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**EVALUATING THE IMPACT OF PUBLIC
INVESTMENT IN INDIGENOUS
DEVELOPMENT: A CASE STUDY OF THE
TORRES STRAIT REGIONAL
AUTHORITY**

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Declaration

To the best of my knowledge and belief this thesis contains no material previously published by any other person except where due acknowledgment has been made.

This thesis contains no material that has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university.

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ABSTRACT

There is increasing level of expectation by government, donors and other funding agencies and the general public in Australia, for organisations charged with implementing development activities to clearly demonstrate improved social outcomes and impacts. In the face of escalating pressure to produce transparent and rigorous evidence demonstrating effectiveness and efficiency, small Indigenous and similarly oriented social development organisations often struggle with understanding, planning for, and measuring the social, economic, and environmental impacts of their activities in the communities within which they work.

For over a decade, successive Australian governments sought to reduce the stark differentials in social and wellbeing outcomes experienced by Australia's Indigenous and First Nations peoples, explicitly targeting funding to reduce these differences (e.g. to close the gaps). Agreed by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) in 2008, the National Indigenous Reform Agreement (NIRA) was premised on goals to close gaps in life course outcomes for Indigenous Australians, including dealing with: lower life expectancy; higher rates of child and maternal mortality; less access and lower participation in early childhood care services; lower levels of reading, writing and numeracy achievement; less senior school attainment levels (year 12), lower engagement in employment and unequal economic outcomes. The Closing the Gap (CtG) strategy is premised on ameliorating these differences in outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians seeking ultimately to achieve congruence in wellbeing throughout the life-course.

The Torres Strait Regional Authority (TSRA) is a regionally based Indigenous statutory agency founded in 1994 primarily to improve the wellbeing of Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal individuals resident in the Torres Strait and Northern Peninsula region of Australia. Over time, the TSRA has administered more than AU\$1 billion to advance economic, social, cultural and environmental development outcomes for the region's largely Indigenous inhabitants. A 2014 performance audit by the Australian Auditor General found that while significant gains had been made, the TSRA's framework for reporting did not facilitate an assessment of the impact it had made on closing the gaps in Indigenous disadvantage. Nor was there robust

evidence to ensure that TSRA was able to clearly demonstrate (and therefore articulate) its contribution to improved wellbeing of Indigenous residents.

This research focuses on the conceptual and methodological issues associated with conducting such an impact evaluation. It includes factors of measurement and reporting of outcomes for a regional peak Indigenous organisation charged with formulation and implementation of a broad social development mandate. The ultimate aim of this research is to analyse to extent to which the TSRA has impacted on the wellbeing of Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal residents of the Torres Strait, and if so, how, and in what ways could development impact be more effectively and efficiently assessed. In doing so, this thesis makes a number of theoretical contributions to the field of Indigenous Impact evaluation, including: deconstructing the elements of scientific inquiry when applied to cross-cultural research settings, identifying structural political factors either facilitating or inhibiting the conduct of an evaluation of impact, how can an applied evaluation be undertaken in a remote context, and ultimately articulating a framework for building institutional data sharing, analytical capability and capacity for small agencies to develop an evidence base for policy making.

Assessing the feasibility of conducting an evaluative analysis via the adoption of a mix-methods approach to evaluating the impact of key TSRA economic, environmental, social and cultural policies and programmes are central among the research priorities. This primarily ex-post analysis is undertaken as a case-study of the work of TSRA covers – an analysis at a broad level since its establishment, and more specifically covering infrastructure and grants activities delivered over the period spanning 2012 to 2018. The applied approach to evaluation and the assessment of performance monitoring and reporting incorporates quantitative and qualitative methods and data within a broad paradigm of systems and complexity theory. The research establishes an impact-oriented planning and design framework assessing existing infrastructure and grants administration to inform future TSRA policy and program design founded on sustainable development principles. Complementing this case study is a bespoke framework for continuous evaluation and reporting to assist TSRA to monitor and assess its impact over time.

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This thesis is the culmination of a five-year voyage, in concert with balancing work, family and those friends closest to me. For those of you that have had to endure my furrowed brow at times, along with the oft accompanying thousand-yard stare, I extend my deepest gratitude.

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My son Chae, of course, deserves an immense amount of my endearing love and eternal gratitude for he has often missed out on the things that other children take for granted in terms of family time and relationships. For this, I hope that the result of this work will ultimately yield some fruit and we will get more quality time together. Just know that I love you dearly!

I want to sincerely and gratefully thank my supervisors Professor Dora Marinova and Professor Jeffrey Kenworthy from the Curtin University Sustainability Policy (CUSP) Institute for the practical guidance and encouragement. Their support, mentorship and the art of timely checking in to see how things were progressing was invaluable for getting me over the line with this work, even during times of mental blocks and self-reflection. I could not have finalised this work without the detailed critique of final versions of the thesis drafts for which I am utterly grateful.

This thesis is dedicated to Amy, Chae and my mother and father Kathy and John. For it is they who have imbued me with the work ethic that has assisted my focus at times when things looked pretty bleak.

My deepest love and thanks always.

This thesis is dedicated to the four of you.....

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ACRONYMNS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ABC	Australian Broadcasting Corporation
ADC	Aboriginal Development Corporation
AES	Australasian Evaluation Society
AG	Auditor General
AIHW	Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
AG	Australian Government
APS	Australian Public Service
AHMAC	The Australian Health Ministers' Advisory Council
ANAO	Australian National Audit Office
APC	(Australian) Productivity Commission.
ATSI	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
ATSIC	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission
ATSILS	Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Legal Services
AUD	Australian Dollar
AusAID	Australian Agency International Development
BP	Before Present
CAEPR	Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research
CAC Act	Commonwealth Authorities and Companies Act 1997
CAH	TSRA Culture, Arts and Heritage Programme
CBA	Cost/Benefit Analysis
CDEP	Community Development Employment Program
CDP	Community Development Program
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CFR	Common Funding Rounds
CGD	Centre for Global Development
CHIP	Community Housing and Infrastructure Program
CIS	Australian Centre for Independent Studies
CPI	Consumer Price Index
CoEATSIS	ABS Centre of Excellence for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Statistics
CSIRO	Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation
Cth	Commonwealth
CtG	Closing the Gap
COAG	Council of Australian Governments
CUSP	Curtin University Sustainability Policy Institute
DAA	Commonwealth Department for Aboriginal Affairs

DATSIP	Queensland Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships
DFAT	Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
DFaHCSIA	Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs
DIIS	Australian Department of Industry, Innovation and Science
DLGIP	Queensland Government Department of Local Government, Infrastructure and Planning
DIRD	Australian Government Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development
DoFD	Department of Finance and Deregulation
DoH	Australian Government Department of Health
DPMC	Australian Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet
EC	Empowered Communities
EES	European Evaluation Society,
FMA	Financial Management and Accountability Act 1997
GTCC	TSRA Gab Titui Cultural Centre
GPM	TSRA Grants Program Manuel
HC	TSRA Healthy Communities
IAS	Indigenous Advancement Strategy
ICC	Island Coordinating Council
IE	Impact Evaluation
IEG	World Bank Independent Evaluation Group
IFC	International Finance Corporation
INGO	International Non-Government Organisation
3ie	International Initiative for Impact Evaluation
ISD	Integrated Service Delivery
KPI	Key Performance Indicators
LIPS	Local Implementation Plans
LMS	London Missionary Society
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MEL	Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning
MIP	Torres Strait Major Infrastructure Program
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
NAC	National Aboriginal Conference
NACC	Commonwealth National Aboriginal Consultative Committee
NCoA	National Commission of Audit
NIAA	National Indigenous Australians Agency
NGO	Non-Government Organisation

NHMRC	National Health and Medical Research Council
NIRA	National Indigenous Reform Agreement
NPA	Northern Peninsula Area
NPARC	Northern Peninsula Area Regional Council
NPA-RSD	National Partnership Agreement Remote Service Delivery
NPM	New Public Management
ODA	Overseas Development Assistance
OEA	Office of Evaluation and Audit
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PA	Performance Audit
PBC	Prescribed Body Corporates
PBS	Portfolio Budget Statements
PFM	Public Financial Management
PGPA	Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013
PNG	Papua New Guinea
PSM	Propensity Score Matching
QPC	Queensland Productivity Commission
Qld	Queensland State
RCT	Randomised Controlled Trial
RO	Research Objectives
RoI	Return on Investment
SC	TSRA Safe Communities
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SES	Australian Public Service Senior Executive Service
SEIFA	Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas
SFA	Standard Funding Agreements
SJL	Seabed Jurisdiction Line
SROI	Social Return on Investment
SVA	Social Ventures Australia
TB	Tuberculosis
TIDS	Torres Strait Transport Infrastructure Development Scheme
ToR	Terms of Reference
TRL	Tropical Rock Lobster
TS	Torres Strait
TSC	Torres Shire Council
TSI	Torres Strait Islander
TSDP	Torres Strait Development Plan - TSRA
TSIRC	Torres Strait Island Regional Council

TS&NPA	Torres Strait and Northern Peninsula Area
TSPZ	Torres Strait Protected Zone
TSPZJA	Torres Strait Protected Zone Joint Authority
TSRA	Torres Strait Regional Authority
TSRC	Torres Strait ATSIC Regional Council
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly
UN	United Nations
USAID	United States Agency International Development
USD	United States Dollar
UNSW	University of New South Wales
VfM	Value for Money
WAEHSC	Western Australian Legislative Education and Health Standing Committee
WB	World Bank

PREFACE

This brief narrative, albeit included as a preface to this thesis, was in fact written toward the latter stages of the process, some five years after embarking on the research journey. It has come about following a re-read of the various Chapters of the document and the emerging sense that an explanation of the author's background will assist those who might choose to read further. It aims to situate the work within the context that it was set with a more complete picture of the professional background, engagement and this researcher's interest in the subject matter.

I have come to this field of academia relatively late in my career. From an early working background in the arts, followed by work in direct youth and community services in the late 1990s - both on the Australian east and west coasts - I relocated to the far north of Australia in 2000 to engage in remote Indigenous community health services. My work for a number of years was on the Tiwi Islands in Northern Australia with what was then part of a national trial for community control over health services delivery – the Tiwi Health Board – Coordinated Care Trials. It was during this time that I also completed my first Master's level course which had a research focus on substance use patterns and antecedents among Tiwi young people. Following a period of four years working closely with the Tiwi people on the Tiwi Islands, I entered the public service in various policy roles spanning youth and community services, public health, remote housing and infrastructure with the Northern Territory Government.

What followed then was a period of six years working in the Australian Public Service in various government departments including, the Australian Bureau of Statistics, Australian Agency for International Development, and Department of Families Housing and Indigenous Affairs. During this period, I was also seconded to the United Nations Fund for Population Activities in East Africa for a little over a year before coming to work for the Torres Strait Regional Authority (TSRA) as a permanent Australian Public Service Employee at Executive Level 2, in 2012. My work with the TSRA was as Programme Manager for three of the TSRA's then Programmes, namely Healthy Communities, Safe Communities and Culture, Arts and Heritage Programmes.

I occupied this position at a management level in the organisation for two years before being seconded to the Department of Foreign Affairs and the United Nations Development Programme first in Papua New Guinea followed by the Philippines through until 2015. After some months following my return to the Torres Strait and work with the TSRA, I sought and was given written approval by the then Chief Executive Officer (with support of the TSRA Chairperson) to undertake my Doctoral studies with Curtin University. This approval was based upon an initial research proposal explicitly aligned to the theme of this thesis in that it was to investigate the basis and recommendations emerging from the Australian National Audit Office performance review of the TSRA that had occurred in 2013-14.

It was in 2016 that I relinquished my permanent position with the TSRA and the Australian public service. This role was then subsequently designated an Indigenous specified management role in the organisation. I then embarked for a period of two and a half years as a Technical Consultant to the TSRA in order to support this somewhat embryonic foray into Indigenous management succession. Key to the then TSRA CEO approving this circumstance was that I would undertake the concurrent research work as documented in this thesis over the period 2016 - 2018. However, and as also articulated within, a new TSRA Board and new TSRA Chairperson were elected in late 2016 and took office in 2017. Given the importance of context for any research and evaluative exercise, these events, and thus the implications for both the researcher along with the conduct of the study are also elucidated in the discussions that follow.

Hopefully the work that has been undertaken makes a contribution to improving the circumstances of those individuals most in need of support.

Brian

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

“extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence and what can be asserted without evidence can also be dismissed without evidence” (Hitchens, 2007, p. 150).

Overcoming disadvantage and inequality both within and between nations has been a pre-eminent narrative in the discourse of human and societal development for many decades. Of particular prominence has been the focus on disproportionate life and wellbeing outcomes experienced by many Indigenous peoples globally. Pronounced are the well documented differentials and ravaging effects on First Nations peoples’ comparative health and wellbeing. These deleterious social outcomes have been exacerbated by centuries of western colonialism and imperialism (Paradies, 2016; Glenn, 2015). Among the overt disparities in outcomes are poorer health, higher rates of poverty, worse diets, inferior housing conditions and a myriad of other social and health problems (Mitrou et al., 2014). Other factors include the rapid erosion of cultural and language practices, dispossession of traditional lands and territories, and systematic marginalization from dominant paradigms of social and economic decision making (UNPFII, 2015).

The adverse impact of these historical events on the First Nations and Indigenous people of Australia has not only been well chronicled but continues to be the source of considerable political and social discourse and deliberation (Williams and Mohammed, 2009; Bergman and Paradies, 2010). Correspondingly, debate continues unabated regarding the means and methods that are deployed in the design and implementation of the policies, programs and projects that are adopted to address these inequalities (Bodkin-Andrews *et al*, 2017; Shepherd, Adams, McEntyre, and Walker, 2014). Contested also are the frames of reference for monitoring and assessing the performance of both large and small-scale initiatives that seek to positively impact upon poverty, poor health and other factors leading to social, economic and cultural disadvantage (Gertler *et al*, 2011; Cobb-Clark, 2013; Hudson, 2017).

Despite many billions of dollars invested annually with the aims of reducing the multi-faceted aspects of disadvantage and improving wellbeing outcomes between

Indigenous and non-indigenous Australians, significant disparities in these circumstances persist (AHMAC, 2015). During the research and drafting phase of this thesis in 2017, it emerged that after almost ten years of significant public expenditure on efforts to redress health and social inequality, Australia was failing to maintain sufficient progress, and ‘not on track’ to achieve all but one of seven targets set out in a strategy to ‘Close the Gap’ (CtG) in health and wellbeing outcomes by 2030 (Conifer, Leslie, Tilley and Liddy, 2017).

Launched in 2008 following an apology to Indigenous people issued by the then Australian Prime Minister, CtG was a key strategy in a National Indigenous Reform Agreement (NIRA) adopted by Federal and State governments via the Council of Australian Governments (COAG). The NIRA originally outlined a number of targets to address differentials in life expectancy and wellbeing outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. Broadly the goals of the CtG were, by the year 2030, to reduce by half life expectancy gaps, reduce gaps in mortality rates for Indigenous children, increase access to early childhood education provision, reduce gaps in reading, writing and numeracy achievements, increased attainment of year 12 school completion rates, and equality in employment outcomes (Gracey, 2014).

However, in 2018 following a decade of significant investment into CtG, the then Prime Minister in the annual 2018 progress report on CtG stated that only three of the seven CtG targets were on track to be achieved by 2030 (DPMC, 2019, pp. 8-9). In terms of achievements, the 2018 CtG reported that the goals of reducing rates of infant mortality, enrolling four-year old’s in early childhood education and halving the gap in year 12 high school attendance were on track. Despite this progress, gaps in school attendance and corresponding reading and numeracy targets, employment and differences in life expectancy remained (DPMC, 2019, pp. 8-9).

A 2016 report by the Australian Centre for Independent Studies (CIS) estimated that annual direct public expenditure on Australian Indigenous specific programs was approximately \$5.9 billion AUD¹. The report, *Mapping the Indigenous Funding*

¹ However, this report suggests this is likely to be an underestimate as the Australian Productivity Commission estimated in the 2015/16 financial year, total direct government spending on services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) peoples was \$33.4 billion. The significant proportion of this funding is provided through mainstream services (Australian Productivity Commission, 2017).

Maze, identified that at that time there were approximately 1048 Indigenous specific programs being funded and delivered by Federal, State and Local Governments along with a wide range of non-government organisations (including Indigenous and non-Indigenous agencies). The report also rather scathingly pointed out that less than 8 per cent (i.e. 88) of the plethora of programs being delivered, apparently for the benefit of Indigenous peoples, had been subject to any evaluation either during or following implementation. Moreover, in its meta-analysis of the Indigenous evaluations that had been conducted, the report found that a majority of these had been based on methods that were unable to provide any robust evidence of the programs' effectiveness.

Based on these findings, Hudson concluded,

“Multiple service providers including government agencies, Indigenous organisations, not-for-profit non-government organisations (NGOs) and for-profit contractors — are all competing in the same space, with little evidence of success. One of the reasons given for the low return on Indigenous investment is that the money is not going to where it is needed most, or used in ways that respect Indigenous input into program design and delivery”
(Hudson, 2016, p.1).

Working closely with a small-medium Indigenous regional agency, the Torres Strait Regional Authority (TSRA), as a case-study, this thesis assesses what methods might be deployed to demonstrate and articulate the impacts the agency has made on the wellbeing of Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal residents of the Torres Strait. It also highlights how, and in what ways TSRA's development impact could be effectively evaluated and the results of monitoring and evaluation findings disseminated and communicated.

This introductory chapter provides a brief overview of the history and culture of the Torres Strait and Northern Peninsula Area (TS&NPA) regions and communities within the governance, policy and programming jurisdiction of the TSRA. It is also a summary overview of the policy antecedents to the establishment of the TSRA along with its operating and organisational context in relation to it being the research case-study of interest. The chapter provides an outline of the underpinning research

drivers for this thesis, along with an outline of the research scope, research questions, and significance of the study. Finally, this chapter also outlines key aspects of the research lexicon and terminology used, thesis structure, and summarises the content of each of the component chapters. To date there has been little academic research focused on an assessment of the impacts derived from the public funding provided to Indigenous organisations and none analysing the TSRA in particular.

1.1 Overview of context and research drivers

This section aims to introduce at summary level the organisational context and driving factors that have provided the impetus for undertaking this research project. A more detailed examination of these concepts is provided in chapters two and three of this research thesis.

1.1.1 The Torres Strait Regional Authority (TSRA)

Established on 1 July 1994, the TSRA is a Commonwealth Statutory Authority with a mandate to provide greater autonomy to the Torres Strait and to “*achieve a better quality of life for the Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal people in the region*” (Moran *et al*, 2014, p. 57). In accord with its legislative framework of, “*reducing the level of disadvantage, improving the quality of life and overall wellbeing experienced in the Torres Strait*” is the primary focus of the TSRA (ANAO, 2013, p.13). In order to appropriate its annual federal budget allocation from the federal Treasury, the Australian Government’s agreed outcome for the TSRA is:

“Progress towards closing the gap for Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal people living in the Torres Strait Region through development planning, coordination, sustainable resource management and preservation and promotion of Indigenous culture” (ANAO, 2013, p.13).

To support the achievement of this outcome, the TSRA has appropriated on average, approximately AU\$50 million per annum in Australian federal government funding each year over the course of the organisation’s existence since 1994. When adjusted for inflation, this equates to the TSRA managing and administering approximately AU\$1.3 billion in public funding to facilitate Indigenous regional

social and economic development over a twenty-two year period from 1994 to 2016. This appropriation from the federal government is provided to the TSRA as a block untied grant in order for the elected Indigenous representatives to determine the regional development priorities for expenditures and the application of agency resources.

Accordingly, the TSRA has engaged in a diverse array of policy and program initiatives aimed at addressing the social determinants of Indigenous disadvantage in the region. Activities included formulation of policies, programs and projects aimed at improved economic, social-cultural, environmental, health and governance outcomes for the Indigenous residents. Governed by a Board consistently comprised of twenty-two elected community representatives, the TSRA has a range of key functions enshrined in the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Act 2005 (Cth)* (ATSI Act), which include in summary:

- *recognising and maintaining the special and unique Ailan Kastom (Culture and Customs) of Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal residents of the region;*
- *formulation and implementation of programs, monitoring the effectiveness of programs for Torres Strait Islanders, and Aboriginal persons (including programs conducted by other bodies);*
- *develop policy proposals to meet national, state and regional needs and priorities;*
- *assist, advise and cooperate with Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal communities, organisations and individuals at national, state, territory and regional levels; and,*
- *advise the Minister (Indigenous Affairs) on:*
 - *matters relating to Torres Strait Islander affairs, and Aboriginal affairs, in the Torres Strait area, including the administration of legislation; and*
 - *the coordination of the activities of other Commonwealth bodies that affect Torres Strait Islanders, or Aboriginal persons, living in the Torres Strait area (TSRA, 2016, pp. 6-7).*

1.1.2 Australian National Audit Office (ANAO) Performance Audit of TSRA (2014)

In 2013, the ANAO, conducted a performance audit of the TSRA's program activities and initiatives as forecast in the organisation's four-year *Torres Strait Development Plan 2009-2013*. The primary audit objective was to ascertain whether the program and service delivery functions and associated development commitments of the TSRA were effectively administered. In December 2013, the ensuing audit report was tabled in the Australian Parliament. Key findings and observations contained within the narrative of that audit report of the TSRA provide the broad framework and serve as drivers for the research imperatives outlined in this thesis.

While not stated directly in its final audit recommendations, the ANAO in summarising its findings concluded that:

“Overall, the TSRA does not have a strong measurement basis to assess the impact of its activities on reducing disadvantage in the region, the TSRA development plan Key Performance Indicators were focused on measuring the delivery of aspects of TSRA's programs, rather than achievement of outcomes” (ANAO, 2014, p.19).

Furthermore, the federal auditor found that,

“the data presented on Indigenous disadvantage does not closely align with the National Indigenous Reform Agreement (NIRA) targets², and the absence of trend data either in the annual report or the development plan does not facilitate the assessment of progress over time” (ANAO, 2014, p.21).

1.1.3 Key issues identified by ANAO

The ANAO considered that the TSRA had established generally sound monitoring and reporting systems to support internal reporting purposes, and that Key

² For an overview of the NIRA see:

https://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/pubs/BriefingBook44p/ClosingGap

Performance Indicators (KPIs) drawn from the *Torres Strait Development Plan 2009– 2013*, provided reasonable alignment in information used internally to monitor performance along with that reported externally to Parliament. They pointed out,

“however, the indicators designed for the development plan do not in all cases translate effectively to the Outcomes and Programs framework established by the (National) government. KPIs in that context should measure performance of programs in achieving the Government’s outcomes, rather than measure deliverables or activities” (ANAO, 2014, p. 21).

Under the Government’s Outcome and Programs Framework, the TSRA’s program outcome is directly linked to the NIRA Closing the Gap (CtG) targets. Moreover, outside of its KPI reporting, the TSRA provided data on CtG in the region in previous annual reports. However, the statistics reported did not provide information to support achievements in CtG and *“overall the TSRA could do further work to develop and report indicators that more directly relate to the achievement of its program outcome”* (ANAO, 2014, p. 24).

The ANAO went on further to note that its enabling legislation requires that the TSRA (Board) formulate a Torres Strait Development Plan (TSDP) (including key performance indicators) for the region, however it is not required to report against achievement over the life of the TSDP. Therefore, they recommended,

“Evaluating and reviewing TSRA’s performance over the period of the plan or at least periodically would provide a means to ascertain whether the TSRA is achieving improvements to the wellbeing of the Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal residents of the region” (ANAO, 2014, p. 80).

While acknowledging the complexity of TSRA’s operating environment, with over 35 government agencies delivering services in the region, other issues identified by the ANAO leading them to recommend that the TSRA could strengthen its coordination and monitoring in the region included:

- * That the TSRA Development Plan could benefit from more information on the prevailing level of disadvantage and projected achievements of the TSRA to improve wellbeing;
- * Annual reporting contained over-reliance on census data collected every five years with no trend analysis or ability to track achievement over time (data might include things such as shipping/transport costs);
- * The need for baseline data, and that inclusion of static performance targets inhibit reporting (it noted a paucity of publicly available data),
- * Recommended inclusion of long-term Performance Indicators (PIs) in order to assess the entire TSRA Development Plan period; and,
- * Suggested TSRA look at reviews of the Torres Strait Major Infrastructure Program (MIP) to ascertain its impact on health outcomes.

Hence, the findings serve as drivers for the need to develop an evaluation framework to assess impacts of the work of the TSRA on the wellbeing of the Indigenous resident population. Given that this is not a dissimilar context to other major Indigenous programs in Australia, the framework should also be applicable to similar cases.

1.2 Research question, aims and objectives

The overarching research aim of this study is to develop a suitable framework that can help analyse public investment in Indigenous organisations and will lead to a robust assessment of the impact of the Torres Strait Regional Authority (TSRA) with particular reference to the TSRA's Torres Strait Development Plan 2014-18. At the outset it is important to acknowledge the written approval to conduct this work from the TSRA CEO in 2016 and 2017 (Appendix 1). The broad approach will be to adopt a case study evaluative design incorporating the collection of data to allow for a mixed-methods analysis. This evaluation approach incorporates methodologies based on: quantitative and qualitative Cost/Benefit Analysis (CBA), Systems Theories and Complexity Theories. These methods are combined to provide a backdrop within which a Return on Investment (ROI) assessment could be formulated. This facet of the research is pre-dominantly ex-post (i.e. an evaluation following implementation) in design thus retrospective.

Ultimately, the intention of this research is to assist the TSRA (and thus other similarly oriented Indigenous development organisations) develop an impact-oriented social, economic, environmental and cultural program planning, design and implementation framework. The approach is one based on achieving positive impacts in accord with sustainable development principles and goals.

Following the first major fifteen-year global development agenda codified under the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) spanning 2000 to 2015, the post 2015 international aspirations for human development are premised on goals for sustainable development. Adopted by the UN General Assembly in September 2015, the set of seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) represents a culmination of international dialogue since the early 1970s. Here international discourse focused on concerns about the environmental and social consequences associated with merely the pursuit of economic growth as the springboard to development.

This global discourse became galvanised with the release of the Brundtland Report (Our Common Future) in the late eighties and the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development – the Earth Summit in 1992. Here the common parlance explicitly diagnoses that long-term poverty eradication and human flourishing could only be achieved via integrating economic growth with close management and protection of natural resources and the environment, along with measures to foster equitable and inclusive social and political relations (United Nations, 2019, n.p). Therefore, this thesis is underpinned conceptually by sustainable development principles and goals consistent with the aspirations that only through the inter-connectedness of economic growth with social justice and the need for preservation of oceans and habitats and confronting climate change will be fundamental for meeting future human needs.

It is these principles that guide and complement development of a suitable performance monitoring, measurement and evaluation systems for small social agencies. These principles inform the synthesis of appropriate methods and tools designed to assess the efficiency of activities, achievement of results, and more effectively measure and articulate impacts. This aspect of the research project is ex-ante in approach (i.e. prospective) and includes a feasibility assessment of

incorporating experimental and quasi-experimental evaluation designs into future TSRA policy, planning and program development processes.

The primary research question that this thesis aims to examine is thus:

Has the Indigenous regional social development agency, the Torres Strait Regional Authority, made an impact on the wellbeing of Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal residents of the Torres Strait, and if so, how and in what ways could TSRA's development impact be effectively assessed?

In order to answer this primary research question, the following Research Objectives (RO) are pursued:

***RO-1:** Assess the adequacy of the existing Impact Evaluation (IE) methods and designs using the TSRA as a case study;*

***RO-2:** Design and implement a methodology to practically assess social development organisations using the case study of TSRA;*

***RO-3:** Develop a system for ongoing planning, monitoring and impact evaluation of the TSRA; and,*

***RO-4:** Analyse the transferability of the developed system to Indigenous settings.*

1.3 Scope

This research opportunity was developed during discussions with the administrative leadership of the TSRA and subsequently approved in writing by the then Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and Chairperson of the TSRA in 2016 (Appendix 1). It was the original intent that the research should be driven predominantly by the findings and conclusions contained within the 2013/14 ANAO Performance Audit of the organisation.

During the early deliberations of the initial research proposal, the federal Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet (DPM&C) issued the release of a series of Social Return on Investment (SROI) Evaluations of Indigenous Protected Area

and Indigenous Rangers under the Working on Country Programs in 2016 (Social Ventures Australia (SVA), 2016). These reports promulgated that for at least one Indigenous ranger program site (Warddeken), every single dollar invested into these programs yielded social returns according to a SROI ratio of 3.4:1 (SVA, 2016, p. 24). Based on this type of analysis, the claim was that approximately AU \$55.4 million of 'social value' was generated from investments of \$16.5 million (SVA, 2016, p. 24).

Using a particular methodology drawing on Cost-Benefit Analysis (CBA) and other econometric approaches, these SROI findings provided the impetus for a political movement aimed at doubling of funding to be allocated towards those Indigenous landcare and environmental protection programs. These claims garnered a high degree of publicity in the lead up to the 2016 Australian Federal Election (e.g. Gartrell, 2016). Given the potential benefit in terms of advocacy along with a range of other promotional opportunities, this type of analysis appealed to the authorised representatives of the TSRA.

On the basis of the context set out above, the scope of this study is to develop appropriate methodologies and be able to cover a broad ranging analysis of financial data over a little more than a twenty year timeframe. This is followed by an analysis of community grants and program performance information over a period of seven financial years. It includes a small within case-study vignette of an evaluation process of a remote construction project, ultimately outlining the issues and implications of defining the scope for an evaluation of the TSRA's 2014-18 Torres Strait Development Plan 2014-18 (TSDP).

