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TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

NAIDOC 2019

A Whole of Government Indigenous Policy and Evaluation Strategy
Romlie Mokak, Productivity Commission

Tuesday 2 July 2019

Museum of Australian Democracy at Old Parliament House, Canberra

Alison Larkins: Good morning everyone and welcome to today's event, A Whole of Government Indigenous Policy and Evaluation Strategy. My name is Alison Larkins. I'm a deputy secretary at the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet and an IPAA councillor and I'll be your chair for today's event. Before we proceed with the format for today's event, I'd like to acknowledge the Ngannawal people, the traditional custodians of the land on which we are meeting. I acknowledge and respect their continuing culture and the contribution they make to the life of this city and this region.

Alison Larkins: I'd also like to acknowledge and welcome any aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who are here today and particularly welcome the aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander public servants that we have attending today's event. For those non-indigenous public servants here today, who have had the privilege of working in indigenous affairs, it's usually been a highlight of our lives and one of the pleasures is working alongside and learning from excellent indigenous colleagues and it's my real pleasure today to introduce three of the people that I have worked with in my career who have contributed to the real highlights of my career. Our speakers for today will be Romlie Mokak, the indigenous policy evaluation commissioner for the productivity commission, Professor Ian Anderson AO, deputy secretary of the newly created National Indigenous Australians Agency, the NIAA, and when I say newly created, on day two. So welcome Ian on your second day in your new role. Dr. Jill Guthrie from the National Centre for Epidemiology and Population Health at the ANU College of Health and Medicine and Bobby Maher from the National Centre for Epidemiology and Population Health, also at the Anu College of Health and Medicine.

Alison Larkins: I'd also like to acknowledge Peter Woolcott AO, public service commissioner who's here with us today and welcome everyone else, senior executives, guests, members and partners. IPAA is a professional body focused on the promotion of excellence and professionalism in public administration. We are a non-profit and non-partisan organisation that provides a platform for debate and discussion about improving and striving for excellence in public service in Australia. IPAA ATC was established in 1953 and has operated for over 56 years in the Canberra market.

Alison Larkins: Today we're holding our event in advance of NAIDOC Week, which commences on Sunday, and the NAIDOC week theme this year is voice, treaty, truth, let's work together for a shared future. We're focused today on A Whole of Government Indigenous Policy and Evaluation Strategy and as I mentioned before, we have a great line up of speakers. The format for today's event involves Rom giving a keynote address and then I'll invite Ian and Jill and Bobby to join Rom on the stage for a panel discussion. Now, it's my real pleasure to introduce our keynote speaker. Romlie Mokak is a Djugun man and a member of the Yawuru people. He was appointed a full time commissioner with the Productivity Commission in December 2018. Prior to this, Romlie was chief executive officer of the Lowitja Institute, Australia's National Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Research and he was in that role since 2014. Before that, he was the chief executive officer of the Australian Indigenous Doctor's association for almost a decade and before that... It's almost getting too long to actually say when this was, Rom, because I think it ages us both but he was the director of substance use and manager of the National Eye Health Programme for the Australian government's Office for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health.

Alison Larkins: He was the first aboriginal policy officer in the New South Wales government Ageing and Disability Department. Romlie has chaired and has been a member for a range of policy research and evaluation bodies at the national and state government levels and he's currently working on the indigenous evaluation

strategy project. Please join with me in giving a big welcome to Romlie to the stage for his keynote address.

Romlie Mokak: I was less grey when Alison and I were colleagues at the Office for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health back in the last '90s, I think it was, Alison. Today, I stand here on the lands of the Nggunawal and Ngambri people. I'm deeply grateful for the warmth and generosity in allowing this country to be home for my family over the last 20 years. I honour their ancestors, their elders and young ones who have yet to come. I honour their sacred places and the wisdom and teachings held and shared within those places. I acknowledge that there are so many of you, my aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander brothers and sisters here today. I think it's a fantastic thing for us to be here on the morning of the first day of the 46th parliament where for the first time we will have, in Ken Wyatt, an indigenous man, a Noongar man as the minister for indigenous Australians and on the other side of the chamber, for the first time, we'll have Linda Burney, a Wiradjuri woman, as shadow minister.

