication by Reconciliation Australia.

28. It should also be noted that some CAEPR staff were also consulted on the development of Reconciliation Australia's submission to this Inquiry, which draws heavily on the proceedings of that conference. This submission has quite deliberately avoided replicating many of the issues raised in the Reconciliation Australia submission. Other CAEPR staff were consulted on the submissions to this Inquiry by the Northern Land Council and the Northern Territory based ARC Key Centre for Tropical Wildlife Management (where Professor Altman holds an adjunct appointment). Again, this submission does not replicate issues raised in those submissions.

Conclusion

29. Much of CAEPR's research since 1990 has focused on the issues of cross-cultural understandings of accountability and performance assurance which are at the heart of the issues of governance and capacity. Many Indigenous organisations still struggle to operate effectively in complex inter-cultural environments, simultaneously attempting to meet the demands of their members or constituents and those of the state (or private sector interests). Conversely, state agencies rarely comprehend the extent of this tension nor the nature and diversity of Indigenous organisational or community politicking and cultural prerogatives. From the state's perspective, statutory accountability and outcomes are paramount and the western law and fiscal power is on its side. This imbalance can create ongoing tensions between Indigenous organisations and the state and can be a source of disempowerment and associated resistance.
30. Indigenous organisations are invariably complex, inter-face and inter-cultural and often inter-ethnic, trying to operate effectively in very difficult circumstances with inadequate financial and human resources. On the other hand, state agencies face different pressures, often from political leaders with unrealistic or populist goals or from disaffected Indigenous people of whom there are always some. Meeting historical legacies and associated organisational capacity deficits, heterogeneity, and cultural differences are not issues that state bureaucracies are well equipped to address.
31. Much CAEPR research has sought to find some middle ground between these inevitable tensions by assessing organisational capacity from a culturally-informed perspective and by calculating on a rigorous workload basis the resource needs and education and training requirements of Indigenous organisations and communities. Underlying much of this work is a recognition that Indigenous organisations need skilled managers and staff and management boards will need governance education and training—otherwise state agency expectations are

likely to see performance and accountability expectations exceed Indigenous organisational capacities. CAEPR's approach has sought to educate and enhance cross-cultural communications in two ways: between state agencies and Indigenous organisations, and vice versa. Underpinning this approach has been the logical assumption that appropriate capacity building and associated accommodations by all parties would alter power imbalances in a much-needed way and would enhance Indigenous empowerment and socio-economic futures.

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank our CAEPR colleagues who assisted us greatly by highlighting capacity building issues in their recent publications and Mr David Inglis for his help with compiling the references.

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