This is drawn from particular reference to the ANAO commentary regarding the possible learning that could be derived from evaluating that plan. Furthermore, to complement the case study, there is a more detailed within case examination of; an evaluation commissioned by the TSRA regarding Torres Strait Seawalls, TSRA's Safe Communities Grants activities, and the development of a regional data agreement between the TSRA and Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). The latter output was directly informed by this thesis project.

Ultimately, this research has sought to evaluate the impact of the TSRA's policies and programmes with the central aim of quantifying and valuing these impacts over the defined period of the recently concluded TSDP and develop a new system for planning, monitoring and impact evaluation. Where relevant, and where suitable data exists, some aspects of the scope of analysis were conducted over an extended timeframe to incorporate analysis over particular features whereby demonstrable organisational results had been achieved.

1.4 Significance

Medium and small regional or community based Indigenous organisations along with other agencies with a mandate to deliver social change and community development activities are coming under increased pressure to measure their operations, outcomes, and demonstrate results to interested parties in order to secure resources essential for functioning. The significance of this research is both practical and applied thus making a contribution to existing knowledge and theory. Practical application of the research is achieved in terms of assisting the TSRA and other significant stakeholders to understand the impacts and results of its work. Thus, it assists the organisation to more effectively frame its planning and programming initiatives and monitor activities based on the achievement of positive impact and to better communicate and report its results to multiple stakeholders.

In contributing to knowledge and theory, the research generates a broader appreciation of the strengths and limitations of evaluation methodologies (with a particular focus on Impact Evaluation (IE) in remote Indigenous and complex regional development contexts. It also contributes to the knowledge associated with developing mixed-method approaches to planning for impact and integrating IE into to operations of social and third-sector organisations.

1.4.1 Practical significance

Undertaking this research required work within a geographically bounded region, with a small to medium sized Indigenous statutory agency³ charged with the

³ TSRA has maintained an approximate staffing profile of 140-150 people. See Section 6.5 page 127.

delivery of a broad social development mandate in a complex development environment. The results of this research work were initially designed to assist the TSRA and its key stakeholders in articulating and where possible, evaluating their impact on the wellbeing of the Indigenous population of the region. Examples of how in practice the research outcomes may be applied include:

- a) Articulation of an evaluative process to ascertain the social, cultural, economic and environmental benefits of a significant publicly funded investment via the TSRA as a case-study;
- b) Identification of a range of regionally relevant data-sets, baselines, benchmarks and trend analysis, and assistance with the development of data sharing agreements across agencies;
- c) Develop the rationale underpinning a performance evaluation model built on a robust logical framework premised on measuring impact in accord with sustainable development principles; and,
- d) Develop a series of guides, presentations and other outputs to assist the TSRA to design appropriate impact monitoring and evaluation methods and develop indicators for regional development plans, policies and programs.

1.4.2 Contribution to knowledge and theory

Following recent guidance on conducting IE by high profile Australian Government agencies (CSIRO, DIIS etc) this research seeks to enhance the understanding of how impact can be assessed and evaluated in a remote and culturally distinct context. It was anticipated that the process and conduct of the analysis in the Indigenous context will also contribute to knowledge pertaining to the communities and peoples of the Torres Strait. The development of a transferable and adaptable set of impact-oriented planning methods and tools based on sustainable development principles contributes to theory associated with the sustainable development for remote population groups. It will be particularly relevant to those remote communities prone to pressures associated with climate change and other environmental circumstances (rising sea levels, water and food security etc) and a

range of complex economic, social and cultural change drivers. The research also contributes to knowledge and theory regarding building Indigenous agency capability and capacity in terms of the following principles for conducting IE as outlined by the Department of Industry, Innovation and Science (DIIS):

- a) **Advocacy** — demonstrating the value of investment in a particular program or portfolio;
- b) **Allocation** — informing how funding will be allocated across potential program, by linking *ex ante* and *ex post* impact evaluation (before and after implementation);
- c) **Analysis** — learning what is working to inform continuous improvement including providing information on effectiveness and the efficiencies associated with scaling up;
- d) **Accountability** — effective risk management (DIIS, 2015, p. 23).

1.5 Thesis structure and chapter overview

This thesis is structured in the format ascribed by and in accordance with the Curtin University guidelines (Rule 10) for Doctorate level thesis production. The thesis comprises eight chapters structured according to the following:

Chapter One: Introduction

This chapter provides the introduction to the Doctorate thesis outlining the research questions and research issues associated with Measuring the Impact of the Torres Strait Regional Authority. The primary aim of this chapter is to give a broad overview of the approach taken and seeks to articulate the research objectives, aims, and significance of undertaking the research. Included in the overview is a summary of the research catalyst and drivers along with a narrative outlining research scope and motivations.

Chapter Two: Torres Strait Context and Operational Environment

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the context within which this research was undertaken including a description setting the scene in terms of geography, regional

characteristics, and key historical events that have influenced TSRA's current operational milieu. It describes the rich and unique history and some of the cultural influences that have shaped the institutional and – without overstating – the complex governance structures of the region. It seeks to impart to the reader some of the cultural protocols and observances that have had to be navigated in order to produce this work.

Chapter Three: Literature Review: Conceptual and Theoretical Framework for evaluation

This chapter traverses the key conceptual and theoretical literature related to evaluation and rapid increase in the number of Impact Evaluations following, particularly after the adoption of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in the year 2000. It canvasses a wide range of issues including the relatively contested field of social research and in particular the application, relevance and validity of scientific research paradigms. This includes what has been described as the 'raging debates' over methodological rigour as explained by White (2009) and other theorists both within the evaluation community and amongst their multi-disciplinary interlocutors. Given the plethora of perspectives, models and approaches to the field of IE, the chapter also describes various definitions of IE and the reasons associated with the apparent absence thereof.

Chapter Four: Evaluation Research Design, Methodology and Methods

An overview of the design and approach adopted for the research is provided. It seeks to provide a basis for the adopted evaluative research design and associated methods used to develop a suitable Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) system for the TSRA to consider in future development planning. The chapter also aims to ground the ontological, epistemological and methodological foundations outlined in the previous chapter, which will in turn guide the choice of study design. The research design underpins the rationale and framework for data selection and collection processes that are incorporated into the analysis that follow.

This chapter also explores some of the ethical, moral, political and organisational considerations and sensitivities that emerged for the researcher during the research process. This is particularly relevant given the researcher's past professional working experience in the region and as a public official of the TSRA. Therefore, also

included is a discussion on the extent to which any particular partiality has influenced this work and in what ways an attempt was made to minimize any interference with the validity of the results obtained due to the potential for bias.

Chapter Five: TSRA Case Study: Scope and Parameters

This chapter provides a narrative explaining the parameters and scope of the case study. It aims to set out the rationale for decisions pertaining to data identification, selection and analysis. This narrative demarcating the scope and parameters for the research is consistent with the ANAO 2013 audit commentary and findings.

Chapter Six: Analysis of the Case Study

This chapter outlines the sources and type of data that was collected and analysed as part of the research thesis. Firstly, it explains how the early stages of data analysis led the researcher to consider more thoroughly the research issues, implications and complexities associated with pursuing an approach that was to an extent exploratory and abductive. As this represented a very new way of working for the TSRA organisationally and politically, the ‘abductive’ approach was considered the most effective given the financial and resource context of the organisation at that time.

This chapter maps data over a twenty-year timeframe and presents a broad analysis of largely quantitative financial (income and expenditure) data along with other aspects of the organisation’s investments over this horizon. It touches on some of the challenges and barriers associated with this approach. An analysis of the TSRA’s community funding grants data from its Healthy Communities, Safe Communities and Culture, Arts and Heritage Programmes covering a period of three financial years (2012-2015) was also undertaken. This analysis incorporates a quantification of approximately AU \$8.5 million in approved funding in response to community requests for almost AU \$25 million in that period.

Chapter Seven: Findings and Discussion

Chapter seven builds upon the predominantly descriptive analysis of a wide range program and financial data presented in Chapter Six. It also provides a detailed critique of the ANAO’s findings and some of the factors (largely inferred) associated with how they ultimately formulated their overall audit conclusions. Following this is an assessment of the changes that were introduced to the TSRA’s annual reporting

structures including additional metrics and data pertaining to social trends and the extent to which they might reinforce performance claims. Therefore, this chapter considers some of the issues associated with reporting on services based on previous evaluations of Indigenous services delivery in other locations under the since abandoned national partnerships on services delivery.

A consideration of the mixed methods evaluation approach to Indigenous policies and programs as promulgated by the CIS in their 2017 Indigenous Evaluation Toolkit is provided. Here discussion focusses on which aspects of TSRA programs, activities and reporting might facilitate assessment against the strong methodology as posited by CIS (as opposed to the moderate and weak Indigenous evaluations). This discussion is framed in the context of the preceding analysis of TSRA's PBS KPIs statements that the agency had reported annually to parliament. It considers the applicability of some of the essential elements of the Indigenous program evaluations that CIS pointed to in the toolkit which they considered to be 'strong' evaluations. This includes some level of consideration of which aspects of those evaluative designs may have been either suited or not-compatible to TSRA's reporting context. Importantly this Chapter explains and analyses two key research outputs as a direct result of this research process, including the design and conduct of the evaluation of the complex Torres Strait Seawalls Infrastructure Project and the design of the Torres Strait Regional Statistics and Data Library via a formal partnership with the Australian Bureau of Statistics.

Chapter Eight: Summary, Recommendations and Conclusions

The final chapter summarises the overall outcome of the research process and production of the thesis. It also provides an overall reflection on the research journey and provides some concluding anecdotes and recommendations for future research directions. This concluding chapter also outlines some of the broader systemic considerations that must inevitably be navigated in order to conduct evaluations in essentially one of the most sensitive social policy domains in Australia.

“If we are to see improvements in outcomes, we need to know which policies work and why. But the overwhelming lack of robust, public evaluation of programs highlights the imperative for Indigenous policy evaluation”

(Chester, 2016, p.2)

CHAPTER 2: TORRES STRAIT OVERVIEW AND TSRA OPERATING CONTEXT

A number of prominent evaluation researchers and scholars have posited that developing a thorough understanding of social context is fundamental to interpreting outcomes and impacts of policy aimed at social change (Antoine, 2010; White and Philips, 2012; White, 2009a). As Harold White asserts,

“The programme theory has to be set in the social, political, and cultural context of the intervention, which will be one means of highlighting expected heterogeneity of impact” (White, 2009a, p. 283).

Further to designing development interventions, White also argues that *“going deep on context (historical, political and cultural) is essential”* in order to analyse and promulgate credible conceptions of impact (White, 2015, p. 376).

Therefore, this chapter aims to provide a brief and high-level introduction to the Torres Strait, its geography, peoples, history and culture. While this background context is important, much has already been written therefore this chapter seeks to focus more on the antecedents to the establishment and operations of the TSRA. This is to provide the reader with a general understanding of the regional development imperatives in which TSRA policy is developed and program activities implemented.

This chapter thus outlines the jurisdiction of the TSRA, along with some of the key regional demographic, economic, environmental and cultural characteristics where appropriate and relevant to this study. It also touches at a high level on some of the most important regionally specific political and policy influences on the region, notably factors such as the independence of Papua New Guinea (PNG) and subsequent Torres Strait Treaty arrangements, the Mabo High Court Decision and its implications for land ownership and rights, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) and related governance implications, and important local aspirations for regional autonomy (now commonly referred to as “One Boat”).

It is however, not the primary aim, nor within the scope of this thesis to provide a detailed ethnography or anthropological study of the Torres Strait region, or its rich

and diverse peoples and culture, as this has already been the subject of numerous and detailed texts, notably those produced by Haddon et al, (1901); Beckett (1987); Mullins (1994); and Ganter (1994), to name just a few. For example, the compendium of papers compiled and produced by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) in 2004, *Woven Histories Dancing Lives: Torres Strait Islander Identity, Culture and History* (edited by Davis, 2004) provides a rich and detailed exploration of the history and anthropology of the Torres Strait. It is important however, to orient the reader to some of the key geographical features, historical milestones and unique characteristics of Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal culture (described in Torres Strait creole as Ailan Kastom) in order to effectively frame the TSRA in relation to its legislated regional social development mandate and objectives.

2.1 Geography and jurisdiction

The Torres Strait region refers to the area comprising the northern tip of Cape York Peninsula in the Australian State of Queensland and extends approximately 150 km north to Australia's only international border with Papua New Guinea (PNG). Encompassing an area of nearly 42,000 km², the northernmost point is approximately 4 km from mainland PNG and 74 km from West Papua and the international sea boundary of Indonesia. The region was endowed its name following the 16th century navigation by Luis Vaz de Torres (Hilda, 1980).

Comprising approximately 274 islands dispersed in cluster type formations featuring a range of topographic and eco-system diversity. The northernmost islands proximate to PNG feature marshy low-lands fortified by alluvial sediments flushed into the sea from the neighbouring south-western PNG river systems. By comparison the eastern islands feature volcanic elevations, while those in the central region are predominantly coral cays (Lawrence and Lawrence, 2004, p.17). According to a number of archaeological theorists including David and McNiven (2004), and Harris (1995), the cluster of western Torres Islands are remnant peaks of the northern spine of the Great Dividing Range morphed into islands following sea-level rise as a consequence of the last ice age. It is proposed that this array of islands likely formed the basis of a pre-historic land-bridge between Australia and PNG (Moore, 1979).

Across its width, the region forms a nexus to the west, linking the Arafura Sea and Gulf of Carpentaria extending to the Coral Sea in the east. Notoriously hazardous in terms of ocean navigation, submerged in the relatively shallow waters (7-50 meters depth) are approximately 580 coral reefs covering almost 2,400 km² (930 sq. miles). Strong tidal currents wash through the constrained island and reef channels, submerged under which are among the most extensive seagrass beds on earth (Coles et al, 2003).

Co-joining the Great Barrier Reef lagoon to the south-east, the Adolphus Channel serves as the main shipping route to the region via the Endeavour Strait in the south between Prince of Wales Island and Cape York. Falling within Australian territory, the regions' residents inhabit eighteen island communities, along with two communities on the north peninsula region of Cape York (Seisia and Bamaga) which were populated by Torres Strait Islanders following relocation from islands near the border of PNG (Ober et al, 2000)^{4 5}.

The region is typified as remote, and the inhabited island communities are geographically dispersed and culturally distinct. These logistical and geographic complexity, time and costs related to travel between communities, *“compounds the challenges associated with the effective implementation of policies, projects and delivery of government services”* (ANAO, 2013, p. 4).

The inhabited islands of the Torres Strait are traditionally clustered into five groupings (see Figure 2.1):

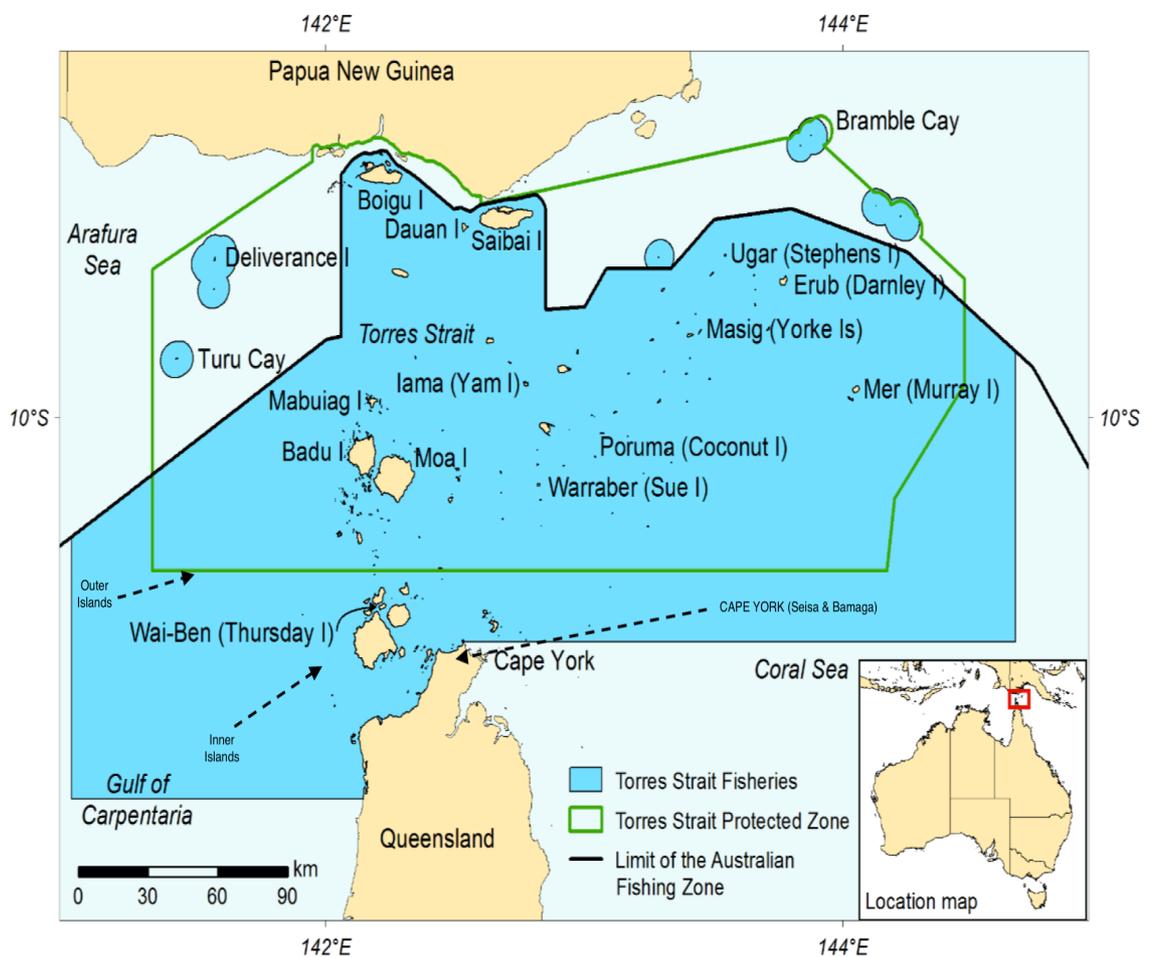
- ***Top Western Islands*** – *Boigu, Dauan, Saibai*
- ***Western Islands*** – *Badu, Mabuaig, Moa - Kubin and St Pauls communities*

⁴ Note also that there are three other established communities located in near proximity to Bamaga and Seisia (New Mapoon, Injinoo & Umagico) on the northern tip of Cape York. These communities are predominantly Aboriginal and do not have representation on the Board of TSRA and receive Commonwealth funding separate from the TSRA via the Department of Prime Minister & Cabinet). Thus, these communities are not featured on the TSRA Service Delivery map in Figure 2.

⁵ For a detailed discussion on the establishment of Torres Strait Communities on the mainland at Seisia and Bamaga, see D Ober, J Sproats and R Mitchell, (2000) *Saibai to Bamaga, The Migration from Saibai to Bamaga on the Cape York Peninsula*, (Bamaga Island Council, Joe Sproats & Associates, Townsville; 2000,) <https://www.qld.gov.au/atsi/cultural-awareness-heritage-arts/community-histories-seisia>

- **Central Islands** - Iama (Yam Island), Masig (Yorke Island) Poruma (Coconut Island) Warraber (Sue Island)
- **Eastern Islands** - Mer (Murray island) Ugar (Stephen Island⁶) Erub (Darnley island)
- **Inner Islands** - Hammond Island, Muralag (Prince of Wales Island), Ngurupai (Horn Island), Thursday Island - TRAWQ [Tamwoy, Rosehill, Aplin, Waiben and Quarantine] and Port Kennedy (WA Legislative Assembly, 2008, p.9)

Figure 2.1: Torres Strait Regional Map



Source: Australia National Audit Office (2019 n.p)

⁶ 'Stephen Island' is the non-indigenous name for the Island employed by the TSRA and a number of government agencies. However, the Queensland Department of Natural Resources and Water notes that the Island was named 'Stephens Island' by Captain William Bligh on 7 September 1792, after Sir Philip Stephens, Secretary of the Admiralty (Queensland Department of Natural Resources and Water, Available at: www.nrw.qld.gov.au/property/placenames/index.php Accessed on 18 January 2008).

2.2 Pre (European) contact - social and cultural context

Beckett (2004, p. 2) outlines that Torres Strait Islanders represent Australia's "other" Indigenous minority, and although related to an extent, are also distinct from both New Guinea Papuans to the north, and Aboriginal people of the mainland. It is suggested that the Torres Strait region is reputed internationally as the site (or place) at which Australian Aboriginal and Melanesian "cultural and ecological" realms meet. Archaeologists have described this region as essentially a "transition zone between the horticultural and hunter-gatherer worlds" (David and McNiven, 2004, p. 200).

It is purported that the initial inhabitants of the region originated from the archipelagos proximate to Indonesia at a time when the Australian and New Guinea continents were attached some 70,000 years ago. These original occupants were then followed by further waves of migration (*ABC Radio Australia, 2005*). According to Barham (1999 & 2000) and Woodroffe (2000), radiocarbon estimates from reef and island coring samples indicate that the region was established as an island archipelago following rising sea-levels approximately 8000 years BP⁷. Therefore, it is supposed that the antecedents to Islander seafaring life corresponded to this period also. It is then promulgated that the Torres region, "functioned as a bridge and barrier for diffusion of cultural traits (and flora/fauna) between North Eastern Australia and Melanesia" (Walker, 1972, p. 7).

In terms of documented ceremonial, village and community life, along with examples of rock-art, it is believed that demographic intensification occurred in the region approximately 2500 years BP with evident sustained proliferation of social activities some 1500 years BP. As David and McNiven conclude, there was, "a later emergence or consolidation of ethnographically known ritual places and practices, perhaps as recently as c.500yrs BP" (2004, p. 206). In 2005, the Australian Broadcasting Commission (ABC) – Radio Australia Program opined that prior to European contact,

⁷ **Before Present (BP)** years is a time scale used mainly in geology and other scientific disciplines to specify when events occurred in the past. Because the "present" time changes, standard practice is to use 1 January 1950 as the commencement date of the age scale, reflecting the origin of practical radiocarbon dating in the 1950s. see Taylor (1985).

“The original inhabitants lived in small communities relying on fishing, hunting and the growing of crops for their subsistence. Trade in artefacts made of pearl shell, turtle shell, feathers, canoes and tools were very important in the life of Torres Strait Islanders. Although it is likely that Chinese, Malay and Indonesian traders had explored the islands before him, the first navigator credited with coming across the islands is the Spaniard Luis Vaez de Torres who sailed through the strait in 1606” (ABC, Radio Australia, 2005).

The legacy of these voyages is obviously derived through the naming conventions applied across the region.

2.3 Post-European contact

Following the initial foray by the Spanish in the early part of the seventeenth century, it is posited that the region did not become the focus of significant European investigation until the later part of the 18th century. Lawrence and Lawrence (2004), contemplate that these incursions were broadly aligned with the expansion of Australian colonisation. Excursions to the region were galvanised more as a result of navigational difficulty, wrecked shipping and *“loss of life, rather than any real interest in the peoples and cultures of the Torres Strait”* (Lawrence and Lawrence 2004, p. 22).

The authors provide an erudite enumeration of early documented European contact including the voyages of Bligh following the famous *Bounty* mutiny in 1789 and the sighting and naming of the Murray Islands from the decks of the *Pandora* in 1791. These early accounts included violent skirmishes in 1793 at Erub Island between local residents and the crews of the *Hormuzzer* and *Chesterfield* and the early 19th century explorations by Flinders and the *Investigator*, who had navigated through the Strait providing for descriptions of local inhabitants and their seafaring ways, including canoes and other vessels (Lawrence and Lawrence, 2004, p. 22)

Various accounts and ethnographies of the region’s people and culture were penned following voyages throughout the middle of the 19th century paving the way for the excursion from the London Missionary Society (LMS) in 1871. The official annexation of the Islands by the Queensland Government (then still a British colony)

subsequently occurred in 1879 (*ABC Radio, 2005*). Thus, Torres Strait Islanders became denizens of Australia, however full citizenship, allowing for voting and rites of free passage and migration, was not bestowed until the 1967 referendum (Beckett, 1972).

The following section provides a summary of some (but in no means all) of the key historical milestones that have influenced the contemporary context and culture of the Torres Strait region. These events include; arrival of missionaries in the late 1800s, the landmark anthropological and ethnographic field studies conducted by Haddon during the Cambridge expeditions, the pearling industry and the maritime strike, the international treaty between Australia and PNG, the historic Mabo land rights claim, and other factors related to the strategic significance of the region.

2.3.1 Missionaries

The 1871 arrival of the LMS, also referred to as the “Coming of the Light” (which still resonates strongly today), had a salient impact on the traditional ways of life and Islander religious practices. Both Beckett (1987), and Sharp (1992), describe in detail the prohibitions enacted by the Christian missionaries on traditional dance, ceremony and cultural mores, along with the destruction of sacred artefacts, objects, shrines and traditional masks and headdress (Sharp, 1993, p.100). However, despite these historic religious incursions, various versions of introduced religious practice have been widely adopted into current regional cultural gestures and customs (i.e. *Ailan Kastom*). For example, there is a scheduled annual holiday and community festivities celebrating the “Coming of the Light”. It is also customary (and in fact included in formal cultural protocols documents) to open and close formal meetings (including somewhat semi-formal meetings), with prayers and associated verbal offerings usually in traditional language or creole.

Lawrence (2004), proposes that the introduction of Christian values has not completely usurped pre-contact spiritual and cultural beliefs and practices among Islanders, notably communities located on the eastern islands. She ruminates that religious practices as purveyed by the various Christian missions, churches and sects, have a high degree of shared commitment among Islanders. This commitment

manifests in a frame of reference for many contemporary “*social and political activities*”. Moreover, Lawrence speculates that,

“This is not incongruous, nor does it create conflict; on the contrary, the absorption of earlier pre-Christian concepts and practices into contemporary Christian lifestyles provides continuity in cultural heritage maintenance and has helped to shape uniquely Indigenous forms of Christianity” (Reeves Lawrence, 2004, as cited in Davis eds, 2004, p. 46).

2.3.2 Cambridge expedition, ethnography and anthropology

One of the earliest and well known anthropological and ethnographic undertakings was compiled by an expedition of researchers from Cambridge University in 1898 led by Alfred Haddon. Haddon, it is noted, had completed zoological research ten years prior in 1888 during which he had formulated ethnographies of western island communities (Urry, 1985, p. 77). According to Sillitoe (1976), the team of Cambridge subject matter experts were assembled to conduct “holistic” studies of the region spanning psychology, social organisation, ethnomedicine, physiology, ethnomusicology, linguistics, religion and technology (Sillitoe, 1976, p. 21).

Undertaken during a period of significant regional social, cultural and political upheaval and change, it is suggested that one of Haddon’s primary motivators was the protection of traditional art, culture and ceremonial customs. In particular, there was a sense that cultural artefacts were at imminent threat of destruction by “*the zealous Christian missionaries intent on obliterating the religious traditions and ceremonies of the native islanders*” (Lawrie, 1970, p.18). Subsequently, Haddon’s extensive publications, including the 1901 book, *Head-hunters, Black, White and Brown* and the six volumes: *Reports of the Cambridge Anthropological Expedition to Torres Straits* were published over three decades between 1901-1935 (Philp, 1999, p. 58).

Haddon, it is suggested, was driven by a desire to record and maintain all sources of information on Indigenous cultures prior to them being subsumed by the forces of modern civilisation. According to Mullins (1996), Haddon’s seven-month expedition, “*broke new ground in almost every aspect of its work*” (Mullins, 1996, 74). Haddon’s research team forged new ground in the use of genealogy to represent

complex social systems, reconstructed ceremonies, recorded traditional speech and songs on wax disks and captured among the first ethnographic film footage. According to Mullins “*The result was a rigorous and sophisticated regional ethnography. It remains the seminal work in Torres Strait studies*” (Mullins, 1996, p. 3).

After Haddon’s explorations other researchers followed. Of note is the more contemporary compendium of work undertaken by Jeremy Beckett, Margaret Lawrie, and Nonie Sharp among many others. For example, in the comprehensive collection of essays ‘*Woven Histories, Dancing Lives: Torres Strait Islander Identity, Culture & History*’ (Davis ed, 2004), Jeremy Beckett, elucidates an animated essay enumerating key contemporary anthropological and ethnographic research. In his essay, ‘*Writing about Islanders: recent research and future directions (2004)*’, the author explains that Torres Strait Islanders,

“as Australia’s other Indigenous minority, not to mention their hospitality, make them an attractive subject to writers as to readers—including themselves.” (Beckett, J., in Davis ed, 2004, p.2)

2.3.4 Pearl industry and Maritime Strike

For almost a century, perhaps one of the most important regional commodities was derived from pearls and their shells. It is claimed that this resource provided the driver for a wave of incoming migration notably from East Asia (Japan, Malaysia, Philippines etc) and Micronesia, along with Europeans. As Ganther (1994, p.13) proposes, Thursday Island became the foci for settlement and by the late 19th century “*more than a hundred*” pearl luggers controlled by 16 firms employed over 700 crew. Sharp (1981), provides a detailed account of the events, tensions and antecedents that led to the much publicised Maritime Strike following almost half a century of pearl harvesting in the Torres Strait in the 1930s.