Romlie Mokak: I think this is a particularly important day, not just for aboriginal people but for parliament itself. I also want to acknowledge all of you in the room, and I'm actually quite overwhelmed by the number of you who have come out on this cold winter's morning here in Canberra but it says to me that there's a great deal of interest in indigenous policy and indigenous evaluation. Today, I aim to speak to two things. One, NAIDOC itself and the theme, and the other, to talk a bit about the focus of our work at the Productivity Commission in developing an indigenous evaluation strategy. I do want to acknowledge that I have two colleagues in the room. One, a graduate who I've termed our deadly graduate on the term. Those of you who know aboriginal English would know that deadly is not fatal. Deadly is awesome. And another one of our team who's up from Melbourne here today. I do want to acknowledge that we're got young people in the room who are on this road, this policy road in indigenous affairs and it's fantastic.

Romlie Mokak: This year's NAIDOC theme brings into focus voice, treaty and truth. The theme being voice, treaty, truth, let's work together for a shared future. The NAIDOC theme by definition seeks for all Australians to work together and build our nation's future. Voice, treaty, truth puts forward a proposition to the Australian people, not just to parliament but to the Australian people about a shared future. These three elements, from the Uluru Statement from the Heart speak to the call by aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to have a greater say in their lives and I quote from the statement, "When we have power over our destiny, our children will flourish. They will walk in two worlds and their culture will be a gift to their country. We call for the establishment of a first nation's voice enshrined in the constitution. We seek a Makarrata Commission to supervise a process of agreement making between governments and first nations and truth-telling about our history. In 1967, we were counted. In 2017, we seek to be heard."

Romlie Mokak: I think this is the essence of the project ahead. I was a delegate to the Uluru National Convention. One of about 250 people and for me, it was an overwhelming experience and an experience where the unifying and uplifting nature of that moment carries forward from that day forward. NAIDOC Week is a time to commemorate as well as a time to celebrate. It is a time to remember and honour those who have come before, to honour those who have worked tirelessly, ceaselessly, for our benefit. NAIDOC Week is a time to place our, and by our I mean indigenous knowledges, our cultures, our science, our strength, our achievement, at the centre. NAIDOC invites all of you into this space and it's beyond raising flags, beyond exhibiting art and beyond eating native foods. NAIDOC really, simply is not about NAIDOC Week alone. The spirit of NAIDOC really is about what we do during those remaining weeks of the year, not NAIDOC week itself.

Romlie Mokak: Alison's given you a sketch of about 25 years and I'm not afraid to say that I was a lot less grey at the beginning of this policy journey but about 25 years ago, I started in my first policy job in New South Wales but this week begins my 12th week at the Productivity Commission. It's still very much early days. I absolutely understand the significance of this role, the first indigenous commissioner at the Productivity Commission. In fact, my preference is to be a commissioner at the Productivity Commission, not the indigenous commissioner. Clearly my focus in my work will be about delivering benefit for our people but I sit around the commission table with my peers and we all work very closely together. The two pieces of work that I'm currently involved in is the evaluation strategy, the other is, as the now chair of the two working groups under the Report on Government Services Steering Committee, the two working groups, the Indigenous Expenditure Report and the Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage groups and currently conducting a review of the value of those reports.

Romlie Mokak: Very much early days, I understand the significance of the role, the weight of expectation but also the great opportunity that comes with this role. My road to the commission has been travelled through state, commonwealth and indigenous organisations and as mentioned, the beginnings in the New South Wales public service 25 years ago, as a junior and only policy officer of the then Ageing and Disability Department, to the Commonwealth Department of Health, working in some fairly challenging areas of policy. Health and equality, substance use and financing, for example, and for the past 14 years, heading up the Indigenous Doctors' Association and more recently, the Lowitja Institute.

Romlie Mokak: It was here in this place in 2011 that the Indigenous Doctors' Association moved in and we were the first black organisation in this house and the significance of that moment was not lost on anyone. This is a place where many laws were made to the detriment of our people, so to have an aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander organisation move into this place was very significant. What we did was cleanse the place. We couldn't smoke it because of heritage values. We had two Ngangkari, traditional healers from the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara lands come and over in that wing, cleanse that place for us to do our good work. There were good spirits and not so good spirits. The good spirits, the Ngangkari left and they helped us along that journey. The bad spirits, the Ngangkari got rid of and forever grateful we were for that.

Romlie Mokak: I have seen over that time, policy work to the good. I know that policy is challenging and I'll get to evaluation in a minute but being involved in tackling petrol sniffing for example. A world first in developing a low-aromatic fuel that would decrease sniffing amongst other interventions. Seeing the number of indigenous doctors in this country escalate over a 10-year period, hearing from medical deans, my colleagues at the time that we would never achieve parity in admissions, for example, aboriginal people, Torres Strait Islander people entering medical school at the proportional rate to the population. We achieved that in 2011.

Romlie Mokak: Indigenous knowledges, putting our knowledges to the fore. That's really been the business of the Lowitja Institute over the last five years. There are heavy transactional costs in that but all of that work is absolutely critical and going from strength to strength, as those who might have been at the Lowitja Institute International Conference in Darwin a couple of weeks ago might attest to. My learnings over these years are fairly simple really, that those who are most invested and most impacted must not be assigned to simply be policy render. They must be the designers, the architects, the builders and even the evaluators for impact and change. Now to the indigenous evaluation strategy.

Romlie Mokak: The commission has been asked to develop a whole of government evaluation strategy to be used by all Australian government agencies, policies and

programmes affecting aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The project will have three main components. The commission has been asked to establish a principles based framework for the value of policies and programmes, identify priorities for evaluation and set out its approach for reviewing agencies' conduct of evaluations against the strategy. The commission has a broad remit to recommend changes to improve the use and conduct of evaluation in Australian government agencies. This goes beyond guiding stakeholders during the commissioning and conduct of evaluations.

Romlie Mokak: The evaluations should also make recommendations on how evaluation and evidence based decision making can be embedded into policy development and programme delivery. The problems with existing evaluation practise that have motivated this project are not just that evaluations have been rarely or poorly conducted, but stem from the lack of influence of evaluation practise and results on policy making. It is clear that the value of evaluation will be limited in the absence of strong and sustainable mechanisms to feed evaluation findings and most importantly, aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledges, perspectives and priorities into the policy making process. The evaluation strategy must cover both mainstream and indigenous specific policies and programmes. If it is to properly examine those that have most impact on or potential benefit for indigenous people.

Romlie Mokak: We will make recommendations on how evaluation efforts should be prioritised, both within agencies and across the Australia government. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's perspectives on what policies and outcomes matter most to them will be vital when identifying priorities for evaluation. In the last 12 weeks, we have been out speaking to a range of people, including a number of people here in this room this morning. Some of my early insights into what people are saying, this is certainly not jumping ahead of the business of the project itself, but in the early stages, some of these discussions have particularly provided insights into the challenges we may face when developing the strategy and the area where the strategy can add most value. The dearth of evaluation of policies and programmes affecting indigenous peoples has been well documented. You don't need to go very far for that.

Romlie Mokak: It is clear that evaluation practise in Australia government agencies varies considerably. Existing evaluation efforts are often narrowly focused rather than systemic and many agencies do not publish evaluation reports in a timely manner, if at all. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and voices have largely been absent from evaluation design and conduct and even where there is leadership and considerable resources devoted, experience indicates that changing the evaluation culture within government agencies is hard. The then Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet now National Indigenous Australians Agency and the Department of Health have been two agencies that we've had early conversations with and they have made in-roads into incorporating aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives and priorities into their evaluation efforts but this is hard work.