The author depicts this as a decisive historical strategy by up to 3000-4000 “*home grown Melanesians*” to “*break the grip of the administration*” by demands “*that they run their own affairs*” (Sharp, 1981, p.71). This much publicised strike, as Sharp deduces, stemmed from a ‘clash of cultures’ in which Islanders had suffered the imposition of cultural mores (i.e. European) that were self-labelled as “*more*

civilised and enlightened” (Sharp, 1981, p.71). These tensions were fuelled not only by a rapid deflation in pearl prices and corresponding drive to increase productivity and transition to waged work, but by a deeper sense of control, self-determination and a bid for equality. As Sharp discerns, not only did Islanders seek equality and favourable resource prices for their pearl product but,

“They wanted the right to decide themselves the terms on which they would participate in the pearling industry. The boats were theirs and they had their own priorities, and these were different to those of the society which ruled them”. (Sharp, 1981, p. 115)

Despite the collapse in the pearl trade as a consequence of increased competition from the plastics industry (Ganter, 1994), themes of control, autonomy and self-determination continue, as emblazoned in the Torres maritime strike. These historical events ruminate strongly in contemporary Islander social, political and organisational spheres and are considered in more detail in the context of the TSRA in subsequent chapters.

2.3.5 Papua New Guinea independence and Torres Strait Treaty

At the time of the first missionary and research expeditions to the region, it is almost certain that there were economic and social similarities between Islander communities and the Papuan villages in the PNG southern provinces. Following the independence of PNG from Australian administration in 1975, an agreement was struck in 1978 demarcating the maritime border between the respective countries which traversed the Torres Strait. During the early iterations of PNG independence negotiations, it had been promulgated by the then Commonwealth Department for Aboriginal Affairs to *“cede eight Torres Strait Islands north of the 10th parallel to the newly independent Papua New Guinea as a demonstration of ‘good will’*” (Kehoe-Forutan, as cited in Davis, 2004, p.174).

Reminiscent of the maritime strike, Islanders were able to effectively mobilise and resist the scheme through garnishing community grass-roots support and international visibility. By establishing a Border Action Committee local political leaders such as the late George Mye, were able to harness this support to influence State and Federal politicians (Kehoe-Forutan, in Davis 2004, p.175). This paved the

way for the ratification of the Torres Strait Treaty between PNG and Australia in 1985. The Treaty represents one of the most significant policy and institutional structures impacting upon the region in that it aims to support sustainable marine resource management, habitat, biodiversity, and traditional cultural interconnections with the communities of the PNG Western Provinces. Articles of the Treaty also establish the Torres Strait Protected Zone (TSPZ) allowing for each State to exercise sovereignty over the resources within ratified boundaries. However, within the TSPZ, traditional inhabitants from communities in the western provinces of PNG, along with those proximate to each side of the border are allowed increasing levels of unrestricted movement based on kinship, traditional movement and trading patterns (DFAT, 2018).

2.3.6 Strategic significance of the Torres Strait

As outlined in the map provided at figure 2.1, given the international norms with respect to maritime boundaries between sovereign states applied, a significant proportion of northern island communities in the region (along with the marine and other ecological resources) would have been fallen within the sovereign jurisdiction of PNG. In this respect the treaty and its impacts on local communities are unique in that it is Australia's only shared international border (O'Donnell, 2006, p. 131). The uniqueness of the international border arrangements in the region are suggested to be unlike any other as there is:

“no clearly marked frontier, few signs of border policing or customs control and free movement ... by ‘traditional visitors’, with no more formal documentation than a scribbled note from a village elder to confirm that the bearer has ‘traditional rights’ to visit the area”. (McFarlane, 1998, p.2)

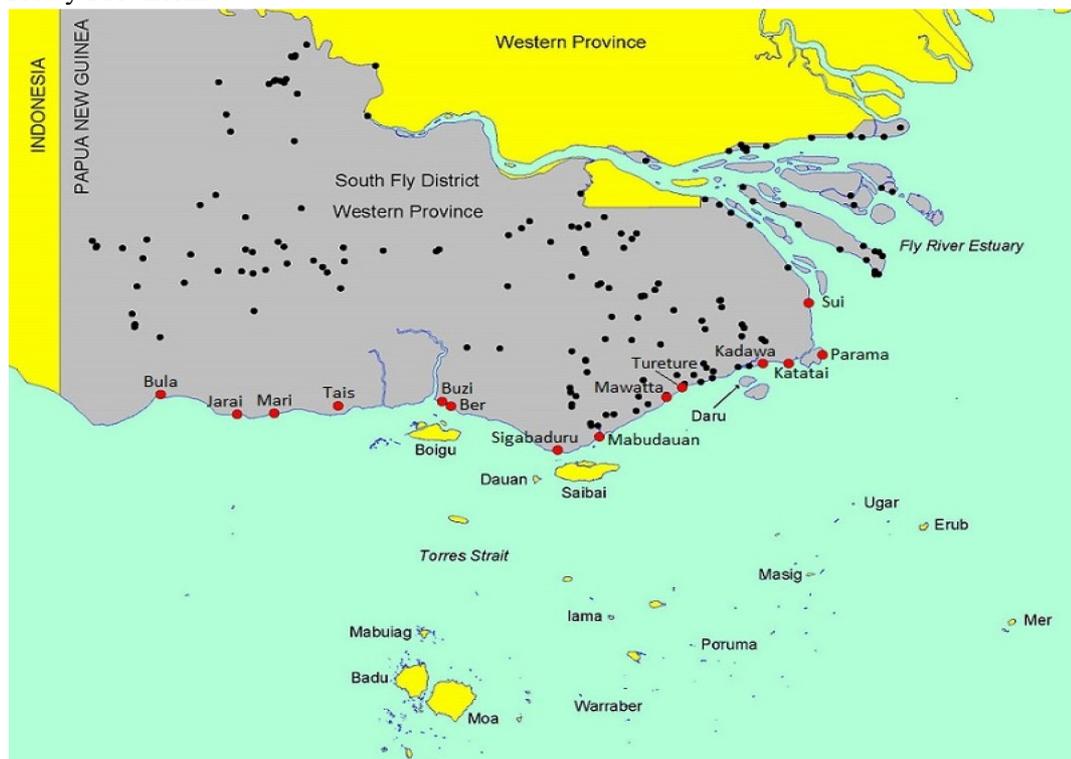
Notably, the Treaty also demarcates the Seabed Jurisdiction Line (SJL)⁸, which grants rights to all objects ‘on or below’ the seabed to each respective sovereign jurisdiction north and south of the SJL. However, PNG is required to recognise Australian sovereignty covering 15 islands and coral cays to the north of the SJL

⁸ Treaty between Australia and the Independent State of Papua New Guinea concerning sovereignty and maritime boundaries in the area between the two countries, including the area known as Torres Strait, and related matters, 18 December 1978 *
<http://www.un.org/depts/los/LEGISLATIONANDTREATIES/PDFFILES/TREATIES/AUS-PNG1978TS.PDF>

which includes, Saibai, Boigu, and Dauan communities for example (see also areas shaded in grey in the Figure 2.1).

An analysis of development progress in the communities proximate on both sides of the Australian and PNG border covered by the Torres Strait Treaty was undertaken by Busilacchi *et al.* (2018). The authors note a paucity of empirical analysis regarding the causes and solutions to remedy development asymmetries between countries separated by transboundary agreements, noting that in many cases they can inhibit initiatives geared towards sustainable development. Busilacchi and her colleagues (2018) discuss a number of high-profile examples of social and health issues magnified by development disparities between the two countries, including transmission of infectious diseases among other pronounced social issues impacting on the region. To address development disparity, they state that there is a “*necessity for transboundary agreements and institutions to have the capacity to adapt to their unintended consequences and rapid global change*” (Busilacchi et al., 2018, p. 4200). Figure 2.2 produced by the ANAO provides a regional overview of the geography and proximity of communities along both sides to the Torres Strait Treaty boundaries.

Figure 2.2: Map of the Torres Strait Islands and PNG villages covered by the Torres Strait Treaty Provisions



Source: (ANAO, 2019)

Perhaps more poignantly, and an issue that is revisited in subsequent analysis sections of this research, were the observations by a Western Australian Legislative Education and Health Standing Committee in 2008 that concluded:

“the strategic significance of the Torres Strait communities forms a backdrop to the distinctive government policies and level of resourcing which have been applied to the remote Indigenous communities of that region” (WAEHSC, 2008, p.13).

2.3.7 Mabo Decision

Famously, the Torres Strait region is also renowned for arguably one of the most significant milestones in Australian Indigenous land rights and policy following the 1992 High Court decision to grant native title rights to Eddie Mabo (along with other claimants) over Murray (Mer) Island. This historic decision upended the concept of ‘terra-nullius’ recognising the habitation of Australia prior to colonisation (Henry, 1993). According to Chaney (2013), *Mabo* represented the most pronounced change in power relations between colonial descendants and Australian Indigenous peoples since 1788. The decision elevated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders from the position as mere appellants to key stakeholders in decision making, particularly in economic negotiations with government, private and corporate interests. Chaney goes on to suggest that:

“At their best, miners and other commercial entities have much to show government about evidence-based approaches to policy and delivery, about the importance of and potential benefits from careful evaluation, about long-term approaches to tackling wicked problems, about learning by doing and about genuinely working in respectful partnerships” (Chaney, 2013, p.52).

Importantly, the Mabo decision has had a significant direct influence on the contemporary political decision making and policy implementation context in the Torres Strait region with the establishment of Prescribed Body Corporate (PBC) corporations created to ensure that nominated traditional land owners (as trustees) control native title decisions over the lands held under title. This context is examined in more detail in subsequent sections of this thesis.

2.4 Culture, custom (*Ailan Kastom*) and language

Many customary and cross-cultural protocols and norms of behaviour are both unique and have a particular reverence in the Torres Strait. Documented oral histories, including those annotated by Lawrie (1970) and Laade (1971), for example, traverse the inter-relations, migratory patterns and traditional trading practices between the Islanders and neighbouring Papuans and Aborigines. As Lawrence (2004) rightly identifies:

“Understanding the position of Torres Strait Islanders as people of the sea is crucial to understanding Islander values, culture, law and society.”
(Lawrence, 2004, p.26)

Jeremy Beckett, an ethnographer who is widely respected for his detailed monographs on TS Islander culture, explains local genealogies as being deeply Melanesian albeit with a degree of sub-regional variation. He also touches on some of the cultural and political narratives that emerge as a result of TS Islanders being, *“a unique example of a Melanesian people living within a predominantly European nation, yet they have been grouped with the Aboriginal peoples of Australia as ‘Indigenous’”* (Beckett, 1965, p.11).

In part, the cultural uniqueness of Islanders has led to a level of political assertiveness, resistance and protest to oppressive or discriminatory policy or laws. Observable results of these characteristics include, a distinctly designed and adopted Torres Strait emblem and flag, the active observance and conformity to the protocols of *Ailan Kastom*, an explicit desire for self-management, community control and protection of cultural and intellectual property and rights. The proactiveness of Islanders in terms of their social, religious and political affairs is also evident in the drive by Islanders to introduce Pentecostal churches (hence eroding the Anglican domination), and *“a keen interest in, and involvement with, social issues, especially in the areas of health, community welfare and education”* (Lawrence and Lawrence, 2014, p.28).

There exists a significant degree of linguistic diversity in the region. The two traditional Torres Strait language groups comprise a number of geographically oriented dialects along with a more broadly used form of Torres Creole or Pidgin. Across the islands to the east, Meriam Mir is commonly spoken. Linked to the

Papuan and Austronesian language groups it features two distinct dialects, *Mer dialect* (Murray - Waier, Dauar) and *Erub dialect* – Erub (Darnley) and Ugar (Stephen). The traditional language of the western and central islands is *Kala Lagaw Ya* (also described as Kalaw Lagaw Ya). This language features four regionally distinctive variants/dialects and it has origins akin to mainland Australian Aboriginal languages.

The distinctive dialects of this language include; “Mabuyag – (Mabuiag, Badu and St Paul's Village); Kalaw Kawaw Ya – (top western islands of Saibai, Dauan and Malu Ki'ai); Kawrereg – (south western islands of Kubin, Kaiwalagal, Muralag (Prince of Wales), Nurupai (Horn), Giralag (Friday), Waiben (Thursday Island), Keriri (Hammond), Maurura (Wednesday), Moa (Banks)⁹; Kulkalgau Ya – (central islands of Aurid, Damut, Iama, Masig, Mauar, Naghir, Poruma, and Warraber” (TSRA, 2012, pp. 2-3).

A widely used vernacular albeit with some degree of community-based variants is Torres Strait Creole (described as Ailan Tok or Yumplatok). Adapted over time influenced by contact with missionaries and others similar to Pidgin in PNG, Creole features standard English combined with traditional language. According to the Queensland Library, Torres Strait Creole, “*has its own distinctive sound system, grammar, vocabulary, usage and meaning*” (QLD, 2018)¹⁰. Following a National Indigenous Languages Survey in 2005, it was reported that Kala Lagaw Ya, Kala Kawawya (dialect) and Meriam Mir were in serious decline with a significant reduction in fluent speakers, especially by people of younger ages.

As the TSRA reports, results from the survey found that participants aged from 40 - 60+ years “*understood well, spoke fluently and spoke often*”. People interviewed between 0 - 40 years “*understood some words and spoke some words on a daily basis*” (TSRA, 2012, p.3). The geographic separation between islands is represented by the picture of Poruma Island below:

⁹ Also known as Kawalgau Ya.

¹⁰ See State Library Queensland <http://www.slq.qld.gov.au/resources/atsi/languages/torres-strait>, accessed 2 September 2018

Figure 2.3: *Poruma Island by air*



Source: (ANAO, 2013, p. 30)

2.5 Contemporary population and demographic characteristics

This section aims to provide an initial broad level snapshot of contemporary regional population and demographic characteristics related to the TSRA’s jurisdictional reach and mandate. In this respect, it is relevant to consider again the key aspects of TSRA’s legislative mandate which fundamentally relates to “*Progress towards closing the gap for Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal people living in the Torres Strait Region*” (ANAO, 2013, p.13). Therefore, the scope of statistical information dealt with in this research will primarily relate to the Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal residents of the region. Although, considering the multi-cultural aspects of the total regional population (particularly in the administrative centre of Thursday Island), regional demographics including non-Indigenous residents are canvassed.

2.5.1 National vs. regional statistics

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), at the time of the 2016 Census, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples represented approximately 2.8 per cent of the total Australian population (24.2 million). The highest proportion of the 649,200 people who identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) in 2016, acknowledged Aboriginal only descent at 91 per cent. Five (5) per cent

identified as of Torres Strait Islander (TSI) origin (i.e. 32,460), and 4.1 per cent (26,600) reported being of both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent (ABS, 2017). On a national basis, 59,000 people identified as being of both ATSI heritage.

Statistics produced by the Queensland Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships (DATSIP) are also compiled based on data derived from the ABS 2016 Census of Population and Housing ('Census') and supplemented by official statistics sourced through the Queensland government statistics office¹¹. In 2016, an estimated 81.4% percent of the Torres Strait region's population (approximately 7786 of 9560) identified as Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal people (DATSIP, 2018). Therefore, the estimated TSI and ATSI regional population represents approximately 13.2 per cent of those with similar heritage identifying nationally and approximately 1.2 per cent of the total national Aboriginal and TSI population. On a proportionate basis therefore, the Indigenous resident population in the Torres Strait region in 2016 comprises approximately 0.032 per cent (one third of 1 per cent of the national population of Australia).

2.5.2 Regional and local populations

Importantly, one of the first significant applied written outputs as a direct result of this thesis process, was the production of a submission that led to an important formal agreement being established between the ABS and the TSRA in 2017. One of the primary aims of this agreement was to scope and establish a regional demographic database repository. This database was to feature time series trend analysis across a range of social demographic trends using data derived through a number of formal statistical collections including national population Census' and other relevant social and health surveys.

The submission establishing the agreement and database was produced as a consequence of the ANAO findings regarding the paucity of relevant regional data and a deficit by TSRA in incorporating key social trend data analysis in their annual

¹¹ Note that regional population and demographic statics are derived from the Local Government Areas of Torres Shire and Torres Strait Islands Shire along with the Indigenous Location (ILOC) data generated for Bamaga and Surrounds and Seisia – Latest statistics updated 1 September 2018 from <https://statistics.qgso.qld.gov.au/profiles/datsip/indigenous/pdf>

reporting to Parliament (refer introduction Chapter 1). A more detailed analysis of key demographic, economic and social trends related to changes in the characteristics of the regional population is a feature of the subsequent chapters of this thesis. However, among the first analytical reports provided under the ABS/TSRA agreement is a summary table of community level population counts and changes to overall counts between 2011 and 2016 as replicated below at Table 2.1.

Table 2.4: *Distribution of Torres Strait Islander Population(a) Living in the region, 2011-2016*

Island Group/ Mainland Community	2011	2016	Change 2011 to 2016 (%)
Top Western Islands	668	790	+18.3
Boigu Island	185	229	+23.8
Dauan Island	129	168	+30.2
Saibai Island	351	389	+10.8
Western Islands	1,332	1,310	-1.7
Badu Island	696	697	+0.1
Kubin (Moa Island)	159	182	+14.5
Mabuiag Island	246	206	-16.3
St Pauls (Moa Island)	233	232	-0.4
Central Islands	873	941	+7.8
Iama (Yam Island)	281	293	+4.3
Poruma (Coconut Island)	142	156	+9.9
Warraber (Sue Island)	219	231	+5.5
Masig (Yorke Island)	236	255	+8.1
Eastern Islands	732	808	+10.4
Erub (Darnley Island)	342	304	-11.1
Mer (Murray Island)	341	429	+25.8
Ugar (Stephen Island)	48	69	+43.8
Inner Islands	2,175	2,638	+21.3
Hammond Island	206	245	+18.9
Ngurupai (Horn Island)	310	368	+18.7
Muralag (Prince of Wales) Island	41	80	+95.1
Port Kennedy (Thursday Island)	839	1,123	+33.8
TRAWQ (Thursday Island)	784	826	+5.4
Northern Peninsula Area Communities	959	1,128	+17.6

Seisia	138	195	+41.3
Bamaga and Surrounds	826	933	+13.0
Total Torres Strait Region(b)	6,744	7,615	+12.9

Source: ABS (2018, p.4)¹²

2.5.3 Considerations in interpreting population estimates

Importantly, it is prudent to reflect on issues regarding the collection and analyses of large-scale statistical compilations such as the Census vis-à-vis the enumeration of Indigenous peoples. This again will be a particular focus in subsequent sections of this research thesis. For example, commentators such Professor John Taylor from the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research (CAEPR), have suggested that there could be as much as 17.5% undercounting in population census' in remote Indigenous communities. Moran (2016), ruminates that an equivalent underestimation of 2016 statistical collection and reporting may have also occurred in some remote Queensland Indigenous communities (Moran, 2016)¹³. As mentioned, subsequent chapters of this thesis elaborate in more detail the individual, family and household demographics of the region including; age, family composition, housing, education, health and wellbeing. Before that further information about the governance structures of the Torres Strait is provided.

2.6 Regional governance structures and antecedents to TSRA establishment

As outlined in previous sections of this chapter, Islanders have demonstrated long held views on self-determination, autonomy and local control over key government decisions and policies that impact upon them. Sanders (1994) provides a lucid summary of key historical events, including those organisational, cultural, demographic and governance factors that led to the 1994 creation of the TSRA.

¹² (a) Based on usual residence Census counts Note: there are small random adjustments made to all cell values to protect the confidentiality of data. These adjustments may cause the sum of rows or columns to differ by small amounts from table totals.

¹³ See <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-06-28/concerns-over-undercount-of-indigenous-population-in-census/8660972>

Sander's chronicle of regional governance as at the early 1990's includes a description of *localized* governance arrangements under various forms of Queensland State legislation along with policy determinations at Federal level.

This enumeration covers an outline of the long history of local government in the region including the establishment of the Torres Shire Council (TSC) in 1903, and the identification of formal governance structures for the inhabitants of the region's outer islands dated back to at least 1899 (Sanders, 1994, p.3). By the late 1980s the Torres Strait had eighteen local government entities, seventeen of which (Island Councils), were established under the *Community Services (Torres Strait) Act 1984 (Qld)*, with the other under the Torres Shire Council, mandated by the *Queensland Local Government Act 1993 (Qld)* (McDonald, 2007, p. 44).

2.6.1 Regional federal policy prior to 1990

At the Federal level the region had representation on the Commonwealth's National Aboriginal Consultative Committee (NACC) throughout the early 1970s, and on the National Aboriginal Conference (NAC) in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Towards the latter part of the 1980s, the Commonwealth developed legislation based on Indigenous representative structures via establishment of elected regional councils with a national board of council elected commissioners (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission - ATSIC). During these consultations, "*(a) dedicated ATSIC regional council was proposed for Torres Strait*" (Sanders, 1994, p.3).

Leading up to the late 1980s federal policy and funding had largely been administered in the region by the federal Department of Aboriginal Affairs and Aboriginal Development Corporation. The Torres Region's regional representational governance was predominantly built upon the Island Coordinating Council (ICC) mandated by the *Community Services (Torres Strait) Act 1984 (Qld)*. The functions of the ICC as per the then Queensland legislation (*hallmarks of which reflect TSRA's contemporary enabling legislation*), included:

- "*considering and advising any person on matters affecting the progress, development and wellbeing of Islanders;*

- *making recommendations to the Minister and the chief executive about matters affecting the progress, development and wellbeing of Islanders;*
- *accepting grants or loans from the Queensland or Commonwealth Government or other sources, and spending that money in accordance with the terms of the grant or loan or, if there are no such terms, in securing the progress, development and wellbeing of Islanders; and*
- *establishing and operating lawful business for the promotion, progress, development and wellbeing of Islanders” (McDonald, 2007, p. 45).*

During the late 1980s, the then Hawke Labor Government objectives was to devolve greater levels of control to develop solutions to the circumstances that affected them. Underlying this devolution of decision making included policy measures to ensure that principles of accountability and decision making over policy and program funding were effective and efficient (Hand, 1989 and 1994). Of this time, Sanders identifies that,

“Since 1987/8, those living in the Strait have successfully mobilised ideas about cultural difference and physical discreteness in a strong push for greater regional autonomy” (Sanders, 1994, p.2).

2.6.2 ATSIC, autonomy and establishment of TSRA

In part galvanised by the Commonwealth’s consultation over the establishment of the new ATSIC proposals, and to a degree, fortunate timing given the bi-centenary of colonisation, TSI leaders via the ICC made public appeals for regional autonomy and independence. Among the demands was, *“full recognition of the institutions, culture and territories of the Torres Strait; rights to control and develop their own resources and economy”*, and *“claims for sovereignty over the land, sea and air”* (Kehoe-Forutan, 1988, p.12). Furthermore, there were calls for the ICC to be provided authority for revenue-raising, trade, fishing, mining, land, broadcasting and to the funding and resourcing (including staff) of the Commonwealth Indigenous portfolio agencies in Torres Strait (Scott and Mulrennan, 1999).

Even at this juncture in regional governance, the aspirations of Islanders were apparent in that the then ATSIC legislation was able to be redrafted to accommodate

special provisions for the Torres Strait. It was established as a dedicated ATSIC Regional Council zone with its own respective national representative. Sanders writes of this time that:

“Torres Strait Islanders objected to the idea that members of this new regional council might be elected independently of Island Council elections and suggested instead that Island Council Chairpersons/ICC members should automatically be members of the new body. To this the Commonwealth agreed” (Sanders, 1994, p.3).

Supplementing the original Torres ICC membership from 18 to 20 with the inclusion of representatives from the Torres Shire jurisdiction, the Torres Strait ATSIC Regional Council (TSRC) was originally one of 60 Councils established nationwide under the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission Act 1989 (the ATSIC Act)*. Under ATSIC’s legislative framework (expanding on those of the ICC) were three additional key functions including; providing advice to governments; advocating on behalf of Indigenous people; and funding and monitoring programs and services (Kehoe-Forutan, 1988). Ultimately, the TSRA came formally into existence on 1 July 1994, following a review of the ATSIC regional structures a few years after its establishment in 1993. Its roles and functions as an independent body with similarity to ATSICs powers for the Torres Region were first enshrined in the *ATSIC Amendment Act 1993 (Cth)*.

Immediately prior to its establishment, Sanders in his previously mentioned CAEPR 1994 monograph considered extensively the implications of having the TSRA as “*a political structure and its potential implications for future regional government*” (Sanders, 1994, p.3). This theme was reiterated and articulated in the TSRA inaugural 1994 Annual Report where it was stated,

“In recommending the creation of a new Torres Strait Regional Authority, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission saw its creation as a transitional arrangement providing a basis for a progressive negotiated movement towards greater regional autonomy in the delivery of programs and services for the Torres Strait (TSRA, 1994a, p.1).

As with the mainland ATSIC Councils, a substantive component of the funding administered to the region was in the form of the then Community Development Employment Program (CDEP) and the Community Housing and Infrastructure Program (CHIP). The CDEP policy and ensuing program implementation arrangements have been and remain among the most contentious in Indigenous affairs. Both of these programs would experience many iterations over the years the latter of which continues to this day as the Torres Strait Major Infrastructure Program (MIP). They are considered in the analysis in subsequent chapters of this thesis.

A chronology of key historical events influencing contemporary regional governance structures, systems and practices has been reproduced from publication of the relatively new institution to regional governance, the Torres Strait Island Regional Council (TSIRC). For an adapted chronology of governance decisions see Appendix 2 (TSIRC, 2018). This historical record of area specific governance spanning the 19th and 20th centuries and into the new millennium outlines pivotal episodes in regional political affairs and provides an indication of the influence exerted by Islanders over State and Federal policy. Tellingly, it also outlines key periods in terms of how the region has harnessed the national and state political landscape to exert their influence and further their aspirations. Notable periods in this chronology following the 19th century annexation by the Queensland Government are outlined in the excerpt at Figure 2.3 below.

Figure 2.5: Summary of key Torres Strait Regional Governance Milestones

1912 – 1926	Island “reserves” gazetted by the Queensland government. Superintendent / teachers appointed, curfew and pass systems imposed on people, wages under Protector’s control.
1937	First conference of Torres Strait Islander Councillors. Demands on Queensland Government included improved services, end unpopular regulations and transfer of power: superintendent-teachers to local councils.
1939	Second conference of Torres Strait Islander Councillors held. New Act is developed based around some of the key changes requested by Councillors.
1939	Queensland Government repeal Protection legislation. Passed <i>Torres Strait Islanders Act</i> . First time legally recognising Islanders as a separate people. Many restrictions remained.
1962	Torres Strait Islanders obtain the right to vote in Federal elections.
1964	Torres Strait Islanders obtain the right to vote in State elections.
1965	The <i>Torres Strait Islander Act</i> of 1939 repealed and replaced by <i>Aborigines and Torres Strait Islander Affairs Act</i> . Many restrictive clauses under the previous Act removed, including old restrictions on the right to travel to the mainland.
1978	Torres Strait Treaty - Australian and Papua New Guinea signed, defining the boundaries between the two countries and the use of the sea by both parties.
1982	The Mabo Native Title claim commenced, Eddie Mabo and four claimants.
1984	<i>Community Services (Torres Strait) Act 1984</i>

1985	Torres Strait Treaty came into effect.
1988	Torres Strait Leaders Forum calls for greater self-determination
1989	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) established
1992	Mabo Native Title determination.
1993	ATSIC reviewed and new regional ATSIC Council structures adopted
1994	Inaugural TSRA established.
2003/4	ATSIC abolished
2005	TSRA maintained under <i>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Act 2005 (ATSI Act)</i> ,

Source: Adapted from Torres Strait Island Regional Council (2016) – full list Appendix 2.

2.6.2 Post ATSIC – TSRA legislative framework

Significant media coverage was given to the animosities that developed between the National ATSIC Council and then Minister for Indigenous Affairs under the Howard liberal government John Herron (see Appendix 3.) A front-page headline from November 1998, reported Indigenous outrage over comments that had been made by Herron regarding mixed heritage and descent (Koori Mail, 1998). It also reported that the Minister was purportedly angry over claims by Indigenous leaders that he had alienated them and was planning to strip ATSIC of its powers. Of particular interest is that on the very same page, the then TSRA Chair issued a media statement declaring that the “*TSRA was pleased at Minister Herron’s appointment*”, and that the Minister was “*a friend of the TSRA*” (Koori Mail, 1998, p.2).

Behrendt (2004), and Pratt and Bennett (2005), are among a wide range of commentators who have chronicled the demise of the ill-fated ATSIC and its subsidiary Councils over the period 2003/05. In redrafted legislation, the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Act 2005 (ATSI Act)*, the TSRA was the only regional representative body that was maintained. At the time local TSI leaders were of the view that “*TSRA’s relative success was due to its localised nature: the region, organisation and community are all smaller, with members of the community more connected to each other*” (McDonald, 2007, p.11).

2.6.3 Financial management framework

Importantly, in morphing the Torres ATSIC Regional Council into what became the TSRA in 1994, Islanders were able to negotiate funding arrangements directly with the Commonwealth that included receiving an annual financial lump-sum

appropriation as a direct single line item. This arrangement was ratified in order to allow a high degree of flexibility and control as funding allocation was effectively ‘untied’ in terms of specifying in detail, the requirements of how funding would be expended. This model of essentially ‘untied’ public funding delivered under a single Commonwealth budget appropriation continues to this day. It has been promoted as one of the most flexible and effective ways of delivering public funding to Indigenous organisations, particularly in terms of offering financial control and facilitating increased self-determination (Moran, 2014). The implications of these financial arrangements are also a key topic for discussion in the later chapters of this thesis.