Romlie Mokak: I do want to acknowledge that efforts are absolutely being made. Implementation matters and considering likely implementation roadblocks, such as capability and culture in agencies and service delivery organisations, data availability and knowledge translation will be key considerations for the strategy. We're also encountering many positive examples from outside of government, of how evaluation can be used to improve decision making and programme implementation. We have much to learn from indigenous organisations and one for example is the Institute for Urban Indigenous Health in Southeast Queensland. Otherwise known as IUIH. IUIH has been active in commissioning and conducting research and evaluation to build the evidence base on what

works and demonstrate its impact to community and government and placing community first is really what their business is about.

Romlie Mokak: Last week, the commission published our issues paper, which outlines some of the key questions we'd like your help to answer. These include, how can aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledges, priorities and values be better integrated into policy and programme evaluation? That might sound like a simple question but really tough. Really hard to really get to the grips of that conceptually in a policy space as well. What principles should guide Australian government agencies? What principles?

Romlie Mokak: What should be the priority policy areas for future Australian government evaluation efforts? And how can evaluation results be better used in policy and programme design as well as implementation. The final question, although if you read the issues paper, there are many, many questions, we did try to keep it reasonably brief but this is an expansive effort. I'm sorry that it was not the 20 pages that we might have intended initially but there are a lot of questions in there that we're seeking your health to input on. The final, at least for this conversation today, is what ongoing role should the Productivity Commission have in monitoring agencies, implementation of the strategy and in evaluating policies and programmes impacting indigenous people more generally.

Romlie Mokak: We are seeking submissions from interested parties between now and the 23rd of August. You can, as is typically the case for the commission, provide written submissions. We're also taking oral submissions. We want to take down the barriers that might be in the way of our people, indigenous people, aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people getting their views into the commission, so we will take oral submissions or you can leave a brief comment on our website. In the second half of the year, we're now into the second half of the year, we will be engaging more widely across Australia to inform the development of the strategy.

Romlie Mokak: We will go to urban, regional and remote areas to speak to individuals, communities, organisations and really anyone who may wish to speak to us and we will hold a series of roundtables and other discussion groups on topics that relate to the evaluation strategy. We will draw on the experience and expertise of people and organisations as well who have been deeply involved in evaluation or have insights into how policy making and programme implementation can be improved. In closing, I go back to NAIDOC's theme, voice, treaty, truth, and NAIDOC Week itself and to make the simple statement that NAIDOC's impact must surely go beyond the single week in July.

Romlie Mokak: So too a future indigenous evaluation strategy must have value in a lasting way, so I invite each and every one of you to be an active part in that discussion in the debates that might proceed but most importantly, in the design to make this a reality. Thank you.

Alison Larkins: While Rom finds his seat, let me thank you, Rom, for that fantastic introduction to today's discussion. Particularly interested in talking a bit more when we have the panel here about how you think bringing indigenous knowledge to the fore changes the way evaluation and policy making works. Let me invite the other panel members on the stage. Professor Ian Anderson is a Palawa man. He is deputy secretary, as I mentioned, of the new NIAA, playing a leadership role in indigenous policy and delivery of Australian government programmes and the refresh of the Closing the Gap reform agenda for the Council of Australian Government. Professor Anderson is a public health physician with a PhD in sociology. I was just making sure he could find the stage. He's a fellow of the academy of the social sciences in Australia and a fellow of the Australian Academy of Health and Medical Sciences.

- Alison Larkins: Dr. Jill Guthrie is a descendant of the Wiradjuri people of western New South Wales. Jill has a PhD from the Uni of New South Wales and is currently at the Research School of Population Health within the ANU College of Health and Medicine. Following graduation from the Masters of Applied Epidemiology programme at the ANU, Jill worked as an academic member of the MAE staff and continues to work in the programme. In March, 2009, she was appointed as a research fellow at the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies in Canberra, working on health related research projects with a particular focus on the relationship between criminal justice and health.
- Alison Larkins: She is a member of the NHMRC funded Indigenous Offender Health Research Capacity Building Group. Welcome Jill. Bobby Maher is a Yamatji woman and her ancestral ties are to the Pilbara and Kimberley regions of WA. She completed her honours in indigenous Australian research at the Centre for Aboriginal Studies, Curtin University. Drawing on indigenous research methodologies, Bobby explored young aboriginal people's perception of sexual consent. Bobby has spent the last eight years working in commonwealth indigenous health policy and programmes. She is now post-doctoral fellow at the Research School of Population Health within the ANU College of Health and Medicine. So please join me in welcoming Ian, Jill and Bobby to the stage.
- Alison Larkins: Ian, I might invite you first to respond to Romlie's address. Was there anything in particular that struck you? I'm particularly interested in exploring... I think people would be interested in us exploring more in more detail what it means to put indigenous perspectives at the front of policy making. How does that change policy making? What does that look like?
- Ian Anderson: I think there are two broad agendas that are shaping the approach to evaluation in public policy, indigenous public policy. One is, as Rom positioned early on in his talk about repositioning the relationship between indigenous Australians and the public policy process. Broadly, within the kind of desire to build leadership, bring in the kind of experiences, knowledges, into the designs and delivery of all parts of the policy cycle including the evaluation bit but I think it's also twinned with the kind of broader agenda of perpetualisation of public policy, how we tap into the assets of the knowledge sector and shift our kind of public policy process in the indigenous space from an, it feels good, it must be right, to developing a stronger understanding of what we know in our knowledge systems and what is the evidence that we can mobilise in our policy and design?
- Ian Anderson: I think that my sense of that is that it has some significant opportunities but also some significant challenges. The opportunities and challenges really go into the institutional fabric of the public policy system and the broader ecology of the evaluation sector. If I just went through what I think some of those challenges are, the evaluation services sector still today is starting to reach out and employ indigenous Australians but that is really only at the beginning and there is a lot of work to be done to build that capability and indigenous leadership capability within the evaluation services sector. I think there's a lot of work that we need to do within our public policy institutions.
- Ian Anderson: Rom, when he was talking about the culture of public service institutions around evaluation, there's a deeper kind of need to really think about what is the capability that we need to do to start to build institutions that are evaluation ready. I think particularly at the EL2 level in organisations, a critical understanding of what good evaluation design looks like, how that then shapes the public policy cycle, what we need to do is think about the analytical capability but also the methodological capability at that level of leadership in the organisation. We can't create centralised units and do evaluation for big organisations. We need to embed that capability within the organisation. With that goes a cultural shift, a shift about why we're doing this outward-looking, curious understanding of what is

that broader world out there? In our case, an additional complexity about understanding the indigenous lens for that process.

Ian Anderson: It's not just building a technical capability. It's also building a social capability in how we draw in indigenous thinking into the process. I think with that, challenges around thinking about the ethical practise of research. Indigenous research, I think, is a very mature system. It's developed largely in the health sector initially and then into the broader indigenous research sector. Most indigenous folks would have an expectation of that as a minimum in terms of practise. That really shifts the whole evaluation cycle, including the transparency around publishing of results, how you publish results, how you work with communities and being part of the evaluation process in engaging them in all parts of the cycle. I think that there are some significant opportunities, some significant challenges that we need to do and we need to take it from the framework level and think about how we embed it in our institution structures.

Ian Anderson: I would add one other element to it. In a world where we're actually understanding how we manage good, indigenous led evaluation practise in a relationship with our politicians and understanding the complexity of how we manage that in order to keep indigenous leadership in the centre, our transparency and rigour at the heart of the evaluation model.

Alison Larkins: Thank you. Jill, I wondered if you might reflect on your experience, having moved from being in the bureaucracy to being a researcher. It looks to me like your research focus has really been directly on research that is feeding back into public policy. I'm just wondering what your reflections are on how well the bureaucracy is taking up the knowledge that's available and your experience of interacting with the bureaucracy as a researcher and attempting to influence with the body of knowledge that you're developing.

Jill Guthrie: Thanks Alison. First I'd also like to acknowledge the traditional owners on who land we're meeting today, the Ngunnawal people. Just going to Alison's question and my experience of coming through as a researcher, this goes back 20 years, 21 years when I was working in the Dept of Health at the time, Office of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health with Alison and Ian. The opportunity for me to do the MAE, the Master of Applied Epidemiology at ANU arose and that was my transition from being a public servant to getting into the research and evaluation side of things.