2.6.4 Planning, monitoring and reporting requirements

As the TSRA is a Commonwealth Statutory Authority it was required to operate in accordance with all relevant federal legislation including the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Act 2005*, the *Auditor-General Act 1997*, and the *Commonwealth Authorities and Companies Act 1997* (the CAC Act). Importantly, the TSRA is obligated to have in place a planning, performance and reporting regime for the CAC Act successor, the *Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013* (PGPA Act), which replaced the CAC Act and introduced a new Commonwealth financial framework and the PGPA Rules from 1 July 2014. These legislative obligations placed new requirements on the TSRA in terms of performance planning and reporting subsequent to the ANAO’s performance review.

2.7 Promotion of TSRA as a model for regional Indigenous governance

Not only has the TSRA been able to remain a regional Indigenous Commonwealth representative organisation, but it has also been the subject of numerous reviews and inquiries. Many of these have promoted the TSRA as a regional model reflecting self-determination, place-based decision making, and the potential framework to drive a form of Indigenous led regional self-government (Johnson *et al*, 2013). This notion of the TSRA as a potential model for driving regional autonomy was a key theme prior to its establishment and has been a consistent narrative over the entire course of its existence.

One of the earliest reviews into modern Torres Strait regional governance was undertaken in the late 1990s, at the request of the then Minister for Indigenous Affairs by the House of Representatives Parliamentary Committee inquiry into greater autonomy for the people of Torres Strait. This inquiry was favourable to increased regional autonomy and had as one of its main recommendations the amalgamation of the TSRA, the ICC and the local community government Councils into a one central Torres Strait Regional Assembly.

However, these recommendations did not come to pass due in part to dissenting viewpoints among some community leaders. McDonald (2007) considered the governance model established for the TSRA in terms of transferability to other regional Indigenous areas. While she touched on a number of the unique geographic, demographic and cultural characteristics as key characteristics that might prevent the ‘transplanting’ of a similar model to other areas, she noted that,

“An Indigenous regional governance model developed by the communities that will be governed is more likely to result in a model that is suited to the needs of those communities; that is less vulnerable to unilateral change; and that is accepted as democratic and legitimate by the community it governs.”
(McDonald, 2007, p. 52)

Reviews by a West Australian Legislative Assembly Standing Committee (Education and Health) in 2008 also formed similar conclusions reporting that:

“What we have seen in the Torres Strait Region is the maintenance of institutional frameworks that have complemented existing Indigenous structures and institutions, allowing the citizens of the Torres Strait the opportunity to engage on their own terms with the wider Australian community and to hold out a place for themselves within our nation (WA HREC, 2008, p.7)

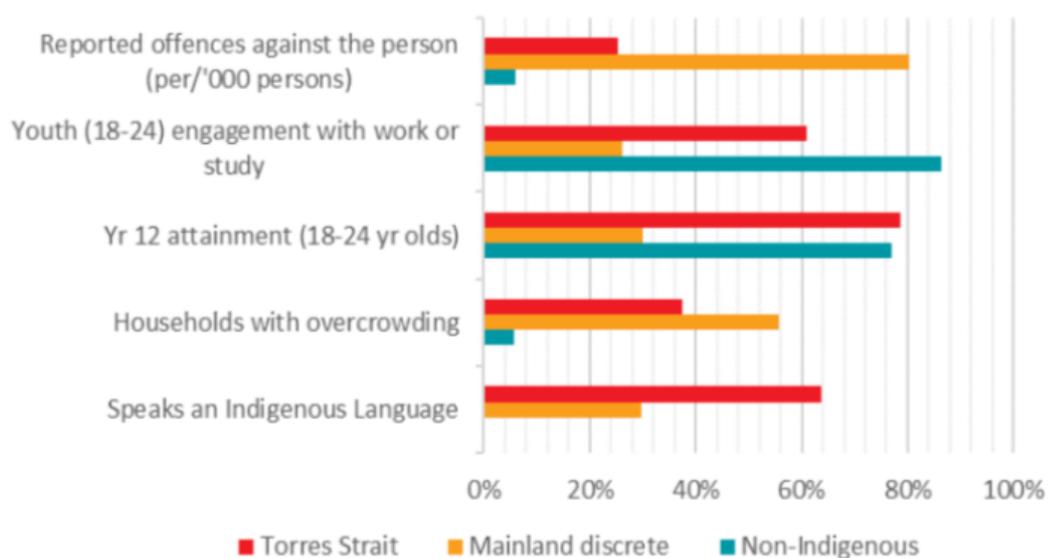
More recently, Moran *et al* (2014, pp.3-4) in a review of modalities of publicly funding Indigenous regional organisations, cited the single line ‘block’ and ‘untied’ appropriation that the TSRA receives as generally beneficial and flexible in particular where there is a “*recognisable jurisdictional boundary or a well-defined service delivery catchment area*”. Moreover that, “*single parliamentary*

appropriations to clearly defined jurisdictions can increase local autonomy and decrease the volume and duplication of reporting requirements” (Moran, et al, 2014, pp. 3-4).

Following an inquiry into service delivery in Queensland's remote and discrete Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in 2017, the Queensland Productivity Commission (QPC) concluded that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders (ATSI) people resident in the Torres Strait experienced better health and social outcomes in comparison to ATSI populations in Queensland. Figure 2.4 below provides a series of select comparative social outcomes between the Torres Strait, mainland Queensland Discrete (i.e. remote) Indigenous communities and the non-Indigenous Queensland population.

According to the QPC, while reported offences were higher than for the non-indigenous population, they were markedly less when compared to remote Indigenous communities. There was higher youth engagement with work and study when compared to remote communities, less household overcrowding and almost twice the reported levels of traditional Indigenous language use. Remarkably, the attainment of year 12 level education was slightly higher in the Torres Strait when compared to the non-Indigenous Queensland population.

Figure 2.6: Selected social indicators for the Torres Strait



Source: ABS 2011a; DATSIP 2016.

Source: Table including data inputs Queensland Productivity commission (2017 p. 69-70)

Following their investigations into service delivery across a wide range of sectors including, health care, housing, education, community safety and infrastructure, the QPC concluded,

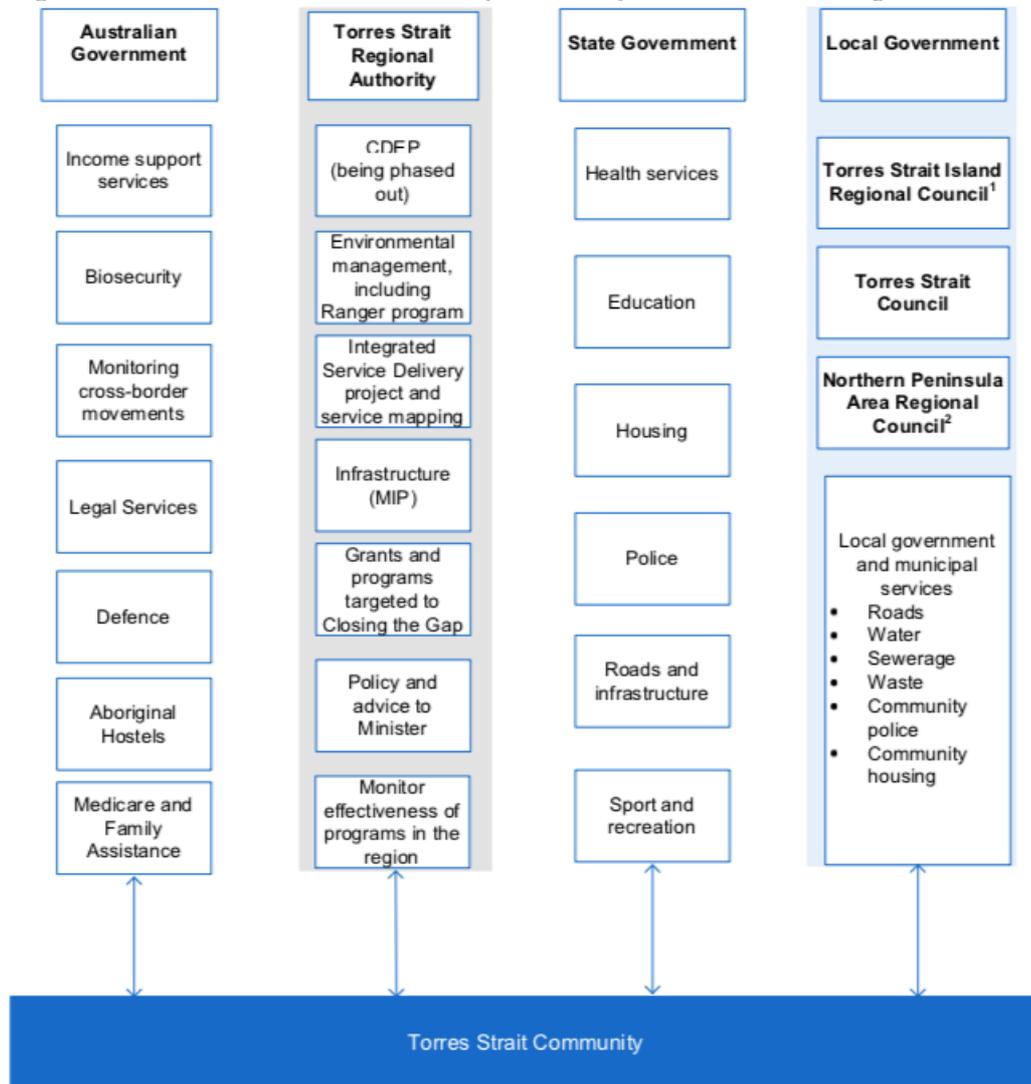
“Indicators for communities in the Torres Strait are generally better than in other communities. Reported offence rates in the Torres Strait are less than one-third of the rates observed in mainland discrete communities, although there are still high levels of overcrowding. Educational attainment rates are higher, unemployment is lower and the rate of youth engagement with work or study is high, despite the geographic isolation of many Torres communities (Queensland Productivity Commission, 2017, p.70)

In an attempt to identify the drivers and causes of differentials in social outcomes, in comparison to other remote QLD Indigenous communities, the QPC posited that,

A possible factor in the better outcomes in the Torres Strait is that the Torres Strait region has been able to maintain strong governance, which has allowed it to exercise a higher degree of control over service delivery than other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities” (QPC, 2017, p.70).

Given the assertions by the QPC that the maintenance of strong governance has facilitated stronger control over service delivery, it is important to reflect on some of the findings of the ANAO’s performance review related to TSRA’s role in regional service delivery. In particular the point that there are in excess of 35 government agencies delivering various services in the region as outlined in Figure 2.5.

Figure 2.7: Government Service Delivery Context of the Torres Strait Region



Note 1: The council was formed in 2008 after the amalgamation of the Indigenous Coordinating Councils.

Note 2: The council was formed in 2008, amalgamating the communities of Seisia and Bamaga, with New Mapoon, Umagico and Injinoo.

Source: ANAO.

Source: ANAO (2014, p 36)

As inferred by the preceding figure (which notably does not include other non-government organisations delivering services in the region) the service delivery and governance landscape is extremely complex thus does not lend to conceptually simplistic evaluative approaches. Furthermore, it would seem overly reductionistic to promulgate claims that the causal drivers for differences in social outcomes are solely attributable to factors such as ‘strong governance’ resulting in ‘control’ over service delivery as touched upon by the QPC.

2.8 Summary and conclusions

This chapter sought to address some of the key fundamental evaluation premises as posed by White (2005) in the introductory section in terms of exploring or ‘going deep’ in terms of evaluation context. It is clear that the relatively unique characteristics of the Torres Strait region and its people has attracted the interest of both professional and amateur researchers from a range of fields including, anthropology, archaeology, linguistics, psychology and political scientists of various persuasions.

There has also been a significant degree of interest in the level of autonomy provided to key government institutions in the Torres Strait region which has benefited from a range of unique jurisdictional, political and cultural mores. There exists, within the defined geographic space, a significant degree of diversity in terms of language groups and cultural heritage. These have all influenced to a degree both the convergence and divergence of political ideation among the local political and cultural leadership. Historically, Torres Strait Islander autonomy and control have had a strong influence over the interactions that regulate the behaviour of those either visiting or working in the area and has certainly been a substantial feature of the work in this thesis.

This complex operating and service delivery context, coupled with the breadth of TSRA’s service delivery and legislative policy obligations, presents a conceptually challenging task in terms of selecting suitable designs and methods from which to evaluate its social impacts. Therefore, in order for the TSRA to implement the suggestions and findings of the ANAO regarding periodically evaluating multiple year development plans, a thorough engagement with the conceptual and theoretical basis of evaluation practice is required. This forms the key content of the subsequent chapters of this thesis.

The following chapter of this thesis firstly canvases perspectives on differing definitions of IE and provide an overview of status of IE and evaluation more broadly in the international development literature. It also discusses some of the key conceptual and theoretical issues that influence the selection of IE designs and approaches along with a brief consideration of the underpinning research

philosophies in terms ontology and epistemology. These guiding philosophical concepts aim to generate further insight to the methodological debates in the evaluation sector and the key theories that influence the choices of methods in what has been described as a trans-disciplinary field of inquiry.

Lastly, chapter 3 also describes the status of evaluation in the Australian public financial management context and importantly the lack of rigorous evaluation in the Indigenous public policy and service delivery context. This has been the source of significant debate in Australian Indigenous affairs policy and one factor that has led to the incumbent Morrison government passing legislation in 2018 establishing the position of Indigenous Commissioner at the (Australian) Productivity Commission. According to the Government's media release:

“The legislation will facilitate the Productivity Commission’s work in evaluating policies and programs that have an impact on Indigenous Australians. Enshrining this position and policy focus into law forms part of the Government’s commitment to Closing the Gap and will ensure there is a strong evidence base to direct funding on the ground and deliver better outcomes” (Australian Government Treasury, 2018, p.1).

CHAPTER 3: LITERATURE REVIEW – THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

“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.” (Banks, as cited in Productivity Commission 2013, p.iii)

Calls by the international community for countries to improve their national evaluation capacities have become increasingly prominent, particularly with the transition to the next phase of the international Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) agenda. An illustration of this is the historical precedent of a committee of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) which determined to issue a stand-alone resolution in late 2014 designating 2015 the *‘International Year of Evaluation’*. This resolution requested that each UN member-state take demonstrable efforts to both, *“strengthen capacity to conduct evaluations, in accordance with its national policies and priorities”* and *“to report back to the UN in 2016 on the progress it has made”* (European Evaluation Society, 2014, n.p.).

This relatively unique form of UN resolution making served as a catalyst for the European Evaluation Society (EES) who encouraged its members *“to advocate evaluation capacity building in Europe and beyond”*, declaring that the *“historic UN Resolution is emblematic of the ascent of evaluation across borders and it signals an exciting post 2015 era for evaluation globally”*. The EES postulated that the declaration would:

“energize national / regional evaluation associations, development partners, parliamentarians, civil society and government representatives”, and encouraged its members to promote, *“visibility brought to the evaluation discipline by the Resolution in order to strengthen evaluation governance and cultures around the world”* (EES, 2014, n.p).

These events unfolded at a point in time where it was estimated that approximately (US) \$191 billion was being directed toward low-middle income countries in overseas development assistance (ODA) (OECD, 2017). While it is clear that more people around the globe have been assisted out of debilitating poverty than at any time in the history of the planet, official ODA funding is under increasing

examination for determining its effectiveness (Easterly, Levine and Roodman, 2004; Glassman and Temin. 2016).

In Australia, it was estimated that in the 2015/16 financial year total direct government spending on services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) peoples was AU\$33.4 billion (Australian Productivity Commission, 2017). This was almost 20% above the level of direct funds provided in 2008/09 and it was stated by the Productivity Commissioner (PC) that it represented twice the level of direct expenditure on services on a per person basis than for other Australians. However, the PC was keen to point out that the report on expenditures to Indigenous people “*does not assess the adequacy, effectiveness and efficiency of government expenditure*” (PC, 2017, p.xii).

Raifman et al. (2018) posit that evaluations play a critical function in terms of providing accountability for the use of funds for development activities and for learning how to design and implement more effective programs. This has resonance with the findings and recommendation that the ANAO canvassed following its performance audit of the TSRA. Notably, the ANAO suggested that, “*evaluating and reviewing TSRA’s performance over the period of the plan or at least periodically would provide a means to ascertain whether the TSRA is achieving improvements to the wellbeing of ATSI residents*” (ANAO, 2013, p.24).

Therefore, this Chapter aims to provide a working definition of ‘evaluation’ noting the debates about differences and similarities between applied social science research and evaluation. It also touches on the multi-disciplinary (sometimes referred to as trans-disciplinary) aspects related to the skills sets required by professional evaluators for what has been described as a meta-profession by evaluation societies.

In light of the significance of the foregoing discussion, this chapter also seeks to define Impact Evaluation (IE) and discuss some of the key debates surrounding its ascendancy in the international development literature. Key thematic issues are canvassed such as; methods for determining a suitable counterfactual, evaluating policy effects in complex systems, and measuring or attributing effects of programs and their contribution to outcomes. This chapter also outlines the ever-increasing

body of international impact evaluation literature along with the context of evaluation in the Australian public sector.

Following the commencement of this thesis, findings from a Centre for Independent Studies (CIS) report, entitled “*Evaluating Indigenous Programs: A toolkit for change*” were released in June 2017. This report found a disproportionately, if not disappointingly, small number of published Indigenous program evaluations that were founded on methodologically rigorous approaches and analytical methods. The elements of what constitutes a methodologically strong evaluative framework are discussed with a focus on literature that bears a relation to the TSRA 2014-2018 Development Plan program objectives.

3.1 Defining evaluation

There is a general consensus among development practitioners, public policy analysts, economists, and political/social scientists that rigorous evaluation is essential to making informed decisions about ‘what works’ in efforts to improve human wellbeing. As Raifman and her colleagues (2018) argue:

“Evaluations are critical to learning about what works in global development and for holding funders and implementers accountable.” (Raifman et al, 2018, p. 285)

However, according to Reed (2014), and Rossi et al. (2004), there exists little consensus on how evaluation is defined, nor how it is described. It is also often the case that evaluation practitioners, based on their specific discipline, work-specialisation, training, or experience, will draw on differing definitions (American Evaluation Association, 2004). Theorists and applied evaluators are usually inclined to cite the applied nature of social research methods, and systematic processes for addressing evidence needs or information deficits as the evaluative imperative. Some practitioners turn their attention to activities, processes and procedures while others seek to examine program outcomes or impacts (Reed, 2014).

Greene (2002), proffers the definition that the examination of public sector programs requires the systematic application of social science research tools, while Scriven

writes:

“In program evaluation, we are concerned to establish the merit, worth, quality, or value of programs, in whole or in part, at the request of some client or clients, and for the benefit of some audience” (Scriven, 1999, p. 527).

Different governments and public sector agencies promulgate definitions highlighting the process and/or systematic approach for ascertaining value for money, accountability, decision making and transparency for public and donor expenditures including:

“the systematic assessment of the appropriateness, effectiveness and/or efficiency of a program, or part of a program” (ANAO Report No. 3, 1997-98, p. xi).

“systematic studies conducted periodically or on an ad hoc basis to assess how well a program is working...typically examines achievement of program objectives in the context of other aspects of program performance or in the context in which it occurs” (US Government Accountability Office, 2005, p.2)

There has been a good deal of conjecture in the literature in relation to what distinguishes or constitutes ‘evaluation’ as opposed to ‘research’ (Mathison, 2008; Scriven, 2007). This distinction is important in relation to this research project from the point of view of how stakeholders in the Torres Strait were engaged in the course of this study. This is outlined in sections and chapters to follow.

According to Blome (2009) for example, some of the key differences are that evaluation places judgements on merit or worth and provides information for decision-making on policy or program specifics. Evaluation also gives precedence to the interests of stakeholders and is usually conducted in settings characterised by change in actors, priorities, resources and timelines. Research on the other hand tends more to occur within controlled settings, produces knowledge that is generalisable or transferable, promotes advances in knowledge and theory, and features inquiry influenced by intellectual curiosity (Blome, 2009).

Perhaps one of the most well-known advocates for the evaluation discipline, Michael Scriven (1991, p.3) proclaimed that “*anything can be evaluated*” and has put forward compelling arguments asserting the ‘trans-disciplinary’ aspects of evaluation. Scriven’s protestations assert that evaluation is not merely applied science but a ‘trans-discipline’, akin to logic and statistics, and not subservient to the general social and physical sciences (including: medicine, law, science, engineering) but a framework within which these disciplines can be examined and assessed (Scriven, 2013).

In order to clarify the role of evaluation in the applied social sciences, Scriven refutes the erroneous sentiment among some commentators that evaluation does not count as ‘research’. Scriven’s view is that while social research has fundamental goals of acquiring new knowledge, the objectives of evaluation are to apply knowledge to inform decision-making (Scriven, 2013). Therefore, evaluation seeks to extend basic research paradigms in order for applied research (evaluation) to understand and obtain insights so as to solve practical problems. As Scriven declares during a verbal presentation to the University of Melbourne in 2013,

“evaluation is the key to getting the answers to the practical questions that human beings ask ‘applied’ social science people” (Scriven, 2013, n.p).

These distinctions are supported by Donaldson and Christie (2005), who posit subtle differences between ‘applied’ and ‘evaluative’ research. The former is drawn upon to enhance understanding and generate solutions to social issues, while the latter aims to assess and improve the effectiveness of initiatives targeted towards social needs. To do this, evaluators are often called upon to gather, examine, interpret and communicate findings about the design, implementation, impact and effectiveness of social programs. This is essential for making sound judgements and informed decisions on how well programs are resolving social needs (Rossi, Lipsey and Freeman, 2004; Fink, 2005). To this end, Sanderson (2002) endorses the significance of evaluation in relation to building the evidence base to sound social policy formulation.

In echoing Scriven’s sentiments regarding the trans-disciplinary nature of evaluation, the Australasian Evaluation Society (AES, 2013a), elucidates the multi-disciplinary

characteristics of evaluation which it describes as a ‘meta-profession’. In this sense, evaluation practitioners and their tools and methods are drawn from a wide variety of occupational backgrounds and professions. Multi-disciplinary approaches to evaluate programs, when those programs are the means to remedy social needs designated by policy and requiring implementation by the systematic application of resources, is characteristic of the evaluation definition proffered by the American Evaluation Association (2012). Moreover, clarifying these definitions is fundamental when program aims are to deliver defined results for target populations and are guided by a theory or logic (Reed, 2014, p.45).

According to Rogers and Davidson (2013), evaluation in Australia gained ascendancy by virtue of public sector reforms in the 1980s, most notably with the adoption of a national ‘Evaluation Strategy’ in 1988. The primary focus of these evaluations tended towards emphasising program management and implementation issues deploying theory and logic premised approaches. Methods to secure the engagement and participation of beneficiaries were also a key element of this approach.

In a 2012 roundtable hosted by the national Australian Productivity Commission (APC), titled *Better Indigenous Policies: The Role of Evaluation*, participants comprising eminent Indigenous leaders and scholars, public officials, and researchers considered the definition of evaluation. Those participating ultimately concluded that:

“the term ‘evaluation’ can have different meanings in different contexts, ranging from mechanisms designed to provide accountability (e.g. spending government money), through measures encompassing process evaluation and/or impact evaluation of either single programs or groups of programs, to broad reviews of system architecture.” (APC, 2013, p.2)

While there was a degree of equivocation among the participants regarding the precise definition of evaluation there was a greater level of consensus regarding the role of evaluation in Indigenous policy where it was stated that:

“evaluation is more than just providing accountability in the narrowest financial sense or checking boxes to ensure that prescribed processes have

been followed, and that it should have a role in holding governments to account for outcomes”. (APC, 2013, p.3)

Developing an agreed definition of impact and associated evaluation approaches is an important precursor to any evaluative activities undertaken in conjunction with the TSRA and its key stakeholders. Given the structures of both the political and administrative arms of the organisation, having an agreed approach to which program activities are examined, under what conditions, timeframes and methods is imperative to being able to address the research objectives and is subject to discussion in subsequent chapters.

3.2 Does evaluation of impact matter?

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), views conceptions of performance as fundamental to the apparatus of the modern nation-state and has provided the impetus for significant reforms across and within many international, national and regional public sector institutions. Premises driving these reforms are based on the state being responsible for such a diverse and changing array of services and regulatory tasks, it must transparently quantify its promises and measure its activities in ways that allow citizens, managers and politicians to make decisions about ever more complex societal development initiatives (OECD, 2013, p.9).

The World Bank Independent Evaluation Group (IEG) reinforces this point, perhaps in more poignant nomenclature. They posit that it is unacceptable for “*governments, official development agencies, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to merely report on funds invested or what outputs have been produced*”, to determine the results and effectiveness of public policy change and/or initiatives focused on improved social outcomes. Furthermore, it asserts that “*parliaments, finance ministries, funding agencies, donors and the general public*”, more widely, are insisting on transparent data on the efficacy and effectiveness of development endeavours and social interventions. Moreover, these groups are asking for more information on how outcomes are achieved as compared to the use of alternate (and often) scarce resources, and, “*how effectively they contributed to*” societal wellbeing (World Bank IEG, 2007, p.5).

Roetman (2011) discusses the increased level of scrutiny international development co-operation has experienced from journalists and politicians, some of whom have openly refuted its effectiveness, noting that “*development agencies are expected to show that all of their efforts lead to impact*” (Roetman, 2011, p.5). Baker (2000) also promulgates the notion that “*despite the billions of dollars spent on development assistance each year*”, when discussing poverty alleviation initiatives aimed at the poor, “*there remains a dearth of understanding about the actual impact of these projects*” (Baker, 2000, p.134).

Furthermore, she claims that while there is macro level data on the benefit of economic progress, interventions building social and cultural capital, and creation of protective interventions for the underprivileged, at the more micro-program and project specific level, answers to questions such as: “*is the intervention producing the intended benefits? What was the overall impact on the population? Could the program or project be better designed to achieve the intended outcomes? Are resources being spent efficiently?*” are only ascertained via impact evaluations (IE). To this end, Baker posits that IE is “*an approach that measures the outcomes of a program intervention in isolation of other possible factors*” (Baker, 2000, p.135).

Impact evaluations of development programs, projects, and other service delivery interventions are gaining increased prominence across economic, social and environmental development policy internationally (Eldridge et al, 2016; Hearn and Buffardi, 2016). The past two decades have seen an upsurge in interest and investment into IE notably in sectors including “*social safety nets and protection, health, education, and agriculture, with many focused in South and East Asia, Africa, South and Central America*” (Cameron, Mishra and Brown, 2016, p.12).

As Wild et al (2015) suggest, unequivocal figures are essential in justifying program investments. Thus, dependable rationales for change are pivotal in influencing policy makers and encouraging accountability to obtain positive impact on health and wellbeing. However, the authors also note the increasingly complex and political facets of large social programs accompanied with (often) expansive public investments.

Development scholars suggest that programmatic responses to under-development have become less uniform. There is an increased diversity of stakeholders, dominant influences on policy implementation are more opaque, complex problems are often structurally enmeshed and systemic, formulating solutions is more multi-dimensional, and emergent change is rapid and often unforeseeable (Burns 2014a; Woolcock, 2013). In addition, Van Hemelrijck and Guijt (2016) believe that the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is driving calls for “*greater inclusiveness and sustainability*”, leading to new conceptions of impact and paradigms associated with the measurement of it (Van Hemelrijck and Guijt, 2016, p.5).

3.3 Key conceptual and theoretical issues

The following sections outline the literature on some of the key themes and issues associated with developing the framework for a suitable evaluative design for the TSRA. It includes an overview of the definitional debate in evaluation with respect to ‘impact’ along with a discussion on some of the underlying philosophical considerations when determining an evaluative approach. The section explores various evaluation theories along with theoretical issues that required consideration such as working in complex service delivery context, establishing the basis for undertaking counterfactual analysis (i.e. the likely outcome without a program or service), and discussion on issues associated with how program activities either contribute or are attributable to outcomes and results.

3.3.1 Evaluating impact – the definitional debate

Even a cursory scan of the literature related to evaluating and/or measuring the impact of social, economic and environmental development programs reveals that the lexicon incorporates a wide range of definitions that are frequently transposed. More cynical commentators view the term ‘impact’ as merely one aspect of complex business jargon (Garner, 2003). This definitional complexity in nomenclature has been elucidated by a range of commentators (Wallman-Stokes et al, 2014; Bortes et al, 2011, Meadow and Yuan, 1997).

White (2009) for example, believes that definitional issues regarding ‘*impact*’ is a key aspect of the ‘raging debates’ surrounding IE in development circles. Hearn and

Buffardi (2016) attempt to clarify some definitional complexity and stress that impact can be a “*multi-dimensional concept with some definitions focusing on very precise understandings (e.g. the World Bank¹⁴), while others are far broader in scope (e.g. OECD-DAC¹⁵)*”. Therefore, they advise that “*how impact is defined and applied has a significant effect on the design, management and evaluation of development initiatives*” (Hearn and Buffardi, 2016, pg. 6).

For some institutions, ‘*impact*’ is viewed as the ultimate end state in a logical continuum (or logical framework) with; a) inputs (financial/resources); b) work or activities; c) generating outputs; d) leading to outcomes; e) which result in *impact* (ARACY, 2009; CSIRO, 2015). Definitions relate to the particular type of program or the logic that underpins it, sometimes described as the ‘*impact chain*’ or ‘*log-frame*’ (Rauscher et al, 2012). However, depending on the program or project terminology adopted, others may articulate impact as being shorter term or having more immediacy stemming from the generation of outputs. For example, in measuring the impacts of health promotion and similar public health interventions, the Victoria Health Department in Australia suggests that ‘*ultimate outcomes*’ are the end state in the logic continuum. They propose that ‘*impacts*’ when evaluating preventative public health activities, “*reflect more immediate changes in populations, individuals or their environments and are impacts as they reflect fulfilling the program objectives*” (VicHealth, 2003, p.3). Conversely, Stannard-Stockton (2010) asserts that the term ‘*results*’ provides an overarching description of the aggregation of outputs, outcomes and impacts.