Jill Guthrie: Just a little anecdote around that, if I may. I'm sure things have changed a lot since then but I was part of the initial indigenous cohort of the MAE 21 years ago and I know Ian and Alison were key in developing that as well. I happened to see a copy of the Koori Times on the desk next to mine in with the MAE was advertised and I thought, that would be a fantastic opportunity to get onto that MAE. For me to learn more skills, those in-depth skills about research and evaluation and as they apply across to policy. I was fortunate enough to be part of that inaugural MAE cohort.

Jill Guthrie: I think the MAE has been and still is a wonderful mechanism for indigenous researchers to come on that pathway between working in their workplaces but learning those skills of evaluation and applying them and influencing policy and also taking them back to their communities. I hope I've covered that.

Alison Larkins: Yes, that was great.

Jill Guthrie: Thank you.

- Alison Larkins: Bobby, do you want to tell us a bit about your transition too and your reflections going from being a bureaucrat to being a researcher?
- Bobby Maher: Yeah. I actually came into the public service 10 years ago as an indigenous trainee and sort of over this 10-year period, got my first Uni degree, my Bachelor's and then transitioned into doing my honours, which was in indigenous research methodologies and then 2017, I went on the MAE journey. I do believe that the MAE provides you with excellent skills in being able to understand evidence, being able to apply your particular learnings and skills in doing field research and I guess the background to this education really is embedded in indigenous ways of knowing, doing and being and the opportunity for me to be able to work in some remote communities during my MAE was very insightful. I did an evaluation of the Stronger Communities for Children programme up in Wadeye and being located in Canberra really requires a community engagement to be at the forefront and it is about visiting the community regularly and not just flying in and flying out.
- Bobby Maher: More recently, Ray and the team were up at the Lowitja Conference and we were able, Ray and I, to go back to Wadeye to share the findings from that particular project with the Community Committee and to have that conversation with them about, what did this mean for them? What their contributions were in terms of the actual evaluation design. I feel quite strongly about being able to build the capacity of community organisations to develop more of the language around evaluation, around evidence and I guess going forward into my PhD, I really do want to concentrate on expanding that.
- Alison Larkins: Thank you. Rom, in your long history, what strikes you as the examples where good evaluation, good research... What are the highlights in terms of where good research, good evaluation have changed practice?
- Romlie Mokak: I'm just thinking of probably some of my most challenging work was in the Office for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health as the director of substance use. We had a national scope, 70-odd services across the country. 20-odd million in the bucket, really poor cousin to everything. Huge need, not enough there to service that need and contained within that broader AOD, substance use policy and programme agenda was petrol sniffing. On the front page of the Oz every other week, numerous coronial inquests, kids dying, communities completely shattered and the nature of petrol sniffing is that literally, like wildfire, if young people have got access to fuel, so supply is a real issue, it can just accelerate.
- Romlie Mokak: I don't like using the language of wicked problems because I think that they just have a life of their own but that was a really difficult issue. Community, the media, the pressure from the Australian multiple governments needing to work together. ATSIC. That was still the days of ATSIC. This is probably now the most pure evaluation, and I'm hesitant to go back there but as the programme manager, I was also the commissioner of the evaluation and the chair of the evaluation. You see the problem there. Chaired the evaluation itself but we had the senior leaders in aboriginal research, Sandra Eades, Terry Dunbar, and others way back then at the early days of the NHMRC trying to lift its effort in aboriginal research on that evaluation process.
- Romlie Mokak: From a 4\$ million programme in the 2005 budget, after the evaluation and all of the pressure on the politicians, Tony Abbot was the Health Minister at the time, we ended up with 10 million in that 2005 budget with a new fuel to offer the world really. Our negotiations with BP were... What junior policy person, director level, EL2, enters into corporate negotiations around the specifications for a fuel, for example? With some strict provisos that the specs would be offered to all of the other fuel producers. That was the interest that the Australian fuel industry lobby body had about tackling this issue of aboriginal kids dying. I saw policy, a small

part of it evaluation, but policy deliver there. We're not just interested in inputs. I think it's now over 100 million. We knew always that supply was going to be an issue. We needed a regional response and a prevention response. Now there are regions across Australia and there's legislation to support it. That would be my case study.

Alison Larkins: It's a great case study. We might just go to questions from the audience.

Esmerelda Rocha: Hello I'm Esmerelda Rocha from PM and C. Thank you for today's discussion. I wanted reflections from anyone on the panel about how we can use evaluation to inform measures of success that are really driven by communities to inform the next round of policy. I think it gets a little bit to that policy cycle that Professor Anderson was speaking to.

Ian Anderson: Maybe I can make a start. I think one of the challenges is the analytical frameworks that people bring to the evaluation process. We still are strongly deficit framed in terms of a lot of intellectual thinking about indigenous Australia. This is one of the opportunities, that if we bring in more indigenous leadership into the evaluation process then you actually start to see the world in much more complex and nuanced ways and start to actually understand what some of the strengths and opportunities are in the aboriginal world. You go into remote communities; people are often overwhelmed by the level of disadvantage in those communities. If you have a much longer relationship with remote Australia, you actually start to see the considerable strengths. The kinship networks and the other things that are at play in remote Australia.

Ian Anderson: I think none of this is about black and white understanding, so to speak, of the aboriginal world but a much more nuanced and enriched understanding. That has to be part of your evaluation process so that the knowledges that you start to build give a sense of where the real challenges are but where some of the opportunities are to leverage those strengths in indigenous Australia.

Alison Larkins: Bobby?

Bobby Maher: I just might say something too. I think that having indigenous perspectives into programme design that sits with evaluation is really important as well. I just feel that sometimes there is that disconnect between the two. We do want to have more indigenous voice within the way programme design is being facilitated, developed and so forth.

Pierre Skorich: Pierre Skorich. I'm from the Canberra Evaluation Forum. I think one of the problems with evaluation across government generally is that the policy evaluation cycle is seen as very, very sequential. Evaluation is something that flies in at the end and sees whether things have been done right or not. I think one of the risks there is that the voice comes alive in the policy making cycle. Then it comes alive again at the very end. What are your thoughts on how to keep that voice alive through the cycle of doing things? And I guess adjusting and changing things as you're going along.

Romlie Mokak: I think that's ultimately the challenge, isn't it? That if we think in a cyclical sense or even worse, a linear sense, that's a problem. This is what I tried to allude to in terms of the point that those who are most impacted need to be a part of the design. That's a very different kind of conversation if you're developing policies and programmes with aboriginal people right at the forefront. The sorts of questions that might be considered in research or evaluation will likely be different. The meaning that is derived and therefore measured over the cycle will likely be different. I think Ian's talking a bit about, this about perspectives and Bobby's saying the same thing but it's really about getting aboriginal people, Torres Strait Islander people at the front end of it. The notion that we just bolt on

evaluation at the back end or close to the back end of a programme, I'm hoping that those days might be passed.

Ian Anderson: Maybe passing. The other point I would make is that, and this is where evaluation is different from research. Research institutionalises knowledge through the universities and through the academic publishing system. That's not quite the same in the public policy evaluation world. We tend to still have a very project-based approach to this and don't think about what it is we need to do to create the sort of institutional capability that institutionalises that knowledge. I'll give you an example. As is probably clear now, we were very active in the 1990s developing a research and evaluation capability in indigenous health. A recent piece of research work looking at where that evaluation in the indigenous health space had gone found that the significant majority, and I can't think of an actual percentage, had disappeared without trace. Just disappeared into the filing cabinets, non-published.

Ian Anderson: What that said is that actually every time an evaluation was undertaken, it was like bunnies in the headlights. This is the first time we're thinking about this problem in a critical, analytical way rather than building on and drawing from a whole body of knowledge that is easily accessible and lends to that critical analysis at the front end of the design process.

Bobby Maher: I think another one just going on from that Ian is, quite often we don't know what works. There's so much of a focus on evaluation. Trying to understand, well what does work? When there's evaluations that have been done and they have not been published, how are we supposed to learn from what was found and what didn't work? I guess that often makes it very difficult in this particular complex space.