It seems that the Australian Government also grapples with the rather complex argot surrounding the definition of ‘*impact*’, for it has adopted the term ‘*outcome*’ as a catchall phrase for assessment of its domestic program logic and articulating the desired end state of its policy endeavours. Hawke (2007), when describing the

¹⁴ World Bank (as cited by White, 2009) ‘The difference in the indicator of interest (Y) with the intervention (Y1) and without the intervention (Y0). That is, $\text{impact} = (Y1 - Y0)$ ’ Note that this is the term preferred by the 3ie initiative.

¹⁵ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development – Development Assistance Committee (OECD-DAC), also used by the UK Department for International Development (DFID) ‘Positive and negative, primary and secondary long-term effects produced by a development intervention, directly or indirectly, intended or unintended.’”

Australian Government Performance and Budgeting Framework, touching on the extent of definitional complexity notes that:

“The Australian government’s performance framework places a strong emphasis on agency-level outcomes as the foundation for assessment. Outcomes are defined as the results, impacts or consequences of actions by government for the Australian community”. Moreover, “the emphasis on explicit measures of results is crucial to the usefulness of the framework as a tool for performance assessment and evaluation” (Hawke, 2007, p.8).

This lexis tends to locate ‘impact’ as a subordinate component (along with consequences and results) in a logical framework used to explain ‘outcomes’. The Queensland State Government does not go to great explanatory lengths in adding fidelity to the definition where it publishes the following,

*“**Outcomes:** The short, medium and/or long-term results generated as a direct result of the delivery of a program (i.e. what difference the program made). Possible outcomes of programs can include changes in awareness, knowledge, skills, attitude and behaviour, as well as economic, environmental and social impacts. **For the purposes of the guidelines, the terms outcomes and impacts are used interchangeably (emphasis added)**” (Queensland Treasury, 2014, p.1)*

However, for its official overseas development assistance financing, the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs has adopted the definition of impact akin to that of the OECD-DAC, i.e. positive/negative, direct/indirect, intended/unintended change brought about by a development intervention – noting in addition the environmental context and interaction with multiple factors that affect that change (AusAID, 2012)¹⁶. For the purpose of this research, the definition of ‘impact’ proffered by the Australian Department of Industry Innovation and Science (2015) generally meets common understandings of the term in the Australian public sector:

¹⁶ Australian Department of Foreign Affairs & Trade Office of Development Effectiveness (DFAT ODE) “Impacts are positive or negative changes produced by a development intervention—directly or indirectly, intended or unintended—in the context of its environment, as it interacts with the multiple factors affecting development change”

“Impacts are the longer-term results produced by a programme, project or policy, usually in conjunction with other factors and activities by other agencies. They include intended and unintended results, positive and negative, direct and indirect” (DIIS, 2015, p.11).

Given the level of definitional complexity that exists within the IE literature, it is therefore important to summarise and thus clarify some of the key conceptual and theoretical issues that inform and provide the basis for this work. This is by no means a comprehensive analysis as each sub-topic outlined below could easily be the basis of a significant standalone research investigation. That said, the process of undertaking this research thesis has required a broad understanding of issues such as research ontology and epistemology, evidence hierarchies in the social sciences, processes associated with establishing a credible counterfactual and dealing with conducting IE in complex social, cultural and organisational contexts.

3.3.2 Ontological and epistemological considerations

There exists a cohort of theorists including, Guba and Lincoln (1994), Rebien (1997), Marsh and Furlong (2010), who posit that all social researchers and development program evaluators have implicit orientations to the subject of their particular research topic based on their ontological and epistemological world view or belief system. They also argue profusely that these fundamental philosophical (or meta-physical) pre-dispositions, while difficult to grasp, are almost impossible to avoid.

Furthermore, it is said that it is essential that researchers *“recognise and acknowledge”* these positions in order to credibly defend the research from critique of alternate views (Marsh and Furlong, 2010, p.17). Rebien (1997) for example, argues that being explicit about *“epistemological outlook and ontology”* is a form of research bias that is required to be addressed so as to explain how findings are reached and how they are connected to the choice of methods deployed (Rebien, 1997, p.442).

In terms of ontology, the authors outline the differences between two broad paradigms regarding the interpretation of ‘facts’ and the essential features of

‘being’. These interpretative philosophies generally fall within two broad camps being essentialist/foundationalist and constructionist viewpoints on physical and social phenomena. The former emphasises that there are fundamental ‘facts’ upon which physical and social life occurs that persist over time and are universally common across cultures. The latter interprets, particularly social behaviour, as being ‘socially constructed’ so that it is time, culture and context dependent while also being fundamentally driven by dominance and power relations (Rebien, 1997, p. 442)¹⁷.

The relevance of touching on this point in the context of this thesis is to provide the basis for how issues such as ‘objectivity’ and ‘subjectivity’ can be differentiated in the context of evaluative approach. Thus, at a summary level, foundational ontology and epistemology are associated with positivist empirical methodologies (pure science). These methodologies search for cause-effect relationships. Positivist (and post-positivist) oriented researchers aim to produce findings that are generalisable, often based on a preference for quantitative investigation (Saunders et al., 2009).

Conversely, constructionist (interpretive) ontology and epistemology-based research is oriented to understanding rather than explanation of cause and effect relations. In seeking to explore complex social phenomena from the perspectives of the people involved, researchers are likely to engage in enquiry which is context-sensitive, descriptive, flexible and based on value judgements. Often empathetic relations between the researcher and subjects are formed in order to understand how social action is created and meaning is ascribed (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998). Interpretive epistemologies therefore, have been linked with qualitative sources of data and analysis more geared towards articulating the ‘how’ and ‘why’ type inquiries (Gelo et al, 2009; Patton, 2002).

¹⁷ Note the authors use an example of the difference in viewpoints between interpretation of the differences between men and women for example. One is being that there are fundamental differences, the other that differences are socially constructed based on patriarchal power relations of power hierarchies (patriarchy).

3.3.3 Evaluation theories

Two broad philosophical debates premised on foundational and constructionist philosophies have formed the backdrop to discussions over research in the social sciences, since its relative growth over the last decades of the 20th century. These distinct worldviews have spawned specific evaluation-based theories, which have also been evolving (Guba and Lincoln, 1989; Pawson and Tilley, 1997). Shadish et al (1991) identify that evaluators, borrowing from other disciplinary traditions, have been integrating conceptual models and frameworks incrementally, and have over the past 20-30 years adopted methods informed by evaluation theory (as cited Reed, 2014, p.46).

Commentators such as Carden and Alkin (2012) for example, offer an interesting typology for explaining theoretical perspectives vis-à-vis evaluative research. They view the chronology of evaluation theorising as essentially ‘pluralist’ (Alkin and Christie, 2004; Christie and Alkin, 2008 and 2013). In their ‘evaluation tree’ allegory, represented pictorially in the tree structure (Figure 3.1 below), the authors show the roots of evaluation as being grounded in three pillars: social accountability, systematic social inquiry and epistemology.

These foundations then branch into three theoretical trajectories being methods, use and value. In the middle ‘methods’ branch, there are theories founded on social inquiry and systematic study of individual and group behaviour. Common trademarks employed by modern method theorists include experimental and quasi-experimental research designs although these are supplemented by disciplines such as anthropology and ethnographic principles which have influenced empowerment evaluation for example (Christie and Alkin, 2013, p.15).

To the right, the ‘valuing’ branch is rooted in epistemology representing the views about the source and nature of knowledge that include both the foundationalist/positivist and constructionist/interpretivist along with more pragmatic approaches. Christie (2013) points out that essentially epistemologies are the basis for beliefs on cause and effect, researcher independence, development of methodology and the control of influencing factors in evaluation. Finally, branching out to the left of the model, is the limb that is linked to theories based on social accountability. This applied cohort of evaluation theorists focus on factors such as

engaging with stakeholders in order to inform policy and program decision making (Alkin and Christie, 2004).

Figure 3.1: Modified Evaluation Theory Tree



Source: (Adapted from Carden and Alkin, 2012)

Reed (2014), examined the sociological and historical aspects associated with the professionalisation evaluation as part of a research doctorate. This work included an analysis of survey data collected from the members of the Australasian Evaluation Society (AES) in 2013. The AES had sought information from its members regarding their experience in using various evaluation theories (models and approaches) and methods (tools and techniques). According to Reed's analysis, the AES's rationale for including both theories and methods in the survey was "that there is some overlap between the two groups" (Reed, 2014, p. 102). The table below adapted from Reed's search terms of evaluative approaches being drawn upon by AES members.

Table 3.2: Evaluation theories and methods – Australian Evaluation Society Search

<i>METHODS</i>	<i>THEORIES</i>
Most Significant Change	Experimental design
Inferential Statistics ‘Big-Data’	Participatory Evaluation
Case Study methods	Realist evaluations / realist synthesis
Economic Evaluation methods (e.g. Cost Benefit Analysis; Social Return on Investment)	Developmental evaluation
Action Research	Empowerment evaluation
Other Qualitative methods (e.g. Surveys, interviews, Focus Groups etc)	Formative
Ethnography	Fourth Generation evaluation
Indigenous methodologies	Impact evaluation
	Needs analysis
	Outcome evaluation
	Process evaluation
	Program Logic
	Summative

Source: (Adapted from Reed, 2014, p. 102)

Reed’s table of evaluation is telling in that it outlines more than thirty five commonly expressed evaluation theories and methods.

3.3.4 Establishing the ‘counter-factual’

It is commonly accepted that one of the fundamental objectives of IE is the question of what would have been the likely outcome for beneficiaries if development programs had not been undertaken (e.g. World Bank, 2008). The US State Department believes that overall impact of an effort can only be measured by “*comparing the performance, conditions or status of the two groups referred to as the ‘counter-factual’*” (US State Department, 2012). According to Cummings (2006,

p.6) without the identification of a ‘counterfactual’, certainty about how much change in behaviour is actually the direct result of the policy cannot be ascertained. Guidance issued by the United Kingdom Prime Minister’s Office (2004), identifies that counterfactual analysis concerns three objectives:

- *“to establish evidence of a causal relationship between a program and the outcomes the program seeks to influence*
- *to account for confounding factors, additional to the influence of the program, that might lead to measured change in outcomes, and*
- *to provide estimates of the impact of the program”* (as cited Cummings, 2006, p.7).

A seemingly persistent conundrum in the evaluation literature, and evaluation practice, is associated with the difficulties in constructing a credible estimation of the likely conditions that may have occurred without a particular intervention taking place. As Cummings suggests, part of this difficulty is due to the outcomes from interventions being observable, whereas in the absence of a program, the possible conditions or outcomes that may have occurred are essentially unobservable (Cummings, 2006). Ideally, factors such as the intervention type, context, target population characteristics, relevant outcomes and data availability or constraints should be built into the evaluation design.

Historically, scientific methods stemming from the foundationalist/positivistic epistemologies have dominated the theoretical narrative in terms of constructing ‘true’ counterfactuals (i.e. Randomised Controlled Trials - RCTs). This has had its basis in assumptions of superior levels of rigor, increased internal validity and the negation to the extent possible of research bias. However, there is a growing consensus, based on analytical concepts found in academic disciplines such as political science, history and sociology, that reliable qualitative techniques for counterfactual analysis are also applicable (Purdon et al., 2001; Greene et al., 2004; Scriven, 2008).

Carden, Bamberger and Rugh (2009) document a think-tank seminar involving over fifty evaluation specialists aimed at generating suitable alternatives to quantitatively derived methods. In addition to both quantitative and qualitative designs, theory-

based approaches featured as a robust evaluative design methodology. The impetus and need for this theoretical plurality can be found in sentiment expressed by Cook et al., (2009) who argue that many randomised trials are “*neither necessary nor sufficient for a well-warranted causal inference*” (Cook et al, 2009, p.114).

3.3.5 Complexity

A growing number of IE theorists acknowledge the non-linear and complex context within which many development interventions are implemented (e.g. Patton, 2011; Woolcock, 2013). Some, for example Befani (2012), stress the limitations of counterfactual-based frameworks in contexts typified by numerous and interacting drivers, and posit a multitude of means to assess causality. Burns (2006) also suggests that complexity theory challenges reductive linear assumptions of how change occurs and analysis of associated factors that underpin many development initiatives. Burns believes that there is a tendency for research views to be based on predictive and at times deterministic logic, i.e. that certain types of activities manifest themselves in a related suite of outcomes.

While this might work “*where there are known solutions to problems*”, and context is constant and “*replicable*”, it can be problematic in more typically highly fluid and unpredictable environments undergoing rapid change (Burns, 2006, p.19). In proposing participatory action research approaches based on complexity and systems theories, Burns (2014) acknowledges that systems comprise complex webs of emotional, communication, and power relationships between, “*people, processes, and the environment within which they are situated*”. Furthermore, that these are typified by “*complex feedback loops, dynamics, thresholds and tip points*” (Burns, 2014, pg. 2). Burns believes that when these challenges emerge, real-time adaptive interventions are most successful, and approaches “*which expose change narratives to critical collective examination provide the vehicle for tracking complex change processes*” (Burns, 2014, pg. 2).

3.3.6 Attribution or contribution

The extent that changes in desired outcomes can be *attributed* to a specific policy or program has typically been one of the foremost objectives of IE. Attribution

commonly involves isolating and estimating, to the greatest extent possible, intervention effects and ensuring that causality can be deduced, i.e. the intervention leads to outcome (Mayne, 2001). However, due to the complex and expansive design of many large-scale development programs, inferring causation can be extremely difficult as there may be multiple program initiatives occurring simultaneously. These may comprise wide-ranging activities which may not articulate direct, explicit, measurable objectives. Moreover, many programs may not be designed or implemented over a short duration, therefore it is difficult to draw causal inference, given the multiplicity of socio-economic, environmental, political, and cultural variables. Therefore, causality in a context in which multiple programs operate cannot often be easily isolated, manipulated, or measured (UNDP, 2009).

Dixon (1996) posits that change is infrequently attributable to a simple factor and causal explanation may be overly optimistic. Given that attribution of outcomes to specific programs requires robust evaluation designs (i.e. RCTs etc), implementing these designs can often be idealistic thus risk being detached from reality. Mayne (2008), and Rogers (2009) propose that evaluation of *contribution* can be more feasible and offer more utility than IE that seeks to *attribute* specific outcomes to programs and that contribution analysis employing longitudinal, cross-sectional or case study evaluation designs for example is often more feasible to undertake.

3.3.7 Situating the research worldview

Given the plethora of conceptual, theoretical issues and approaches to evaluation method selection outlined in the preceding discussion, more recent commentators such as DeCuir-Gunby and Schutz (2017) offer a useful typology outlining five categories (referred to as “families”) of research worldviews (DeCuir-Gunby and Schutz, 2017, p.32). These worldviews include: positivist (i.e. foundationalist), constructionist (interpretive), critical, participatory/transformational and pragmatic/pluralist. Elucidating on the key characteristics and differences between these worldviews, the authors outline five characteristics or dimensions of inquiry typically associated with each including, views on the nature of reality and the nature of knowledge (i.e. ontology and epistemology), the characteristics of inquiry in terms of the relationship between researcher and participants, the research process and

types of data collected, and finally the commonly preferred research methods for each of the viewpoints.

Section 3.3.2 touches on the dichotomy between the foundationalist-positivist and constructionist-interpretive camps. The former typically focussed on a singularity in perspective on reality often explained by absolutist claims of truths. These claims are generally derived through distant interactions with research participants often by the use of experimental quantitative methods. The latter view is of a world of multiple realities and truth claims that are relative and contextual. Research outputs are derived from closer relationships between research participants and more qualitative explanations of social interaction.

Critical and transformative-participatory perspectives have some commonalities with the constructionist worldviews in that they are based on closer relationships between researcher and subject and aim to explore the multiple realities that inform social relations. The key differences in these viewpoints are that they take a more universalist epistemology (i.e. some basic absolute truths that are influenced and mediated by context) and consider in more depth the sources and nature of power in the social world (Habermas, 1971; Giroux, 1988). Furthermore, they build on how that power can be harnessed more effectively through participatory processes (Zusho & Clayton, 2011).

The fifth of the research views (or families) canvassed by DeCuir-Gunby and Schutz (2017) pragmatism – pluralism, offers particular salience as a framework for this research. In citing the work of Schutz (2014), and Nichols and Rodgers (2009) (as DeCuir-Gunby and Schutz, 2017) the authors note that researchers adopting a pragmatic and pluralist approach to research:

“would be receptive to blending worldviews and research methods in order to solve a problem. Many mixed methods researchers tend to be pragmatists/pluralists in that they are willing to use multiple approaches in order to solve problems” (DeCuir-Gunby and Schutz, 2017, p. 32)

The rationale (and in fact the requirement) for the adoption of both participatory, pragmatic and pluralist approaches to this research process is explained further in the

discussion on methodology and methods in chapter 4 of this thesis. The implications of adopting this approach and the resultant findings are discussed in chapters 8 and 9.

3.4 The international evaluation literature

Recent pronouncements by the UN and various evaluation societies around the globe in the lead up to the 2015 Year of Evaluation differ markedly from less than just a decade earlier. In 2006 a report by the Centre for Global Development (CGD), *‘When Will We Ever Learn? Improving Lives Through Impact Evaluation’*, asserted that in the previous decades, “*hundreds of billions*” of dollars had been expended by international development agencies, developing nations and international non-government (NGO) aid agencies, and that it was:

“deeply disappointing to recognize that we know relatively little about the net impact of most of these social programs” (CGD, 2006, p.1).

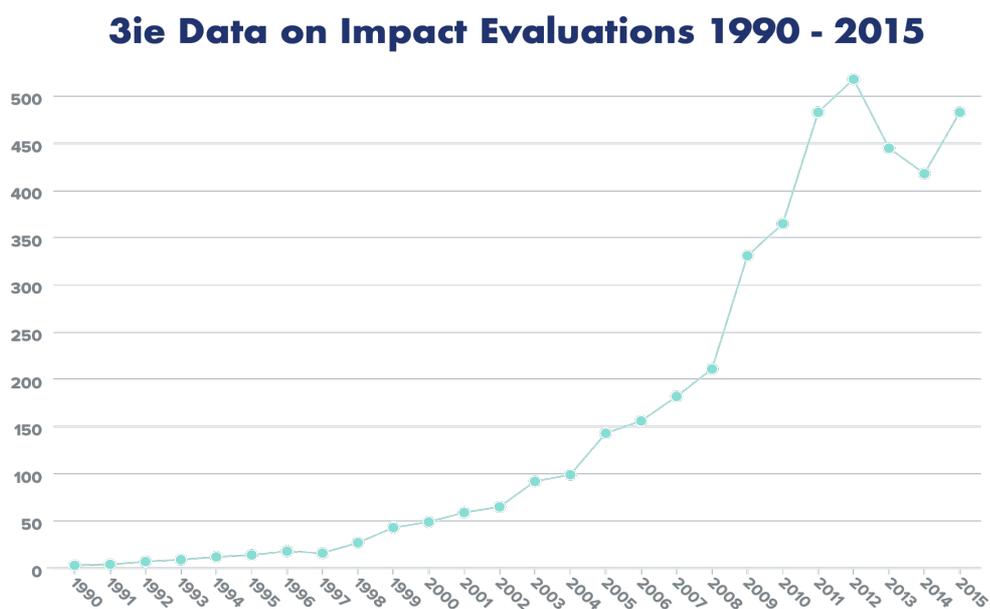
The CGD Evaluation Gap Working Group (EGWG) among their recommendations implored governments and funders of Official Development Assistance to increase the level of funding directed towards impact evaluations. They also encouraged intensifying monitoring, evaluation and reporting systems, to build greater standards of evidence, and to disseminate and facilitate access to knowledge (CGD-EGWG, 2006). These findings echoed to an extent the commitments struck the previous year by the international development community as reinforced in a number of international forums notably the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness (2005). Among the commitments to enhance the effectiveness of ODA funding were also stated aims of improving the impact of funding and resources by complementing them with initiatives such as more effective and transparent measurement of program results and improved accountability for achieving goals (OECD, 2014).

According to Cameron, Mishra and Brown (2016), the last two decades of the 20th century experienced the notable emergence of Impact Evaluation (IE) in the international development sector and in the corresponding literature. For example, the 2006 recommendations from the CGD-EGWG provided the catalyst in 2009 for the establishment of a database repository of published international development IE studies hosted by the International Initiative for Impact Evaluation (3ie). The 3ie

received financial support from a range of international donor countries. Among the key objectives of the 3ie evaluation repository is addressing gaps in knowledge through a systematic gathering of evidence about what works in social policy and program design (Cameron, Mishra, and Brown, 2016)¹⁸.

The authors posit that the aims of the 3ie database also include generating the evidence base in order to improve both domestic and ODA development effectiveness and value for money (see White, 2009b). As the 3ie repository reports, for over a quarter of a century, spanning the period 1990 to 2015, the body of published impact evaluation studies has grown exponentially. As outlined in the graphs at Figures 3.3 and 3.4 below, there has been almost a 500% increase in the number of registered IE studies published annually since 1990, with a cumulative total of over 4260 IE studies maintained on the database (Sabet and Brown, 2018).

Figure 3.3: 3ie Database on Impact Evaluations 1990–2015

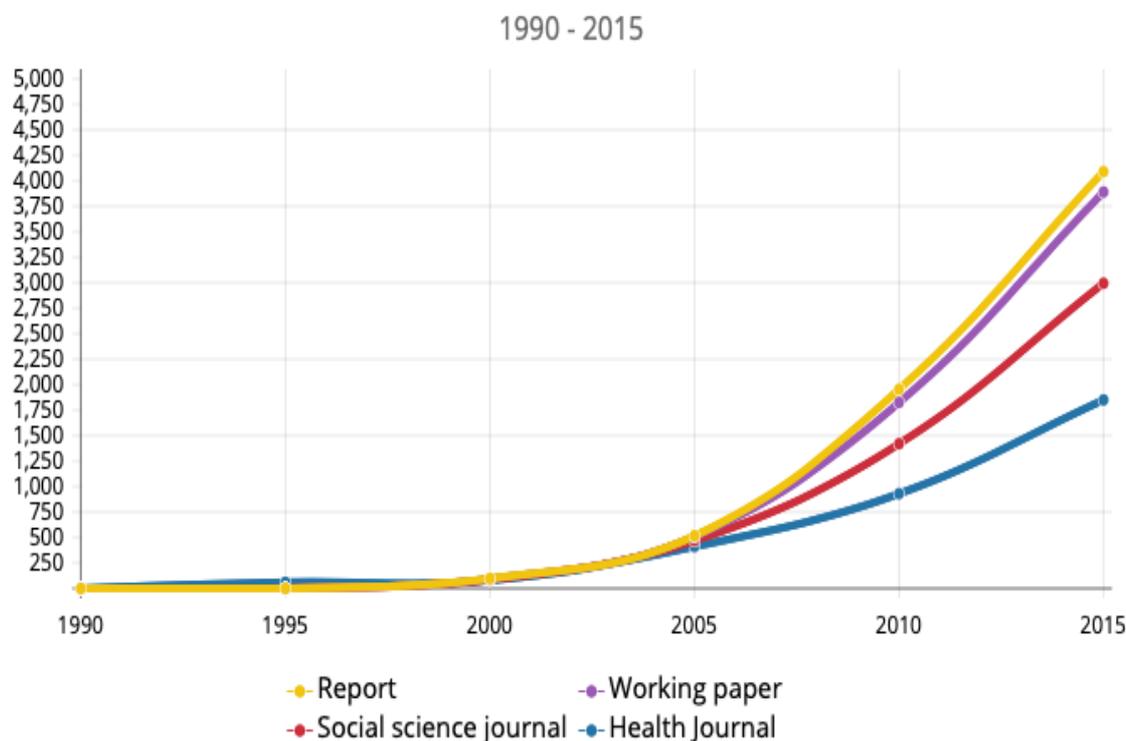


Source: Sabet and Brown, 2018, p. 295.

¹⁸ See also White (2010) and the 3ie database guidance. “Studies must compare a treatment condition to a counterfactual (what would happen in the absence of the treatment), therefore 3ie IER only includes studies: i. Randomized Controlled Trial (RCT). ii. Regression Discontinuity Design (RDD). iii. Propensity Score Matching (PSM) for non-randomized studies based on participant self-selection, or other Matching Methods. iv. Instrumental Variable (IV) estimation (or other methods such as the Heckman Two Step approach). v. Difference-in-Differences (DD), or a fixed or random effects model with an interaction term between time and intervention for baseline and follow-up observations”. White, H., & S. Sabarwal (2014) **Appendix 5.**

Eligibility for inclusion of IE studies to the 3ie database is based on a number of criteria, including the type and design of the study undertaken (see footnote 14), publication platform (recognized journal / book / university website etc), global region (e.g. developing or low-middle income countries¹⁹), and evaluation methodology (e.g. excludes bio-medical double-blind studies). The figures presented in the 3ie database only show studies that are based on what White (2010) defines as ‘counterfactual-based program evaluation’. Therefore, the international literature contained within the 3ie database, it is posited, includes only those IE studies that can ameliorate issues of selection bias, whilst aiming to attribute specified program activities to specific social outcomes (Mishra and Cameron, 2014).

Figure 3.4: Cumulative Impact Evaluations 1990 - 2015 by publication type



Source: Sabet and Brown, 2018, p. 295.

According to the 3ie guidance, there are approximately 135 countries identified by the World Bank as ‘developing (or low and middle income)’, therefore eligible for IE

¹⁹ Australia is not included in the 3ie list of developing countries. Note: Studies collecting data (even in part) in a developing country are included (this includes countries categorized as low- or middle-income according to the World Bank).
http://www.3ieimpact.org/media/filer_public/2014/05/23/3ie_repository_protocol.pdf

studies to be included on the IE database. Notably, IE studies conducted in Australia, by virtue of being classified as a ‘developed country’ are not represented in the database. This issue is discussed in the context of evaluations on Australian Indigenous policies and programs in a subsequent section of this thesis.

Sabet and Brown’s (2018) 3ie analysis below indicates that the majority of published IE studies are undertaken on development programs in South/Latin America and Caribbean countries followed by those on the African continent. Although proportionately, there is a growing number of IEs undertaken in South and East Asia and the Pacific. The following figure 3.5, outlines the countries where the approximately 4,260 IE studies included as eligible for the 3ie database, have been undertaken. In addition to the cataloguing of IE according to country, 3ie data in the following Figure 3.5 outlines how they are categorised to fifteen broad development ‘sector’ or ‘thematic’ criteria (Sabet and Brown, p. 299).

Figure 3.5: *Spread of impact evaluations by country.*

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Sabet, S, M., Brown, A, N., (2018) Is impact evaluation still on the rise? The new trends in 2010–2015, *Journal of Development Effectiveness*, 10:3, 291-304, DOI: 10.1080/19439342.2018.1483414

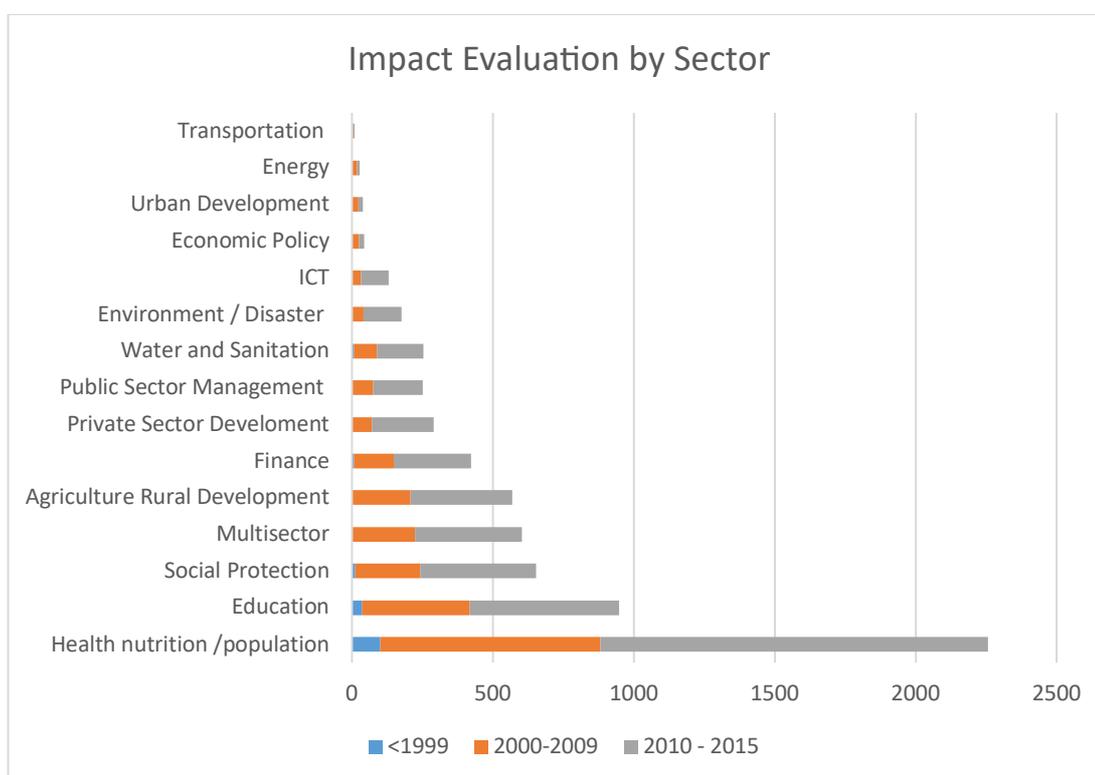
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/19439342.2018.1483414>

Source: Sabet & Brown, 2018, p. 297

As represented in figure 3.6 below, evaluations of health, nutrition, population, education and social protection ODA initiatives typified most IE studies prior to the

new millennium. While evaluations in these sectors continued to be prevalent in the literature, the new millennium has also brought about studies in other key development sectors. In the era of the SDGs, evaluations of development activities outside of the health and population related sectors has grown to 58% of all 3ie collated studies. Despite the increasing growth in published IE studies in ODA sectors other than health and education, those related to “energy, transportation, urban development and economic policy” in particular languish (Cameron, Mishra and Brown, 2016, p.8).

Figure 3.6: Impact evaluations by sector and publication decade



Source: Sabet and Brown, 2018, p. 296

A feature that permeates any search of the international ODA IE literature relates to the proliferation of ODA projects across a range of thematic sub-sectors. For example, in the 3ie database alone, the 15 broad IE search categories are further disaggregated into approximately 50 thematic sub-sectors. An example of this is provided by Sabet and Brown (2018) in Table 3.7 below. Further categorizations of IE studies relate to specific regions within countries and to approximately 11 population *sub-groups*, including Indigenous peoples. Other populations include the elderly, gender-based, ethnic minority, differently-abled, migrant workers, refugees and conflict affected groups.

Table 3.7: 3ie Database Sector and Sub-sector Classification

Sectors	Sub-sectors
Agriculture and Rural Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agricultural Extensions • Fisheries & Aquaculture • Rural Livelihoods • Irrigation & Drainage • Rural Roads • Agricultural Credit • Agro-industry & Marketing • Forestry • Rural Land Reform • Livestock • Weather Insurance
Content, tools and materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child Nutrition • Nutrition • Health services • Hospitals Secondary & Tertiary • Preventative Health and Health Behaviour • Primary Health – including reproductive health • Sexual behaviour • Specific diseases: including Malaria and TB • Mortality • Health Financing , Insurance and user fees • HIV/AIDS • Health Sector Reform

Source: Sabet and Brown, 2018, p. 297

It is likely that the exponential increase in IE as presented by the quantum of literature contained on the 3ie repository represents only a small fraction of the number of ODA evaluations globally. For example, Mishra and Cameron (2014) when establishing the inclusion protocols for 3ie studies in 2013, conducted a search of 22 ODA institutions responsible for funding for evaluative activities. This search (included in **Appendix 4**) revealed approximately 21,000 reports, publications, working papers and studies (Mishra and Cameron, 2014, p. 33). These conclusions regarding the number of IEs undertaken is consistent with the views of Bamberger (2009) who suggests that less than 2% of IE (using the most generous estimates) are based on strong statistical designs. Strength of design (i.e. RCT – the ‘gold standard’) underpin claims of rigor (as cited in Heyward et al., 2011, p. 376).

Savedoff (2016), one of the original authors of the 2006 *Will We Ever Learn?* CGD report, when reflecting on relative growth in IE, noted in a CGD presentation that a typical response from ODA funders would be to reduce funds directed to IE. He cautioned against this by suggesting that the IE evidence base was relatively small when considering the number of developing countries (approximately 135), regions, population groups, and the number of ODA sub-sectors (50) multiplied by the number and range of interventions/activities. He cautioned that there was still a dearth in the counter-factual evidence base. Savedoff's inference was that funders needed to take a '*strategic and opportunistic*' approach to planning for and conducting IE.

This point is reinforced in Raifman et al's (2018) analysis of 299 ODA health sector studies. These studies funded by five of the largest funders of health ODA programs (USAID, DFID, World Bank, PEPFAR and Global fund), indicated that 3ie type studies constituted less than 7 per cent of these (19 of 299). By far the largest proportion of studies were process / performance evaluations (i.e. not based on the 3ie counterfactual methodology). The authors terminology for non-randomised 'performance evaluations' referred "*to evaluations that focused on other aspects of performance such as managerial efficiency, outputs, or beneficiary satisfaction*" (Raifman et al, 2018, p.279). It should be noted that if the premises for similar proportions of generated literature are extrapolated, this would infer that there could be at least in the vicinity of 7,500²⁰ ODA evaluative or performance reports or studies published per annum.

Raifman (2018) and her colleagues sought to address the question of "*How well are aid agencies evaluating their programs?*". Following an assessment of a random sample of 37 of the 299 studies (both counter-factual and performance) against the three criteria of relevance, reliability and validity, she found particularly in relation to the performance and process evaluations that overall it was:

“essential to improve the quality of these evaluations by encouraging less biased approaches to collecting information and greater rigour and

²⁰ Approximation based on the assumption if 500 3ie studies catalogued each year represents 7% of all published materials)

replicability in the methods used to derive conclusions.” (Raifman et al, 2018, p. 283)

Other notable findings from this analysis were claims that²¹;

- 38 per cent of IE and **no** PE used highly relevant data, and only 67 per cent of PE and 13 per cent of IE using data considered ‘low’ in relevance;
- less than half IEs and lower than 10 per cent of PE met social science standards for relevance, validity, and reliability;
 - only 38% of IE and 10% of PE had high sampling validity with most PE (81%) and half IEs (50%) featuring ‘low’ levels of sampling validity,
 - Approximately one third (31%) of IEs and 5% of PEs were considered high in analytical validity, with most PEs (71%) considered low in analytical validity, while half of IEs were assessed as medium validity (50%) (Raifman et al, 2018, p. 282)

The following text aims to summarise one of the IE publications sourced from the 3ie that could be considered to be consistent with the TSRA’s development mandate including its government’s Outcome Statement and the sectoral program activities that it identified in its 2014-18 TSDP. The TSDP reiterates that the Federal government’s objectives for the TSRA is to close gaps in social and wellbeing outcomes for residents via the delivering of services and activities based on the following means “*development planning, coordination, sustainable resource management and preservation and promotion of Indigenous culture*” (TSRA 2014, p. 3).

A 3ie database search for published IE studies with Indigenous peoples as a population sub-group and completed within the timeframe 2010-2018 revealed 10 studies. No studies were completed in the Pacific or countries with significant Melanesian populations. Published studies included those by Islam (2015) assessing the adoption and impacts of rice-fish farming in Bangladesh, Prensushi and Gupta (2014), who studied women’s empowerment and socio-economic outcomes in rural

²¹ Impact Evaluation (IE); Performance Evaluation (PE)

poverty reduction programs in South-Asia, and Ashraf, Bandiera and Kelsey (2014), who evaluated incentives on public goods distribution in Zambia.

A 3ie stored IE by Arraiz and Rozo (2011) evaluates the response to social protection and Conditional Cash Transfer programs in Panama by Indigenous and rural non-Indigenous peoples. The Working Paper titled *Same Bureaucracy, Different Outcomes in Human Capital? How Indigenous and Rural Non-Indigenous Areas in Panama Responded to CCT*, draws on a Propensity Score Matching (PSM) methodology and outlines program effects in terms of educational attainment and increased number of health clinic check-ups between the study and control (matched) groups. It is notable that the narrative of the paper does not address the constituent elements of ‘human capital’ nor does it explain to any great extent how or what drivers influenced the outcomes. They did however, touch on some unintended consequences which included higher fertility rates as a result of the program²².

Despite the exponential growth in evaluation studies and reports internationally over the past two decades, significant questions on the relevance, reliability and validity of their data analysis and quality persist. These criticisms on the quality of international studies mirror to an extent the assessment of evaluations of programs and policies for Indigenous peoples in Australia. Notably the findings reported by Hudson from the CIS that less than 8 per cent of programs for Indigenous people are evaluated and of those less than one per cent include analysis based on strong methodological analysis.

Given the definitional and methodological complexity associated with evaluating impact, along with the conceptual and analytical resources required to effectively monitor, interpret and report on what has transpired, it is hardly surprising that small agencies struggle to incorporate the measurement of impact into day to day business and reporting functions. While the ANAO’s critique of TSRA’s reporting framework may be valid, little direction has been provided on the appropriate theoretical understanding of what impact means moreover, how it should be evaluated. This is

²² It is this author’s subjective view that the above paper by Arraiz and Roso (2011) is difficult to interpret and certainly would not be relevant to the TSRA other than some aspects of the Propensity Score Matching principles.

the gap that this research aims to address.

3.5 Role of evaluation in Australian public financial management

In late 2015, both the Commonwealth Industrial and Scientific Research Organisation (CSIRO), and Australian Department of Innovation, Industry and Science (DIIS), produced guidance documents specifically on the choice of appropriate designs and methods for impact evaluations of their portfolio policies, projects and major research initiatives. These documents point to greater levels of debate in public policy forums regarding the best methods to evaluate government policy and programs (CSIRO, 2015; DIIS, 2015).

These guidance issuances pose paradigms outlining how to collate evidence needed to assess the impact of investment that the agencies propose will be transparent and defensible including how policy makers determine what works, in what circumstances and why (DIIS, 2015, p.9). The largest State jurisdictions in Australia also have in place policy guidance regarding the evaluation of their policy and funding commitments (Queensland Treasury and Trade, 2014; ACT Government, 2010; NSW Premier and Cabinet, 2016)

According to public sector management theorists, Australia is feted internationally as among the highest performing public sector managers and is considered in the vanguard of the performance management movement (e.g. Bouckaert and Halligan, 2008; Hawke, 2012). In response to demands for increased efficiency and effectiveness in service delivery, and facing global economic forces, both Pollitt (1990), and Osborne and Gaebler (1992), posit that Australia was one of the pioneering nations to forge the New Public Management (NPM) approach in the 1980s and 1990s. According to Podger (2018), central tenets of the NPM movement in Australia were,

- a focus on results rather than processes;
- use of market-type mechanisms to improve efficiency in service delivery;
- devolution of central authority to line agencies and use of business corporate planning and accrual accounting;
- a systematic approach to performance budgeting and management (Podger, 2018, pp.95-96).

The authors however, refute Australia's public sector reputation in relation to performance assessment, suggesting that boasts of how much public sector reform has been achieved are, *“down to hyperbole and exaggerated claims of improvement”* (Podger, 2018, p.5). The critique here is that the public sector has undertaken limited analysis of whether reforms have been adopted and the extent to which they have resulted in *“actual performance improvement”* (Podger, 2018, p.5).

This sentiment is supported by senior public officials who have questioned whether decentralisation principles have been accepted into agency practice. Importantly, they question whether devolution of performance assessment functions has produced a suitability robust and effective framework for monitoring, measurement and evaluation (Australian Government Information Management Office, 2011). Commentators have also claimed that measures for evaluation of the public sector performance are inadequate and where they do exist are often subjective and based on anecdote (Mascarenhas, 1993). Furthermore, it is claimed that measuring project transactions does not equate to assessing the net worth or effectiveness of a policy or program route. As Podger points out:

“Many overseas practitioners and scholars find it hard to understand why Australian governments are reluctant to engage in evaluating the effectiveness of government policies and programs. American managers find it perplexing that Australia spends enormous effort in perfecting public management cultures without publicly paying much attention to evaluating the worthwhileness of policy/program initiatives” (Podger, 2018, p.6).

3.6 Evaluation of Australian Indigenous policy and programs²³

A litany of successive reviews, audits, inquiries and reports highlight the relative ineffectiveness of policy and programs supposedly geared towards reducing the life-expectancy and wellbeing gap in outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. For example, in 2010 the Department of Finance and Deregulation (DoFD) review concluded that, *“a multitude of separate disconnected programs runs*

²³ Note that the spelling of ‘programs’ is used to refer to national level Indigenous policy interventions that can include a combination of policies and services etc. The spelling ‘programmes’ is also used internationally and also in how TSRA describes its own policies and services.

contrary to the need for flexibility of service delivery,” and that, “significant efficiencies could be gained by pooling expertise and coordinating efforts in areas where individual agencies are currently ‘doing their own thing’” (DoFD, 2010, p.13).

In 2012, Olga Havnen, then Northern Territory Co-ordinator General for Remote Services, in the Remote Services Progress Report bemoaned the lack of strategy and coordination of Indigenous programs and stated, *“There are not only massive pre-existing service gaps but also a serious lack of high quality, evidence-based program and service development”* (Havnen, 2012, p.5). Later in 2012, the Australian Productivity Commissioner sponsored a Roundtable focused on the role of evaluation in improving Indigenous policy. Participants highlighted a wide range of issues and barriers in the use of evaluation to drive policy and service effectiveness. Some of these (but not an exhaustive list) included:

- Significant gaps in the evidence base, due to lack of mandated evaluations;
- Evaluating impact challenging, primarily because of difficulty isolating the specific policy effects from multiple, often competing, social programs;
- Cost of evaluation often not factored in program budgets and timetables, the result that many have low-cost, partial or no evaluations (APC, 2012, pp.1-7).

Furthermore, the participants of the APC workshop noted that there was *“enormous cynicism”* (APC, 2012, p.10), among Indigenous people, regarding a commitment by government for program effectiveness citing issues such as:

- *“a focus on the Closing the Gap agenda (see Chapter 1) means that programs (and therefore evaluations) not necessarily reflecting Indigenous objectives and priorities, particularly in relation to community development and governance issues;*
- *when consulted, Indigenous views are not always reflected accurately and widespread failure to implement even straight-forward recommendations flowing from evaluations;*

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- *a failure to communicate the results of evaluations and subsequent actions to Indigenous people, and reports are used to justify actions that do not reflect the recommendations;*
- *frequent reliance on overseas studies, in the absence of quality evaluations of Australian Indigenous social programs;*
- *only 30 per cent of the evaluations listed on the Clearinghouse register of government-commissioned research are released publicly. This potentially creates a publication bias, if only studies that have positive findings or accord with the funder's views are released” (APC, 2012, pp.7-14).*

These findings were echoed in a subsequent 2014 National Commission of Audit (NCoA) report where again poor government policy and coordination reiterated calls for *“significant scope to improve the effectiveness of Indigenous expenditure”* (Moran et al, 2014, p.11). Among the NCoA findings were:

- too much duplication and a substantial degree of overlap between the Commonwealth and States in Indigenous affairs;
- excessively bureaucratic processes and administrative arrangements; and
- too many disparate and fragmented Commonwealth Indigenous programs.

Notably the NCoA stated, *“There is also a critical lack of robust evidence and evaluation about the effectiveness of Indigenous programmes at all levels of government.”* (NCoA 2014, p.174).

Later in 2016, Sara Hudson for the Centre for Independent Studies (CIS) undertook seminal research that aimed to map all Indigenous funding programs across Australia (Hudson, 2016). This report confirmed that Indigenous specific expenditure in 2014 was AU\$5.6 billion (i.e. programs, services and payments explicitly targeted at Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders). Although representing approximately 15 per cent of the total expenditure on services provided to Indigenous Australians²⁴, it still exemplified a *“significant component of total expenditure provided for Indigenous services; which rose from \$5.1 billion in 2008–09 to \$5.6 billion in 2012–13 (when adjusted for CPI represents a decrease in real terms by 1.2%)”* (Hudson and Kiekebosch-Fitt, 2017, p.3).

²⁴ See pg. 47 for overall expenditures reported by the Productivity Commission.

The mapping report identified 1,082 different Indigenous specific programs being delivered by multiple providers²⁵, the overwhelming majority (92%) of which had never been evaluated, prompting Hudson to write “*too many programs are implemented because of their perceived benefit, rather than a rigorous assessment of what works*” (Hudson, 2017, p.1). These conclusions led Hudson and the CIS to produce a subsequent research report, *Evaluating Indigenous Programs: A Toolkit for Change* in 2017. This report reiterated the paucity in Indigenous specific evaluation, with only 8 per cent of 1,048 Indigenous programs and policies being subject to evaluation (n 88)²⁶.

Moreover, the authors found following an analysis of more half of the reported Indigenous evaluations (49 of 88), only three adopted the level of methodological robustness to the equivalent of that ascribed to the apparent gold-standard of RCTs. Consistent with the sectoral representation of studies in the international development literature, Hudson’s analysis indicates that the Indigenous health and education sector represent the majority of available studies (67 per cent or 74 of 111). Studies were also available in other sectors including, crime, culture, housing, jobs and transport. Table 3.8 below summarises available Indigenous evaluation reports by sector.

Table 3.8: CIS search of available Indigenous program reports

Category	Evaluation	Audit	Reviews	CBA	SROI	Other	Total
Crime	8			1	1	1	10
Culture	4	1	1	1		1	8
Education	15				2	5	22
Health	41	2	5	1		3	52
Housing	4	4	2			1	11
Jobs	3				3		7
Transport			1				1
	75	7	9	3	6	11	111

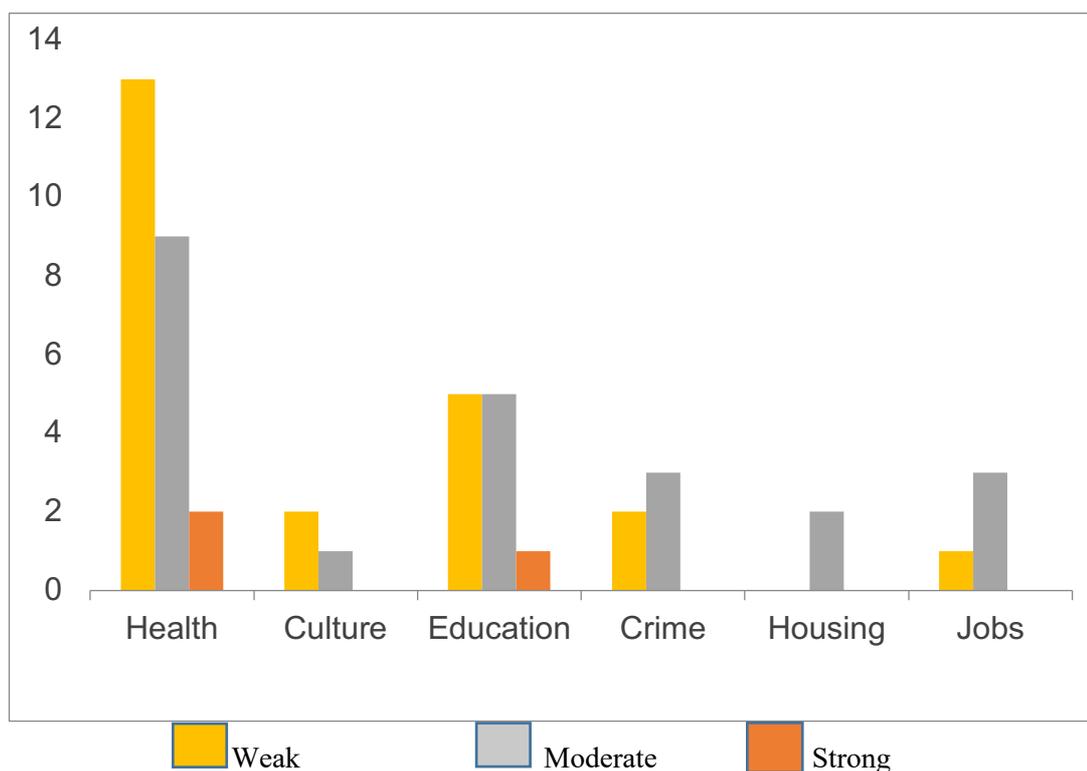
Source: (Hudson, 2017, p.13)

²⁵ “including government agencies, Indigenous organisations, not-for-profit NGOs and for-profit contractors” (Hudson, 2016, p.1)

²⁶ Note the subsequent CIS report identified a reduced number of Indigenous programs than the previous mapping report had identified (1048 v 1082)

Hudson (2017) found that of the 111 program reports identified for analysis, only 71 were able to be reviewed in detail (5 were based on Cost Benefit Analysis, 6 were SROI reports and 60 were a combination of either/or evaluations/audits/reviews), as the full text of the remaining 40 evaluation reports was not available. In total, only 49 of the 60 program reports could be assessed against a rating scale based on level of rigor and methodological strength accordingly as weak, moderate or strong. It was found that the 11 of the published documents were not evaluation reports, but audits or review reports. Hudson’s (2017) findings identified that: 23 reports were founded on weak analysis; 23 evaluation reports were based on a moderate level of methodology, with only 3 of 111 available evaluation reports using a strong methodology. Her synopsis of the 71 assessed evaluations according to their criteria for methodological rigor by sector is provided below at figure 3.9.

Figure 3.9: CIS assessment of Indigenous ‘Evaluations’ by level of rigor and sector



Source: (Hudson, 2016, p. 112)

Of concern, Hudson (2017) identified that there was an overall lack of rigour in the evaluation reports assessed, noting in particular overreliance on anecdotal evidence, lack of data and absence of a control group. The CIS analysis led the author to the conclusion that robust (i.e. strong) evaluations in the Australian Indigenous context, must be premised on the following features:

- i) *“A mixed method design, which involves triangulation of qualitative and quantitative data and some economic components of the program such as the cost effectiveness/or meta-analysis;*
- ii) *Local input into design and implementation of the program to ensure program objectives match community needs;*
- iii) *Clear and measurable objectives; and,*
- iv) *Pre and post program data to measure impact” (Hudson, 2017, p.1)*

A more detailed consideration on the CIS rating scale developed by Hudson for the assessment of Indigenous program evaluations is provided in chapter 4 due to its relevance to the research objectives of this thesis. The previous discussion of evaluation theory and methods in the international, national and Indigenous public policy in Australia is of direct relevance to the TSRA. As shown in Figure 2.4 in chapter 2, the TSRA’s operating context and legislative mandate requires it to be able to monitor all programs and policies targeted towards regional Indigenous social improvement. The organisation is also legislated to provide advice to the Minister for Indigenous Affairs of the efficacy of policies and programs delivered by other agencies in the region that are to benefit Indigenous residents. A thorough understanding of the issues outlined in the preceding discussion is paramount both in terms of the development of an evaluation framework for the TSRA’s own programs, and in order to effectively ascertain the effectiveness of the activities of other organisations in the region.

3.7 Choosing appropriate evaluation methodologies for TSRA

Decisions regarding adoption of suitable evaluation methodologies that could be adapted to the TSRA’s program delivery context were not immediately apparent. Particularly, as changes to political oversight of the organisation rendered open and frank conversations about survey or program data collection highly sensitive. Furthermore, the sheer breadth of the TSRA’s development work required an assessment of the feasibility being able to reasonably undertake an IE given that program activities covered public health, land care and environmental activities, infrastructure, jobs, training and governance activities. Therefore, the data and thematic focus of this thesis dep dives into two key and high profile TSRA

initiatives, namely infrastructure and grants administration. Articulating the opportunities, barriers and challenges associated with evaluating these activities identifies a number of lessons related to the application of evaluation in real world and applied contexts.

3.8 Summary and conclusions

This chapter has sought to outline some of the key theoretical, conceptual and definitional issues that would require in depth consideration prior to undertaking an impact evaluation, particularly for an organisation that has the regional development imperatives akin to the TSRA. At the outset, the review of the rapidly growing body of evaluative literature reveals that even a consolidated and settled definition of ‘evaluation’ is yet to be determined among the evaluation fraternity. This lack of definition, notably in being able to distinguish the differences between pure research and applied practical evaluation continues to be the subject of conjecture by prominent theorists such as Scriven (2009), White (2014), and many others.

It is also apparent that the definitional lexicon often deployed in the assessment of the results or consequences of social policies and programs in terms of the impact they make is also complex. These definitional and methodological debates in relation to ODA and publicly funded research is manifest in the criteria used to assess impact studies and publications for consolidation on global clearinghouses, such as the 3ie database and others. Here dissemination of studies associated with supposed rigor ascribed to randomised trials are given ascendance, however concerns over data and analytical relevance, reliability and validity persist.

As this chapter points out – acknowledging the analysis of the international health sector literature conducted by Raifman and her colleagues (2018) - IE studies undertaken based on randomisation, propensity matching, and other designs purportedly more ‘scientifically rigorous’ methodologies represent only a very small proportion of the published evidence base. This would conclude that more than ninety per cent of international ODA evaluative studies (thus the corresponding volume of related literature) include those described by the US Department of State (2015) as being a myriad of either / or, performance and process evaluations, summative/ex-post evaluations, impact evaluations, global/regional program

evaluations, experience reviews, program audits and special evaluation studies. These evaluative designs and corresponding published literature constitutes the majority of published studies available due “*to their ability to generate rapid and cost-effective learning*” (US Department of State, 2015: vii).

Although worthy of a far more detailed discussion, certainly beyond what is possible within the scope of this work, the underpinning philosophies informing the ontological and epistemological decision making that occurs when considering an evaluation are canvassed within this chapter. Here the literature indicates the degree of divergence in perspectives that might be applied to issues such as claiming a credible counter-factual, particularly when social policies are likely to be implemented in complex multi-program contexts. Important considerations in this regard must be given to the degree to which claims attributing program interventions and activities to social outcomes are formulated, as opposed to an assessment of how a service or programs *contribute* to outcomes that are generated.

This chapter also examines the role of evaluation in the Australian public policy and financial management context. Importantly it touches on the criticisms by some international commentators that claims of public sector effectiveness are rife with hyperbole and exaggeration rather than substance (see Podger, 2018). Finally, the chapter provides some commentary on the rather desultory state of the evaluation of policies and programs that aim to improve outcomes and the wellbeing of Indigenous Australians. Here the commentary and feedback from Indigenous leaders, academics and policy makers in the forums coordinated Australian Productivity Commissioner and recent detailed publications by Hudson (2016) of the Centre for Independent Studies is considered. In this respect, Hudson’s innovative work on mapping Indigenous program funding and the corresponding recent 2016 work on assessing Indigenous evaluations is illuminating. In particular, their conclusions that despite the increasing number of Indigenous programs, the lack of “*strategic oversight, nor a requirement for an evidence base for funding*”, has resulted in, “*no appreciable improvements to outcomes*” (Hudson, 2017, p.6). As Hudson rightly points out:

“Not all evaluations are equal. Many evaluations are akin to a ‘tick box’ exercise, with limited data available to measure impact. The primary focus of these types of evaluations appears to be participation in the program, or

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throughputs, rather than outcomes. A number of program providers seem reluctant to admit the failings of their programs and their evaluation reports read more like exercises in public relations than independent and rigorous analysis” (Hudson, 2016, p.1).

Developing a suitable methodology and approach to address these significant concerns and applying it in relation to the work of the TSRA will be the central focus of this research and forms the substantive content of the following chapters of this thesis.

CHAPTER 4: EVALUATION RESEARCH DESIGN, METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

“[P]ressing need for more and better evaluation of Indigenous policies and programs nationally if we are to see improvements in outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians.”³ SCRGSP (Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision) 2016, Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key Indicators 2016, Canberra: Productivity Commission, p.iii)

4.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to build upon the overarching theoretical and conceptual issues and approaches outlined in Chapter Three. It seeks to create a basis for the adopted evaluative research design and associated methods adopted for the establishment of a suitable Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) system which the TSRA or any similar Indigenous organisation can consider in future development planning. The chapter also aims to ground the ontological, epistemological and methodological foundations outlined in the previous chapter, which in turn guide the choice of study design. This research design underpins the rationale and framework for data selection and collection processes that are incorporated into the analysis that follows.

The chapter also explores some of the ethical, moral, political and organisational considerations and sensitivities that emerged for the researcher during the research process. This is particularly relevant given the researcher’s past professional working experience in the region and as a public official of the TSRA. Therefore, also included is a discussion on the extent to which any particular partiality has influenced this work and in what ways an attempt was made to minimize any interference with the validity of the results obtained due to the potential for bias.

Given a certain degree of inter-changeability in how research processes around IE are narrated (e.g. differentiating terms such as approach, paradigm, methodology and methods), it is important to distinguish how component elements of this research thesis relate in structural terms. Rowley (2002) offers some sage advice to fledgling

researchers (and tacitly those who would presumably consume research results), that resonates with this analysis given the cross-cultural context within which it has taken place. Rowley notes that:

“Research design often seems to be something of a mystery to new researchers, and the proneness of research philosophers to engage in sophisticated debates using terminology that is inaccessible to the novice does not help” (Rowley, 2002, p.18).

Payne and Payne (2004) offer a similar perhaps even more derisive critique of the tendency for some of those involved in social research to appropriate and even to “abuse” research terminology (Payne and Payne, 2004, p.150). As an example, they point out that in a literal sense the term methodology refers to the study of methods, including “*their characteristics, the principles on which methods operate, and the standards governing their selection and application*” (Payne and Payne, 2004, p.150). However, they offer a sobering reminder to researchers in that they believe the term ‘methodology’ has been abused in two ways. Firstly, they argue that it is used as a synonym for ‘method’ where it is:

“often used in the context of describing a researcher's own work: ‘The methodology used in this study entailed ...’ This owes something to language: ‘methodology’ sounds more impressive than ‘method’. It rolls off the tongue or page more mellifluously – it just sounds better!” (Payne and Payne, 2004, p.151).

Furthermore, and an issue that is highlighted later in this chapter in relation to research sensitivities in cross-cultural contexts, notably within which this study was undertaken, Payne and Payne (2004) suggest that referring to methods as being ‘methodologies’ infers a more profound set of conceptual issues. They posit that:

“In this sense, ‘methodology’ means not so much the end use of a technique, but a grander scheme of ideas orienting researchers' work. This abuse of the word allows researchers to legitimate their choice of topic, methods and findings, by implicitly (and often explicitly) lining up an elaborate apparatus of justificatory literature” (Payne and Payne, 2004, p.152).