Alison Larkins: You wanted to-

Jill Guthrie: Yeah, thanks Alison. Just going to your question and reflecting on what everyone else has said, it's that idea of evaluation start early, start often, sort of. Have it at the front end and throughout of course. I'd just like to make people aware of a piece of work that's been done by a fellow Wiradjuri scholar, Megan Williams. It's called Ngaa-bi-nya, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Programme Evaluation Framework, which I'm sure you're already aware of anyway. I think Megan's work, through this paper and through her work anyway will be very informative to the review that Rom's doing. Megan sets out a framework for this ongoing evaluation of aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander policies and programmes as an evaluation framework. It's a fantastic piece of work.

Alison Larkins: Thanks Jill. Other questions.

Emma: Thank you. Emma from the NIAA. The panel's talked and raised a whole lot of thoughts in my mind. I'll try and focus back down to one. From an evaluation point of view, you need to know what we expect to see change in the end. Do we think that there'll be enough traction with the new Closing The Gap refresh so that we can bring cross systems, cross cutting areas to bear across agencies? So that we don't get evaluation that is piecemeal and doesn't align to a broader impact. We had the NIRA back in 2008, the National Indigenous Reform Agreement. Of course, it identified principles as well and findings from evaluations talked to the fact that the principles in some respects became platitudes. How will we as commonwealth agencies, service agencies, indigenous organisations, take forward application to change through principles, and not leaving them as statements?

Emma: The third area I just wanted to flag was, I think to distinguish the social benefits and social changes that are happening in amongst our urban first Australia

versus the remote and the issues of capability for those remote people who have literacy issues that mean that they can't access tertiary education. They live in complex worlds where just evaluating one little programme doesn't necessarily change the overall impact within that complex environment. I've actually flagged three things. I'm really grateful for this conversation and the good work that is being led by this whole of government evaluation process.

Romlie Mokak: Was that for me? Yeah. I mean the simple answer could be, we're just embarking on it. I'm keen to hear from all of you. I think you're right. I won't get into the discussion around the refresh. There's certainly, as far as I can see, in a quarter of century of working in policy we've now got ministers sitting beside indigenous leaders under the COAG frame with the joint council. Certainly evaluation has been written into the partnership agreement under that COAG arrangement. I'm keen to see where that might land. On the question of cross cutting I think you're absolutely right. Where I made the point about not just programmatic but systematic I think we can do something with that. Just in terms of the current work that the commission's undertaking, sorry I'm ignoring this side of the room, Michael Brennan is the chair of the commission along with another colleague Angela MacRae, are currently working on Northern Territory expenditure for children. That's very much about not only the funding but how does funding flow and what are the cross cutting issues? Ideally to inform a joint approach between the commonwealth and the Northern Territory government.

Romlie Mokak: There's a lot of talk as well about localised decision making, place based approaches. I think all of these things but not just simply geographical or location specific. This is really the challenge for the work going forward across portfolios. I think that's correct. The other two aspects of the question, sorry? The reference to the principles is derived from the letter of direction from the government around this piece of work. It seeks for a principles based framework. This work will unfold. I certainly take your point that principles should not equal platitudes. We need to think about, and I referenced some of this in the broad, around the importance of implementation. What does implementation look like?

Alison Larkins: I wonder if that's a challenge to the room actually Emma. It's something that all of us need to take up in terms of taking those principles and turning them into-

Romlie Mokak: That's right.

Alison Larkins: ...making them influence practise. That's something that's got to be broader than Rom's work.

Romlie Mokak: There's a specific question that government have put to the commission through this work, which is, what would an approach be to reviewing the evaluation strategy? What does that look like? I'm particularly keen to hear from people in this room about what that looks like in real terms, within your agencies and across agencies.

Alison Larkins: I'm sorry, we've run out of time. I'm sure there are lots more questions. That's only really been a taster. Rom, thank you so much for coming and speaking and really thank you to Ian and Jill and to Bobby as well for joining us on the stage this morning.