Given both Rowley's and Payne and Payne's observations above, along with an acute understanding of the potential audience/s for this research, the following chapter aims to present a clear logical paradigm and explanatory basis for the research process. In doing so, the point of reference is to reiterate in summary the research objectives outlined in Chapter 1.

Consistent with the primary research aim of effectively assessing TSRA's development impact, the first two research objectives include: a) an assessment of the adequacy of the existing Impact Evaluation (IE) methods and designs using the TSRA as a case study, and b) to design and implement a methodology to practically assess social development organisations using the case study of TSRA. These objectives require understanding of both the availability and utility of particular data along with what adaptations would render them of use as inputs to a suitable evaluative framework.

The introductory narrative touches on key aspects of the research approach that had to be addressed in the event that they undermined research legitimacy in the applied context of the Torres Strait. Key contextual considerations and sensitivities in terms of political, organisational socio-cultural dynamics had to be traversed during the course of this research process. It then provides a discussion and rationale for the adoption of the case study research design (or method depending on what terminology is adopted). In this instance, the selection of the TSRA organisation as a particular case, with further justification of the approach to using case study design in view of its suitability when attempting to align the evaluative analysis to address the research objectives above.

Given the choice of case study, including factors related to organisational dynamics in a period of significant change - both political (elected TSRA Board) and organisational (i.e. key personnel) - the primary tools and techniques adopted to support data collection and analysis were restricted primarily to document analysis, document screening and direct observation. The rationale, available options and subsequent decisions to adopt these data collection and analytical tools and techniques are discussed later in this chapter.

4.2 Key contextual considerations and sensitivities

It is important at the outset of a discussion on research methodology and evaluation design to elaborate on some of the sensitivities associated with conducting this work, in the particular regional and organizational context. This discussion aims to clarify further the definitional distinctions between evaluation and research in the social sciences outlined in Chapter 3. In particular, the significant past criticism that research involving Indigenous peoples has been “*inherently biased and disempowering*” (Putt, 2013, p.1).

Henry et al (2004), and Sherwood (2010), provide compelling arguments for how (predominantly western) research paradigms and processes have essentially reinforced the subjugation of Indigenous rights and knowledge. As Kenny (2004) claims:

“Research methods are not created in a vacuum. They come out of a historical context, represent a philosophy or worldview and are created in a specific social context. Beneath each culture of inquiry, there is an entire world view and a belief about the nature of knowledge and truth” (Kenny, 2004, p.24).

According to Kincheloe and Tobin (2009), the potential for certain research processes to oppress and dehumanise subjects or participants is “*often invisible to researchers and those who consume their research*” (Kincheloe and Tobin, 2009, p.513). Rigney (1999) offers a more scathingly poignant critique of historical western research epistemology and ontology noting that the pursuit of ensuring valid and reliable data infers that its “*science is authoritative, neutral and universal*”. Furthermore that “*Its power is historical in that it has always foisted so called facts and half-truths about Indigenous peoples, contributing to hegemonic colonial construction of Indigenous identities*” (Rigney, 1999, p.109).

Other issues and risks associated with conducting research with Indigenous peoples include, that definitions and recognition of ‘experts’ and ‘subjects’ can be reinforced in values and practices associated with assessing and approving work (Sherwood, 2010). Further, that research funding approval and many research outputs are judged

based on scientific rigour and not net social benefit (Henry, et al 2004). Davey and Day (2008) posit that the reproduction of stereotypes can be manifest in the over-identification or romanticising and reifying the construct of Indigenous identity (as cited in Putt, 2013, p.4).

While changes to the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) of Australia's research guidelines now require an articulation of community engagement, capacity building and benefit, it is suggested that much of the research that Indigenous people experience may relate to evaluations and associated consultation processes (Putt, 2013, p.4). It is acknowledged that in many cases, the business model for evaluations is that Government contracts external or independent parties to work in accordance with specifications and timeframes determined by government and the contracted entity. Moreover, it is claimed that evaluations of Indigenous programmes and initiatives pose particular challenges that guidelines for Indigenous research do not deal with specifically (Williams et al, 2011). As Dr Judy Putt observes;

“Collaborative and participatory research methodologies do not lend themselves to short timeframes...they are relatively easy to talk about but difficult to do. There are limited resources, and limited time to develop the trust and confidence at the heart of true partnerships” (Putt, 2013, p.4)

In the context within which this thesis was undertaken, all the above issues percolated at various points during the period covering the research process. As expressed in previous chapters, many of those who claim Torres Strait heritage are acutely concerned with the maintenance of rights including the control over how, why, and what forms of evaluation or research are undertaken and, perhaps more importantly, who undertakes it. This has important implications for notions of objectivity and unbiasedness and an appreciation of these facts had to remain in the foreground throughout the research process.

4.3 Rationale for the case study evaluation (research) design

Chapter 1 outlined the context and background for this work along with the development of the research question this thesis aims to address. According to

Bordage and Dawson (2003, p.378), “*the single most important component of a study is the research question. It is the keystone of the entire exercise*”. The problem statement including an explanation of the background drivers (e.g. key findings of the ANAO performance audit of TSRA) to this research have been outlined in Chapter 1. As stated, the primary question/s that this research aims to examine is:

Has the Indigenous regional social development agency, the Torres Strait Regional Authority, made an impact on the wellbeing of Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal residents of the Torres Strait, and if so how and in what ways could TSRA’s development impact be effectively assessed?

Once the research problem and questions have been ascertained, writers such as DeVaus (2001), for example, denote the importance of a clearly articulated research design as fundamental to the research process. This provides the high-level logic and coherence for assembling different elements of the activities so that they address the research objectives, questions or problems. The research design thus serves as the roadmap or blueprint for collecting measuring and analysing data. In doing this, DeVaus proposes that:

“Social research needs a design or a structure before data collection or analysis can commence. A research design is not just a work-plan. A work-plan will flow from the project’s research design. The function of a research design is to ensure that the evidence obtained enables us to answer the initial question as unambiguously as possible” (DeVaus, 2001, p. 9)

This view is supported by Yin (2013) for example, who suggests that the importance of a well formulated research design is a ‘logical’ issue rather than an issue of ‘logistics’. The latter is more commonly inferred to indicate the processes of data collection and analytical methods rather than an overarching strategy that aims to allow “*a detailed, holistic, intensive exploration of individuals, groups, organisations and phenomenon in context*” (Schütze, et al, 2017, p.2). In terms of underpinning philosophy, Løkke and Sørensen (2014) write;

“Case study research can depart in a positivist or interpretivist approach, it can be deductive or inductive, and it can rely on qualitative or quantitative methods” (Løkke and Sørensen, 2014, p.66).

It is posited by numerous authors that the case-study research approach can effectively integrate differing philosophical positions with respect to ontology, epistemology and methodology (Marshall and Rossman 1995; Lyons, 2009). To generate a rich and thorough understanding of the subject under enquiry, the case study approach is also amenable to multifaceted data collection methods. The case study design is also able to accommodate various analytical measures dependent on the choice of research question, study objectives, degree of researcher control, and whether the research is approached from a historical or contemporary perspective (Yin, 2009).

Luck et al (2006) advocate strongly for the methodological flexibility and application that the case study approach provides. They suggest that the case study design, when applied judiciously, can serve as both process and the end product of research, and that:

“It provides a delineated boundary for inquiry, and a structural process within which any methods appropriate to investigating a research area can be applied”. (Luck et al, 2006, p.103)

Salient to research objectives are the observations of the case study approach made by Tellis (1997) who propounds that in order to thoroughly understand the structure, dynamics and context of the ‘case’, inspiration can be sourced from disciplines such as *“anthropology, sociology, political science, or historical research”* (Tellis, 1997, p.3). Moreover, the approach is well suited to both inductive theory generation and theory testing (i.e. inductive and deductive). Consistent with the research objectives aimed at generating an adaptive/transferrable evaluation framework, Tellis notes that *“one can move from the analysis of a single case towards the comparative in-depth-analysis of two and more cases”* (Tellis, 1997, p.3).

McDonnell, et al., (2000), assert that methodological rigour can be derived through the case-study design by using existing quality measures for the methods that are

incorporated into the study processes. Furthermore, they state that “*flexibility of method, and potential for practical application, is arguably one of the key strengths of case study*” (McDonnell, et al, 2000, p.385). Yin (2003) proposes that case-studies are particularly suited to investigations that aim to glean insight into the ‘how’ or ‘why’, while Darke et al., (1998) enthuse on the efficacy of the case-study design where research aims are “*to provide descriptions of phenomena, develop theory, and test theory*” (Darke et al, 1998, p.281). As a framework, the approach can suitably incorporate a variety of techniques such as interviews, observation, questionnaires and document analysis (Darke et al., 1998).

4.4 Methodological approach

As indicated in the discussion of ontology and epistemology in Section 3 of Chapter 3, the primary methodological foundations for this research are derived from the typology and principles set out by DeCuir-Gunby and Schutz, (2017). At the outset the intent of the research project was designed to be participatory. It was to incorporate the TSRA political and organisational stakeholders at all stages of the research.

This was the circumstance at commencement in 2015 and through 2016 where there was consistency in management and leadership within the organisation. However, following the TSRA Board elections and changes to political representation at the end of 2016, the methodology became oriented to be more pragmatic and pluralist in orientation (see also section 4.6). Essentially, following the Board elections there was a change in personnel and an explicit sentiment that previous administrative agreements or approvals were subject to review, including those provided for this research project. The factors leading to this are discussed in the discussion at Chapter 8. In this sense DeCuir-Gunby and Schutz enthuse that:

“Taking a pragmatic approach to a mixed methods study implies that you are open to using whatever methods best address your problem. This approach could result in a qualitative or quantitative-dominant mixed methods study or a more balanced use of both approaches” (DeCuir-Gunby and Schutz, 2017, p.38)

As also canvassed in Chapter Three, the analyses of Indigenous evaluations by Hudson and the CIS (2017) also provide the methodological basis and approach for identifying sources of data which might serve as key inputs for evaluating TSRA’s impact. According to Hudson’s (2017) typology, a summary of the characteristics of studies based on weak, moderate or strong designs or methodology are outlined in Table 4.1 below:

Table 4.1: *Hudson’s typology for evaluating the ‘evaluations’*

<i>Study design / methodology</i>	<i>Study characteristics</i>
Weak	limited methodology reliant on qualitative evidence or a survey with a small sample size, no pre and post data, or only a summary of full evaluation report publicly available
Moderate	a mixture of qualitative and quantitative data, some attempt at triangulation of data (cross verification from two or more sources), some evidence of impact but no pre and post data and no control groups.
Strong	a mixture of qualitative and quantitative data with evidence of triangulation of data. Evidence the program is having an impact through the use of pre and post data or other benchmarking data. The use of experimental design/random control trials/ or control group. Or in the absence of that, evidence the evaluation utilises in addition to triangulation of data and benchmarking one or more of the following: an economic component through either a cost benefit or cost effective analysis or some mention of the financial impact of the program and or meta-analyses — reviews of multiple evaluations.

Source: Hudson (2016, p. 12)

On the basis of the typology set above, the evaluation methodology sought to identify both a formative and summative analysis of TSRA program delivery using a combination of methods that are outlined above as constituting a methodologically rigorous case study analysis. To this end information was sought that allowed for triangulation between qualitative and quantitative sources and data that would serve as performance benchmarks. Very early in the research process the leadership of the organisation ruled out the use of RCTs, therefore consideration of economic and cost benefit aspects of program performance was required along considerations of past TSRA evaluations.

4.5 Pluralism and pragmatism in a mixed methods approach

Increasingly, literature related to identifying and selecting suitable approaches to IE

advocate for designs comprising mixed and/or multiple research methods (e.g. Mertens, 2015; Bamberger, 2012; UNEG, 2013). According to Bamberger (2013), “*all evaluative methodologies possess strengths and limitations*”, therefore, “*it is important to use a mix of methods to ensure triangulation*” and thus counteract the limitations of any single method (Bamberger, 2013, p. 6).

Recently there has been concurrence across international development and national public policy debate that, “*systematic integration of quantitative and qualitative methods*” rather than IE that incorporates makeshift or “ad-hoc” methods are more accepted in domestic and international IE (USAID, 2013; Stern et al, 2012; AusAID, 2012; CSIRO, 2015). This consensus acknowledges that development activities, “*operate in complex and changing social, economic, ecological and political contexts*” (USAID, 2013, p. 2). Further interactions among these facets of society cannot be sufficiently described by unitary evaluation methodologies.

High profile proponents of mixed-methods evaluation designs, e.g. Bamberger (2012, p. 14), advocate for systematic integration of methods by pointing out that implementation aspects of programmes produce a range of outcomes and can transform in response to how they are viewed and integrated by different population groups (beneficiaries and non-participants). As noted by the CSIRO “*observing these processes of behavioural change underpins the need for different methods and a well-designed mix-methods IE is able to draw on a much broader range of qualitative and quantitative tools, techniques and conceptual frameworks*” (CSIRO, 2015, p. 31).

Commonly, a mixed-methods analytical approach will also factor in a multi-disciplinary aspect to IE as professionals with differing skills in evaluation teams often leads to a better understanding of how the localised context can be used to interpret variations in program delivery and outcomes in differing environs. The US AID Agency USAID (2013), agrees that mixed-methods IE can combine representativeness derived from quantitative methods allowing for generalisation of findings from smaller samples to larger populations “*along with the ability of qualitative methods to articulate the effects of intervening variables (e.g. ethnicity, empowerment etc – emphasis added) on outcomes*”(USAID, 2013, p. 3).

4.5.1 Triangulation techniques

Consistent with Hudson's components of strong evaluation methodology, according to Flick (2002) and Denzin and Lincoln (2005), the use of triangulation in social research is an approach that can improve the validity of data analysis thus increase the credibility and confidence in research findings. Triangulation involves blending multiple methods, data inputs, analytical tools and theoretical paradigms as a strategy that provides added breadth, depth, richness of understanding, and ultimately rigour to inquiry (Flick, 2002, p. 229). Conceptually, triangulation is derived from the domains of survey and navigation, whereby the measurement of two separate locations allows one to derive or predict a third measure or locale. According to Downward and Mearman (2007), "*in social research in its broadest sense, triangulation implies combining together more than one set of insights in an investigation*" (Downward and Mearman, 2007, p. 80)

Denzin (1970) provides a taxonomy outlining four dimensions of the research process where triangulation techniques can be used including triangulation of data, investigators, theories, and methodologies. Among the arguments for triangulation are that the approach leads to increased persuasiveness of findings and interpretations of evidence and that the validity of inquiry is enhanced. According to Shih (1998) financial data is considered more 'complete' if coupled with triangulated analysis which also assists in confirming the accuracy of the data (Denzin, 1989). Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009) view triangulation as a key strategy to reduce risks associated with researcher biases, while both Cresswell (1995) and Tashakkori and Teddlie (1998), argue that application of pragmatic principles is well suited to decisions on the combinations of data or methods deployed as part of an analysis. As Olsen (2004) asserts:

"Triangulation, I argue, is not aimed merely at validation but at deepening and widening one's understanding. As a research aim, this one can be achieved either by a person or by a research team or group. Triangulation and pluralism both tend to support interdisciplinary research rather than a strongly bounded discipline of sociology" (Olsen, 2004, p. 1)

4.5.2 Economic methods for evaluating social programs

Health researchers in particular have long understood that there is a myriad of social, environmental and economic factors that impact on bio-logical and psychological health and wellbeing (Suls and Rothman, 2004). These concepts have provided the basis for a deeper level of consideration across government, business and social sector organisations about the impact of their activities sometimes referred to as the ‘triple-bottom-line’ (Elkington, 1997). The concept of a triumvirate of factors impacting on wellbeing is mirrored to an extent in references to the social institutions charged with making decisions and delivering services including the public, private and non-government (third) sectors (Arvidson, Lyon, McKay and Moro, 2013)²⁷.

Fundamental to the field of economics and the private sector is the concept of ‘return on investment’, where at a fundamental level, investment decisions are made if the return (or the expectation of return) over time exceeds the initial investment (Eklund, 2010). For many public sector investments however, such as increased life expectancy arising from new medical treatments, improved family cohesion, reduced travel time etc, are often intangible and not amenable to financial estimation (Leck, Upton and Evans, 2014). Nonetheless, in order to inform the public sector investment in social and physical infrastructure and services, many governments deploy economic evaluation methods such as cost-benefit analysis to inform investment decision making (Victoria Government Treasury, 2013).

Progressive government reforms have resulted in the outsourcing of many community services to charities and social organisations (i.e. third-sector). Arvidson et al. (2013) highlight the difficulty that many third-sector organisations experience in relation to demonstrating their value in a context where returns on spending are not traded in a private market therefore “*there is no clear price*” (Arvidson, Lyon, McKay and Moro, 2013, p. 3). Here the authors also suggest that many third-sector and social enterprises do not possess the resources or technical expertise that is available to governments to conduct CBA type economic evaluations of their activities. They note that:

²⁷ Here the ‘third-sector’ refers to non-government social organisations such as charities, social organisations etc (See Arvidson et al, 2014)

“Into this gap have flowed a large number of different tools for measuring ‘social value’, and increasingly prominent among them is the approach known as ‘social return on investment’ (SROI)” (Arvidson, Lyon, McKay and Moro, 2013, p. 3).

The key facets of the applicability of both CBA and SROI in relation to an analysis the TSRA’s activities will be discussed in the following chapters of this thesis.

4.5.3 A note on differences and synergy in monitoring and impact evaluation frameworks

Given the context of this research and its stated aims and objectives (see Section 1) it is important to clarify both the distinctions and complementarities between monitoring, evaluation and IE. O’Flynn (2010), and Perrin (2012), each present typologies outlining the key distinctions between approaches noting that divisions between monitoring and evaluation are predominantly based on timing and the overall focus of assessment. Monitoring is ongoing in nature, focuses on what is happening, and is normally undertaken by those directly involved with implementation. Evaluations however, are often undertaken at pre-specified times, aim to evaluate how the intervention or policy measure performed, and what differences were made.

Monitoring data is generally used by managers to track outputs, budgets and procedural compliance with project / program implementation plans etc. Evaluations while also designed to inform implementation (e.g. mid-term), are generally less frequent or more episodic, seek to assess greater levels of change (i.e. outcome), and require enhanced levels of methodological and analytical rigor (Stem et al, 2005). However, while it is important to distinguish various attributes of monitoring and evaluation activity, the International Finance Corporation (IFC) (2008), identifies that, *“both monitoring and evaluation are integrally linked, as monitoring typically provides data for evaluation, and other key elements”* (IFC, 2008, p.12) required for assessing impact (i.e. performance indicators etc).

4.6 Selection of methods for data collection and analysis

The following section describes the case study unit of analysis, data collection tools and analysis method of the case study.

4.6.1 Case study unit of analysis

The approach to the selection of methods for data collection and analysis is consistent with the TSRA's operational and organisational context, aspects of the research problem in question, adoption of the case study design, and pragmatic approach to building a strong evaluative framework. The program logic as articulated in the TSRA's Torres Strait Development Plan (2014-18) along with the performance reporting and accountability framework required by Government (e.g. Portfolio Budget Statements, Annual Reports and KPIs) provided the guiding architecture for the assessment and selection of methods. Other key sources of data and information including TSRA's Corporate Plan, Community Service Delivery Booklets and media were incorporated into the analysis where necessary. Key quantitative analytical activities focussed on the following primary data sources:

- TSRA Annual Reports (1995 – 2015)
- TSRA Torres Strait Development Plan (2014 – 2018)
- Analysis of TSRA Healthy Communities and Safe Communities Common Funding Round (CFR) Grants Programme (2012 – 2016)

To assist with the triangulation of quantitative data a qualitative synopsis of the process and outcome associated with the development of a collaborative base-line mapping project via inter-agency collaboration with the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). The substantive data required for this research is drawn from publicly available information sources only. Although a number of specific data gaps were identified, suitable formal requirements (due to the organisational factors) to obtain alternate data sets were not able to be formulated. This is despite the preparatory measures to ensure all appropriate personal consent and privacy provisions were considered (e.g. health data etc). Given that this research was not ultimately able to involve humans (surveys, focus groups etc), Human Research Ethics (Level A) Permits was not sought or provided from Curtin University and the

Research Student Coordinator, Sustainability Policy Institute (CUSP) prior to the research being completed as it was not necessary.

4.6.2 Data identification and collection tools

The primary tools and techniques used for the identification and analysis of data were predominantly a combination of document analysis and observation. According to the University of New South Wales (2018), document analysis, as a tool for data collection can be both qualitative in terms of “*interrogation of correspondence (letters, diaries, emails etc) or reports*” and quantitative when used for “*sourcing numerical data from financial reports or counting word occurrences*” (UNSW, 2018, n.p). This research also incorporated publicly available data available from national statistical collections, the Queensland Government and other agency reports where appropriate. To add substance to some of the analyses, direct observations from the researchers own experience whilst on-site during the course of the research are also included to explain more clearly context.

4.6.3 Content and thematic analysis

The quantitative and qualitative analysis of the content of documentation according to thematic and semantic structures is an accepted social science research approach (Roberts, 1997). Thematic analysis in particular is a technique that can be used to investigate texts in order to ascertain and clarify meaning. It has also been used to “*identify patterns, stances, or concerns evident in the data, which can be interpreted in reference to the existing theories from the sociology of scientific knowledge*” (Duckworth, 2016, p.18). It is this approach that is taken in relation to the analysis of documentation for this thesis.

4.7 Ethical considerations, bias and positioning

As research participants may include Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal peoples, National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) ethical research protocols and guidelines are adhered to. All source data obtained from either individuals, the TSRA or other regional Torres Strait stakeholders are treated as confidential and informed consent is obtained.

It is important to note also that the researcher and author of this thesis was previously a fulltime employee of the TSRA in a level of relative seniority in terms of the administrative hierarchy of the organisation. In terms of employment in the administrative arm of the TSRA, employees are engaged as Australian Public Servants (APS). In the administrative structures, the CEO is employed as a Senior Executive Service (SES Band 1) level, whilst the next tier under the direction of the CEO are APS 'Executive 2' levels. It was at this level that the author was employed in the TSRA from 2012 to 2016. Following this period of tenure, I was engaged by the TSRA as a service contractor providing strategic policy, planning and program management advice.

It was whilst employed as a fulltime APS officer that I commenced the Doctor Sustainable Development degree course with Curtin University in 2015. At this time the research topic was determined and put forward for support from the organisation. At that time, it was approved by the CEO with support from the TSRA Chairperson as representative for the TSRA Board. Based on this written approval and support from TSRA my application to commence the DSD was supported by the Curtin University Sustainability Policy (CUSP) Institute. Later in 2016, the TSRA CEO and then Chairperson supported and approved the content of my DSD Candidacy proposal, which was also subsequently approved by CUSP (see Appendix 1).

This chapter sought to elaborate on and clarify in more practical terms key aspects of what would constitute an appropriate and applied research design including assumptions underpinning the choices of particular methods. It also outlines a range of ethical, moral, political and organisational considerations and sensitivities that had to be navigated during the research process. These important aspects of process are relevant in terms of highlighting and considering where particular points of partiality or bias may have had an influence on the work and to provide increased validity of the results. The chapter provides an important segue for Chapter Five in that it gives a clearer picture about factors that influenced decision making with regard to defining the scope and parameters of the case study. Finally, and important to note, is that I was not and had not been a member of any political party throughout the production of this research. No external funding was provided for this research outside of that which was provided by Curtin University in line with standard post-graduate administrative support.

CHAPTER 5: CASE STUDY SCOPE AND PARAMETERS

“Social policy is notoriously difficult to design and evaluate, and Indigenous policy is as difficult as any. But that should be a reason for making more effort, not less” (Banks, 2012, p. 17).

5.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a narrative explaining the parameters and scope of the case study. It sets out a rationale for decisions pertaining to data identification, selection and analysis. The inclusion of a narrative demarcating the scope and parameters for the research is consistent with the ANAO 2013 audit commentary and findings, some of which were outlined in Chapter 1 (sections 1.1.2 and 1.1.3). To reiterate, the ANAO following the Performance Audit (PA) of the TSRA Torres Strait Development Plan 2009-13 (TSDP 09-13) included in their conclusions regarding TSRA’s Performance Measurement and Reporting (at Section 4):

“Evaluating and reviewing TSRA’s performance over the period of the plan or at least periodically would provide a means to ascertain whether the TSRA is achieving improvements to the wellbeing of the Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal residents of the region” (ANAO, 2013, p. 80)²⁸.

Presented as an excerpt, the preceding statement may well have been phrased or perceived as a standalone recommendation however, this did not end up being the case, along with many other aspects of the narrative throughout the ANAO’s report. A number of recommendations may have been inferred by a lay reading of the commentary throughout the ANAO’s PA. Some of this is the subject of the findings and discussion chapters of this thesis. Other significant aspects of the ANAO’s commentary and a reflection on particular points of relevance are considered in those chapters also.

²⁸ Note that while this statement was made in the narrative of the ANAO Audit Report, it was not included as a headline recommendation. This will be discussed in Chapter 6.

At the outset of this study it was anticipated (albeit somewhat naively) that an evaluation of the TSRA at organisational level, or at least some of its flagship programmes and projects, spanning the full twenty-five year period from inception in early 1994 to the end of 2018 may have been possible. However, following significant time and resources invested by the researcher in collating and quantifying the financial and performance data in twenty-five separate TSRA Annual Reports, this ultimately proved unfeasible. Although there are many reasons for this, perhaps the most poignant was due to the sheer scale of TSRA's funding and diversity of its work. Furthermore, a contributing factor was the operational complexity, both in terms of how the organisation delivers its services, the broader environment in which services are delivered (see Chapter 2) and the resources available to the researcher in order to conduct a retrospective IE.

However, undertaking this process did reveal some trends in staffing and expenditure that would provide the basis for the TSRA agreeing to establish a regional data repository under a formal agreement with the ABS. In order to achieve this, the researcher had collated and undertaken a high level of analysis of financial and performance information contained within each of the TSRA Annual Reports over the entire period. A brief snapshot of this analytical approach is outlined later in the narrative to follow. The logic and structure of this Chapter include an explanation of the initial approach at commencement of the research noting the need for exploration based on abductive principles complementing what are considered more traditional deductive and inductive designs. Following this, the Chapter reflects on the ANAO audit findings and approach to reporting its recommendations. Examples are also provided of the TSRA existing performance monitoring and reporting regimes as required by its legislative mandate and Government requirements.

This chapter includes a discussion of the changes to the legislative architecture that occurred over the period of the next iteration of the TSRA's Development Plan 2014-18 following the ANAO's audit. During this period there were changes in government at federal level, the amalgamation of the Indigenous programs and the Indigenous Affairs portfolio from the Department of Families and Housing to the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (DPMC). The incoming Australian Liberal government also introduced the Performance Governance PA Act and associated rules, launched the Indigenous Advancement Strategy, and the new

Minister of Indigenous Affairs Statement of directions to the TSRA. All of these “policy pulses” (Empowered Communities, 2015) impacted to some extent on TSRA monitoring and reporting obligations to the Australian Parliament (and thus the public).

5.2 Initial approach to data analysis: an abductive and exploratory framework

Social scientists generally point to two broad paradigms associated with reasoning and the application of logical assumptions in research. These are often referred to as inductive and deductive approaches (Trochim, 2006, p.1). According to Creswell and Plano Clark (2007), a deductive researcher, “*works from the ‘top down’, from a theory to hypotheses to data to add to or contradict the theory*” (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2007, p.23). Conversely, they suggest that inductive researchers approach research from the “*bottom-up, using the participants’ views to build broader themes and generate a theory inter-connecting the themes*” (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2007, p.23). These approaches to reasoning are also then often associated with the quantitative (deductive) and qualitative (inductive) methods of research (Soiferman, 2010). To an extent the philosophical basis of this research project is articulated in the previous chapters.

However, theorists such as Eriksson and Lindström (1997), present a third and arguably more fundamental approach. Abductive reasoning, they suggest, propels the initial hypothetical constructs which are then subsequently explained both logically and empirically via deductive and inductive reasoning. Raholm (2010), considers abductive reasoning to be drawn from creative inferences that new knowledge involves both the integration and justification of new ideas. Mirza, Akhtar-Danesh, Noesgaard, Martin, and Staples (2014), in describing Raholm’s views, state that:

“While abductive reasoning allows one to conceive ideas from vague, possible or potentially possible phenomena, deductive and inductive reasoning allow for the consequent processing of those ideas” (Raholm, 2010, as cited in Mirza, Akhtar-Danesh, Noesgaard, Martin, and Staples, 2014, p.1982).

Mirza, et al (2014) above go further to explain a reasoning process which contextualises the role of abduction as embryonic steps in the research process suggesting that:

“This process can be explained as such: (1) Surprising phenomena emerge and require an explanation because they do not follow an accepted hypothesis; (2) a new hypothesis that predicts these phenomena is adopted through abduction; (3) necessary and probable experimental consequences of the hypothesis are traced out through deduction; (4) when tests verify prediction after prediction, the hypothesis is stationed among scientific results through induction” (Mirza et al, 2014, p.1982)

The above discussion should not be construed as pre-empting a more detailed examination of the findings in this Chapter. It is intended to set the scene for how the approach to the collection and analysis of data commenced along with the factors that resulted in the scope and parameters outlined in the preceding Chapter. However, a discussion touching on the early conceptual and analytical work undertaken in the initial phases of this research thesis was an important precursor in determining the research scope and timeframes. For example, early in the research process, it was considered whether an analysis covering a longer-term horizon would allow for correlations between TSRA investments and commensurate changes in regional social outcomes.

5.3 Reflection on 2013 ANAO audit process, findings and recommendations

As the ANAO audit commentary served as the driver for this research project, the following section provides a reflection on the ANAO’s 2013 audit processes, findings, conclusions and recommendations. A more detailed critique and interrogation of the ANAO’s audit methods, processes and report will be covered in subsequent chapters in terms of their utility and applicability (or otherwise) as valid inputs to the analysis of the case study. The links between how the ANAO derived (or arrived at) its two high level recommendations based on the report narrative is also of note. The Auditor-General (AG) *Audit Report No.10 2013-14, Performance Audit Torres Strait Regional Authority – Service Delivery*, outlines the process that was undertaken over a period of approximately six months in 2013. On 11 December

2013, following a consultation on drafts with the TSRA, the AG presented the final report to The Australian Parliament. Following its presentation and receipt by parliament, it was lodged on the ANAO's website where it is publicly available²⁹.

Undertaken with the primary objective of assessing the effectiveness of TSRA's administration and delivery of its programmes and services, the ANAO formed conclusions pertaining to the agency's arrangements to ascertain service delivery gaps and needs. It also assessed the efficacy of the agency's coordination and delivery of services, and importantly, its monitoring and reporting on its performance. The ANAO's audit method, described as "*Audit Methodology*" (ANAO, 2013, p.37), included analysis of key documentation (plans, agreements, reports, meeting minutes etc), along with two audit personnel undertaking a number of field visits to the region. During these field visits face to face meetings were convened with the TSRA Board, staff, other government agencies and regional stakeholders³⁰.

The ensuing report consists of a total of eighty-nine pages (including appendices, acronyms, references and copies of communication between the agencies). There are four main sections of the report, each of which is on average twelve pages long and deal with topics such as; i) background and context, ii) TSRA's coordination and service delivery arrangements, iii) services development and implementation, and iv) performance measurement and reporting. There is also a summary section of the report which truncates the content of the four sections and enunciates a number of audit conclusions. Ultimately, based on these conclusions, the ANAO ended up aggregating the narrative of the report stating only two high level recommendations to both of which the TSRA agreed to.

Given that the ANAO's process and subsequent report formed the genesis of this research, the two recommendations along with the TSRA's response are replicated verbatim in Figure 5.1 below. A more detailed critique of how the ANAO came to

²⁹ According to the ANAO it aims to improve public sector administration and accountability and assists the Auditor-General with duties as per the *Auditor-General Act 1997* by undertaking performance audits, financial statement audits and assurance reviews of Commonwealth public sector bodies. They also provide independent reports and advice for the Parliament, the Australian Government and the community. <http://www.anao.gov.au>.

³⁰ Senior managers of TSRA were sceptical of the field visits and ANAO's processes. Some of these issues are discussed in Chapter 6.

formulate these recommendations logically (above other findings and conclusions contained within the report narrative), is worthy of significant analysis. This will be a component of the discussion section of this thesis in Chapter Seven.

Figure 5.1 – ANAO Performance Audit Recommendations TSRA 2013

Recommendations

Recommendation No. 1
Paragraph 2.31

To assist the coordination and monitoring of services in the absence of an integrated service delivery framework, the ANAO recommends that the TSRA establishes suitable formal arrangements with relevant service delivery agencies to share appropriate program information.

TSRA’s response: Agreed.

Recommendation No. 2
Paragraph 2.39

To improve its client service delivery, the ANAO recommends that the TSRA undertakes periodic client satisfaction surveys to gauge the level of satisfaction with TSRA’s services, and implements a feedback and complaints process.

TSRA’s response: Agreed.

Source: (ANAO, 2013, p. 18)

In relation to the overall audit conclusions, the ANAO summed them up its ‘conclusions’ in four paragraphs. A narrative covering a summary of the key ‘findings’ in relation to TSRA’s support to coordination and service delivery, development and implementation of services and performance measurement and monitoring is covered in seven chapters of the report (18 - 24). A discussion of the logical inferences between the ANAO’s narratives explaining findings, conclusions, and recommendations is considered in more detail as part of the analysis in subsequent chapters. For example, one of the statements included as a conclusion by the ANAO regarding the TSRA’s development plans (that was not stated as a specific recommendation) was:

“The development plan could be improved by including greater context describing the prevailing level of disadvantage in the region, which would assist in assessing achievement made over time” (ANAO, 2013, p. 67).

The TSRA's formal response to the ANAO's PA is covered in three paragraphs. Essentially, they agreed with both of recommendations noting that they considered it a balanced report and reiterated the ANAO's finding that they had in place effective internal monitoring systems for their own programmes and services. The TSRA agreed also to 'build' on informal arrangements and establish suitable 'formal' arrangements. They also agreed with the second recommendation stating that they would:

“adopt the ANAO's recommendation to undertake periodic client satisfaction surveys and implement a feedback and complaints process. In addition, the TSRA will continue to engage with the Communities in the Torres Strait region to seek feedback on satisfaction levels with its services” (ANAO, 2013, p. 22)

In terms of the audit scope, the ANAO noted that TSRA as per its legislative obligation was required to have a development plan in place covering a period of *“at least three years and not more than five years”* and that the scope of the performance audit was for the TSRA - TSDP period covering 2009-13. They also pointed out that, *“The TSRA is currently preparing a new development plan for the period 2014-18”* (ANAO, 2013, p.16). In fact, the TSRA planning, drafting and consultation processes for the TSDP 2014-18 were at the time well advanced, this point is significant in relation to the extent that ANAO recommendations could be incorporated in a meaningful way. An explanation of the planning processes, timeframes and final content of the TSRA's 2014-18 plan are outlined in the following section.

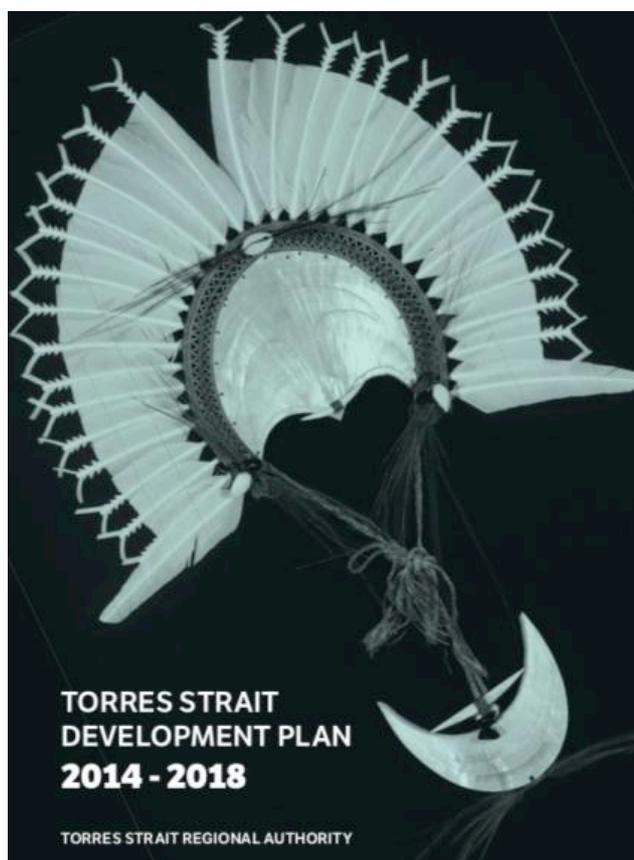
5.4 TSRA's Torres Strait Development Plan 2014-18

This section describes the legislative requirements for the TSRA to have in place a development plan along with some of the important components and program architecture that comprise the plan. It also discusses the planning and consultation timeframes that occurred during the design and approval phase when getting the plan approved and key policy changes in Indigenous affairs that happened over the course of the TSDP 2014-18 period. An understanding of these factors assists in defining the scope and analysis undertaken for the case study. As outlined in chapter two, *Section 142D of Part 3A, Division 2, of the ATSI Act (2005)*, the requirements for the TSDP is spelt out in eight points. In summary, the requirements are that TSRA must

formulate and revise a plan from “*time to time*” (TSDP) covering a period of at least three but not more than five years.

The aim of the TSDP is to improve the economic, social and cultural status of ATSI persons living in the area and the organisation must outline strategies and policies that it “*intends to adopt*” (ATSI Act, 2005, n.p) to implement the development plan “*including but not limited to a marine strategy*” (ATSI Act, 2005, n.p). Points five and six of the ATSI Act requires that “*TSRA must review the Plan regularly*”, and the it must perform its functions in “*consultation with the Minister*” (ATSI Act, 2005, n.p). The final two requirements of the ATSI Act in relation to the TSDP state that TSRA must comply with freedom of information and privacy laws and that the CEO must ensure copies (print and electronic) of the plan are available and published in the Commonwealth Gazette. Relevant sections of the Act are provided at **Appendix 6**. Figure 5.4 is a copy of the covering page of the TSRA’s 2014-18 Development Plan from which this research predominantly draws its scope.

Figure 5.2 – Cover TSRA Torres Strait Development Plan 2014-18.



Source: (TSRA, 2014)

Following the election of a new TSRA Board at the end of 2012, the final version of the TSRA's TSDP 2014 - 2018 was released in early 2014 after a design, development and consultative period spanning most of the 2013 calendar year. The design and development of the plan coincided with the timing of the ANAO PA field trips auditing and generating the PA covering the previous TSRA TSDP 2009-13. As per the ATSI Act, the organisation must have in place a development plan that covers a period of a minimum of three years and no longer than five years.

That year also the year of a federal election witnessed the election of a new conservative federal government along with a new Minister for Indigenous Affairs. The policy and political implications of these factors are explored further as part of the analysis in the following chapters. One significant aspect of the TSRA TSDP 2014-18 is that it was the first in TSRA's history to be designed under a Board that had been elected in an electoral process separate from the Local Government electoral processes as outlined in Chapter 2. Prior to this particular election, TSRA Board members had fulfilled both the role of local government councillor and TSRA Board member.

Consistent with the previous 2009-13 TSDP, following a reiteration of TSRA's legislative functions and introductory text the 2014-18 version outlined the organisations intended program and service delivery activities under eight 'programs' which are stated as:

- Economic Development Program
- Fisheries Program
- Culture, Art and Heritage Program
- Native Title Program
- Environmental Management Program
- Governance and Leadership Program
- Healthy Communities Program
- Safe Communities Program (TSRA, 2014, p. 7)

The planning narratives and rationale for each of the distinct programs outlined above comprise an opening statement covering the overview and the particular aims of the respective program. Following this are statements of the broader social

development issues identified through longer term regional planning processes and alignment of proposed activities to longer term regional development goals³¹. Each program then articulates between three and five desired outcomes, the benefits being sought by undertaking the activity (for both the 2014-18 period and the next TSDP iteration), and a number of Performance Measures (for this research referred to as Key Performance Measures – KPIs). Following this, each section of the TSDP related to a TSRA program also outlines a number of projects and initiatives that will be undertaken. These range from three (Safe Communities) to sixteen projects (Environmental Management) per program.

The Economic Development (ED) Program for example lists as projects four activities such as providing concessional home and business loans, business training, and business support services. The Culture, Art and Heritage Program (CAH) lists as projects arts industry development, cultural maintenance and observance, and management of a cultural centre (gateway hub) as a place for “*preserving, promoting and providing education on cultural and the arts*” (Gab Titui Cultural Centre) (TSRA, 2014, p. 33). Across each of the eight TSRA programmes, a total of fifty-one activities are listed along with thirty-four social outcomes to which they are assumed to positively contribute. Projects and activities along with the stated outcomes sought for the Healthy Communities, Safe Communities and Culture, Art and Heritage Programmes for the purposes of an example are replicated in Table 5.5. A summary table of projects and outcomes against all of the five remaining TSRA program structures are provided at **Appendix 9**.

Table 5.3: Example Summary table of the TSRA Healthy Communities, Safe Communities and Culture Art, and Heritage Programmes 2014-18 Development Plan

TSRA Programs	Projects and activities listed in 2014-18 TSDP	Stated Outcomes
1. Culture, Art and Heritage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - cultural maintenance and observance - arts industry development - gateway/hub for presenting, preserving, promoting and providing education on Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal culture and arts 	<p>CAH-1] An active and sustainable arts and craft Industry.</p> <p>[CAH-2] Cultural values and protocols are integrated into</p>

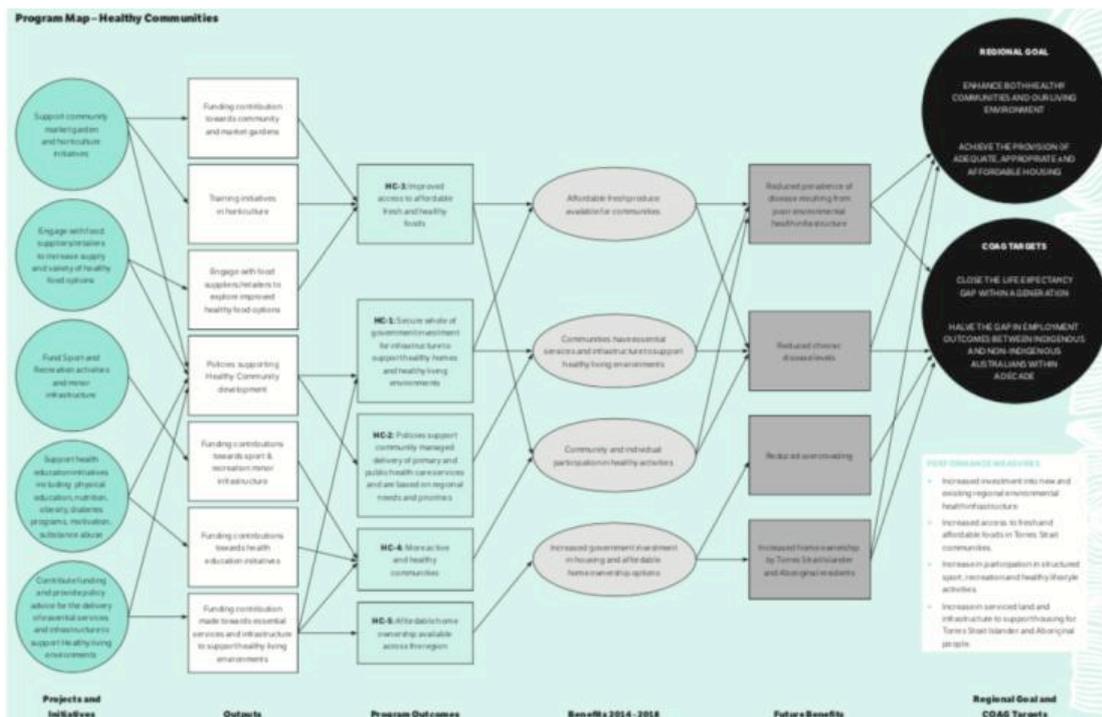
³¹ The Torres Strait Regional Plan 2009 – 2029 was developed following a service mapping process in 2009. The TSRP has a twenty-year timeframe and was endorsed by the Mayors of the three Local Governments in the region along with the State Government. The TSRP is broadly aligned to the COAG CtG focus areas. It outlines eleven regional development goals, ranging from economic development, housing, governance, social services, native title and early childhood etc

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - cultural heritage management (with links with to the Environmental Management Program) - copyright and intellectual property rights - cultural values and protocols. 	<p>service planning and management practice.</p> <p>[CAH-3] The unique cultural heritage and histories of the region are preserved, maintained and promoted.</p> <p>[CAH-4] Strong, supported and respected Ailan Kastom.</p> <p>[CAH-5] The copyright, intellectual property and traditional knowledge of Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal people in the region are protected.</p>
2. Healthy Communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - support community market garden and horticulture initiatives (in conjunction with the Environmental Management Program) - engage with food suppliers/retailers to increase supply and variety of healthy food options - support health education initiatives including physical education, nutrition, obesity, diabetes programs, motivation, substance abuse - fund sport and recreation activities and minor infrastructure - contribute funding and provide policy advice for the delivery of essential services and infrastructure to support healthy living environments. 	<p>[HC-1] Secure whole-of-government investment for infrastructure to support healthy homes and healthy living environments.</p> <p>[HC-2] Policies support community managed delivery of primary and public health care services and are based on regional needs and priorities.</p> <p>[HC-3] Improved access to affordable fresh and healthy foods.</p> <p>[HC-4] More active and healthy communities.</p> <p>[HC-5] Affordable home ownership available across the region.</p>
3. Safe Communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - support Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal women, men and children social development and support programs; child and family safety programs - support safe and accessible community infrastructure; land and sea communications systems; community capacity building - participate in interagency and Integrated Service Delivery meetings/ forums to discuss issues of community and domestic safety and to contribute to shaping planning and service delivery in the region. 	<p>[SC-1] Effective community and social services support.</p> <p>[SC-2] Families and individuals are safe in home and community.</p> <p>[SC-3] Public areas are safe and accessible for community members.</p> <p>[SC-4] Communities have access to appropriate transport infrastructure.</p>

Source: (adapted from TSRA, 2014)

Following the enunciation of the TSRA’s activities, benefits and outcomes, the planning document aims to align the narrative of listed benefits to a related CtG outcome (e.g. closing the child mortality gap, increasing life expectancy etc). Reference is also made to Indigenous specific outcomes listed in various COAG National Partnership Agreements (e.g. Indigenous Service delivery, Remote Indigenous Housing etc). Following this, for each program area, the plan diagrammatically reiterates the information in program maps providing a visual layout of content akin to a Logical Framework structure listing left to right; Projects/Initiatives, Outputs, Outcomes, Benefits (2014-18), Future Benefits, links to CtG Outcomes and Performance Measures. An example from the TSRA’s Healthy Communities Program is provided Figure 5.6:

Figure 5.4: TSRA Program Map example – Healthy Communities Program



Source: TSRA, 2014, p. 67

Lastly, for each program area the TSDP reiterates the information outlined in its main body section with two further tables (Annexes), the first listing overviews and aims, outcomes, benefits, performance measures and initiatives. An excerpt of this is provided in Figure 5.3.

Figure 5.5: Example planning annex TSRA Healthy Communities Program 2014-18

**Annex G-2
Healthy Communities Program – Overview**

Overview and aims	Outcomes	Benefits	Performance measures	Initiatives
<p>The Healthy Communities Program will undertake projects and activities which fulfil the regional goals to enhance both healthy communities and our living environment (Health), and to achieve the provision of adequate, appropriate and affordable housing (Housing).</p> <p>The program aims are to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> seek to influence policy for all health programs across all tiers of government 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> [HC-1] Secure whole-of-government investment for infrastructure to support healthy homes and healthy living environments. [HC-2] Policies support community managed delivery of 	<p>2014 – 2018</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Affordable fresh produce available for communities. Communities have essential services and infrastructure to support healthy living environments. Community and individual participation in healthy activities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased investment into new and existing regional environmental health infrastructure. Increased access to fresh and affordable foods in Torres Strait communities. Increase in participation 	<p>The Healthy Communities Program has a mandate to undertake the following initiatives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> support community market garden and horticulture initiatives engage with food suppliers/retailers to increase supply and variety of healthy food options

Source: TSRA, 2014, p. 68

The table in Figure 5.8 is an example of the last graphic provided summarising the narrative for each TSRA program, which lists benefits, performance measures, targets, and target groups.

Figure 5.6: Example of TSRA Healthy Communities Annex 3 – Benefits mapping.

**Annex G-3
Healthy Communities Program – Benefits**

Benefits	Performance measures	Targets	Target groups
Communities have essential services and infrastructure to support healthy living environments.	Increased investment into new and existing regional environmental health infrastructure.	At least 90 per cent of environmental health infrastructure projects delivered under the Torres Strait Major Infrastructure Program Stage-5 (MIP-5). Ten per cent increase per annum in funding directed to maintaining existing environmental Health Infrastructure.	Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal people and communities.
Affordable fresh produce available for communities	Increased access to fresh and affordable foods in Torres Strait communities.	Twelve communities supported to establish sustainable horticulture systems by 2018 (measured by the Environmental Management Program).	Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal people and communities.

Source: TSRA, 2014, p.69

The preceding excerpts are provided to outline the level of complexity associated with TSRA’s existing internal monitoring frameworks designed from the basis of eliciting a logic for its programmes and services. This inclusion of tables and excerpts also serves as an example of the level of complexity associated with formulating decisions over the scope and conduct of evaluative activities as each of the fifty-one initiatives under the Agency’s eight program areas would be able to serve as a candidate for evaluation. However, given the timeframes of the release of the ANAO 2013/14 Performance Audit, a number of the recommendations were unable to be built into the subsequent plan, notably those based on the inclusion of ‘stretch’ targets as opposed to static annual targets (e.g. a 5 per cent increase in training programs per year).

Ultimately, a detailed performance analysis of all targets may well have yielded results that would not have been acceptable to the administration if proposed within the conduct of this research. Therefore, this was not done.

5.5 TSRA's Portfolio Budget Statements and Annual Reporting to the Australian Parliament

This section outlines the performance criteria and framework for TSRA's external reporting to Parliament over the TSDP timeframes via Annual Reports and the Portfolio Budget Statements (PBS). The Government's Outcomes and Performance framework applied to the external reporting criteria in TSRA's Annual Reports for the first year of the TSDP. Mackay (2011) when writing for the OECD provides a technical deep dive into the various machinations of agency performance-based budgeting and reporting to parliament. This framework had primary oversight by the Department of Finance (DoF) which is an attempt to link 'outcomes' or 'results' to financial appropriations (Budget Portfolio Statements) and annual financial reporting. This was ultimately superseded by an 'enhanced performance framework' was subsequently introduced from 1 July 2015 under the Government's *Public Governance and Accountability Act (PGPA Act)* in 2015. A summary of these processes is provided in the discussion below.

5.5.1 Portfolio Budget Statements 2014 - 2018

Over the period of the TSDP 2014 – 2018, the TSRA had received approximately \$200 million (AUD) in four untied appropriations from the federal treasury³². Federal budgets are traditionally announced in May with budget releases occurring shortly after in the new financial year 1 July of that same calendar year. Therefore, the budget releases related to TSRA TSDP 2014-18 commenced from 1 July 2014, 2015, 2016, and 2017^{33 34}. Originating in 2008, Australian Government agencies were required to adopt the Federal Government Outcomes and Programs framework

³² Note that the TSRA also delivers the Working On Country and Indigenous Rangers Programs for which it administers an Additional \$15 million per annum (approx.). An evaluation of the Ranger or Landcare Program was not feasible within the scope of this research for reasons outlined in Chapter 8.

³³ The Federal budget appropriation announced 1 July 2018 on this basis relate to the TSDP dated 2019 on. As of writing this plan had either not been produced or was not yet available.

³⁴ In actuality, approximately 50 per cent of the 2013/14 budget and 50 per cent of the 2018/19 budget could be attributed towards 2014-18 TSDP calendar year activities.

for reporting on resources administered. Consistent with this, TSRA’s external reporting to Parliament was to stipulate measures on the efficiency, effectiveness and economy of the agency’s management of the financial appropriations received were articulated in the annual Portfolio Budget Statements (PBS). The annual PBS as part of the budget process includes specification of the program outcomes (in this case TSRA has one outcome, see Chapter 1), along with “*objectives, resourcing, deliverables and KPIs*” (ANAO, 2013, p. 67).

Guidelines on reporting to Parliament issued by the Department of PM&C requires agencies to develop annual reports providing information that provides a succinct and accurate account detailing the result of government actions. To this end the PM&C instructs federal agencies to submit Annual Reports with a “*clear read*” aligning statements contained in budget performance indicators (issued in the PBS) with the information contained within Annual Reports. In the first year relevant to the TSDP 2014-18, the budgets announced for the 2013/14 financial year were administered by the then federal Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (DFaHCSIA).

The TSRA noted during the PBS in 2013/14 that “*the TSRA is currently finalising Development Plan 2009–2013 and has commenced drafting Development Plan 2014–2018*” (Department of Social Services, 2013, p. 287). Following the election of the conservative Liberal federal government in 2013, the TSRA in line with other Indigenous programs was brought under the administration of the DPM&C. The following table lists the PBS KPIs for the TSRA for its financial allocations in 2014 as outlined in the DPM&C’s budget statements.

Figure 5.7: *TSRA Key Performance Indicators 2014 Portfolio Budget Statements*

Programme 1.1 Key Performance Indicators

The Development Plan articulates all the TSRA's performance measures; the purpose of this table is to list only key performance indicators:

- increase in the number of Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal owned commercially viable businesses
- increased availability of approved business training
- increases in catches by Torres Strait and Aboriginal fishes relative to total allowable catch, strengthening claims for increased ownership
- increase in the number of emerging and professionally active artists and cultural practitioners that have access to information and support to ensure copyright and intellectual property rights
- number of Native Title determinations claims successfully determined
- number of Indigenous Land Use Agreements (ILUA) that have compensation or other benefits as part of ILUA terms
- number of endorsed community based management plans for the natural and cultural resources of the region being actively implemented
- increase the level of engagement of elected Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal leaders in policy development and decision-making
- number of PBCs that achieve Office of the Registrar of Indigenous Corporations (ORIC) compliance as at 31 December each year
- increased investment into new and existing regional environmental health infrastructure.

Source: Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2014, p.310

Across each of the four annual budgeting cycles covering the TSDP timeframe, the same ten organisational reporting KPIs for TSRA's reporting to Parliament were in place. In the final annual budgeting and reporting cycle in 2017-18, two additional KPIs were introduced the first focussed on the percentage of ownership of the local fisheries by ATSI residents, the second on improvements to regional environmental health, telecommunication and marine infrastructure (see Appendix 10). The purpose of describing the reporting obligations that the TSRA is required to deliver to Parliament is to highlight broad characteristics of the language used to describe how the Agency's performance might be assessed, notably the absence of any specific targets or benchmarks from which statements about "increasing" might be assessed.

5.5.2 TSRA Annual Reports 2014 - 2018

Over the timeframe within the scope of this research, the TSRA had submitted four Annual Reports to Parliament. According to the ANAO:

“performance measures in its annual report to Parliament is a key element of an agency’s accountability and there should be a clear alignment between the KPIs specified in the PBS and those reported in the annual report” (ANAO, 2013, p.70)

In accordance with the federal Government’s Outcomes and Performance framework the identification of an agency’s program or project deliverables (in the TSRA’s case the program outcomes in the TSDP identified at Table 5.1) are considered as goods or services produced by the agency in order to achieve its objectives. As the ANAO states *“collectively, the deliverables represent the intervention government has chosen to take to meet a particular policy need” (ANAO, 2013, p.70).*

The TSRA’s Annual Reports from this period have generally followed a similar logic and report structure. Typically, the reports are compiled and formatted into eight sections including; letters of transmittal and overview by the chairperson and CEO. The following sections provide narratives and case studies of particular projects and activities categorised into strategic overview, programme performance, report on operations, corporate governance, financial statements, appendices and compliance and access information. While key information regarding the Agency’s activities are described within, as the discussion in Chapter 6 will consider, data related specifically to the statements of ‘Key Performance’ alone would not present a decisive explanation of effectiveness or impacts.

The covers of the reports are usually drawn from the entries of local artists in annual art competitions and licensed for use between the TSRA and the creator through a licensing agreement which exemplifies good practice. These covers are reproduced below with appropriate acknowledgement in accordance with TSRA’s copyright requirements.

Figures 5.8: (a,b,c,d) TSRA Annual Reports



Source: TSRA Annual Reports (Public Website accessed 2018)

5.5.3 Public Governance and Accountability Act 2013

A number of legislative and policy reforms were introduced by the conservative Federal Government following its election in 2013. One of the first reforms introduced was the passing into legislation of the *Public Governance, Performance*

and Accountability Act in 2013 (PGPA Act). Coming into effect from 1 July 2014, the PGPA replaced the previous *Financial Management and Accountability Act 1997* (FMA Act) and *Commonwealth Authorities and Companies Act 1997* (CAC Act). Up until that time, the administration of the TSRA in terms of financing and resource management, was as an agency governed under the CAC Act. According to Podger (2018), the PGPA ushered in the third broad successive commonwealth resource management framework since 1997. The introduction of the PGPA Act placed an additional layer of planning and reporting obligations on Commonwealth agencies, including the need for more detailed annual corporate plans and increased reporting obligations.

It was suggested that the introduction of the PGPA Act and notably its objectives sought to push the ‘principles’ based approach governing public sector entities to a greater extent than the previous FMA and CAC Acts (Podger, 2018). Among the PGPA Act objectives were those that focussed on establishing a consistent performance framework across Commonwealth entities, that agencies were using and managing resources effectively. The introduction of the Act required that they meet higher standards of accountability and governance and “*to provide meaningful information to the Parliament and the public*” (Alexander and Thodey, 2018, p.11)

The introduction of the PGPA Act ushered in tighter and more rigid requirements for corporate planning, notably the content and structure of agency plans and timeframes for performance reporting. Specific obligations are for agencies to outline capabilities and approaches to the management of risks. It was posited that public agency performance regimes were to more deeply ingrain notions of ‘stewardship’ into agency governance and reflected both government and a degree of public concern with not only ‘what’ results but ‘how’ and ‘why’ they are achieved or otherwise (Podger and Wanna, 2016, p.11).

In annual performance statements to parliament, new PGPA Act reporting requirements must outline how the agency complies with the Act in relation to the results it reports while also articulating the analysis of factors that led to the results, changes to entity’s purposes, organisational capability, its environment that impacted on its implementation of government policy. In relation to TSRA, the introduction of new planning and reporting obligations resulted in additional effort being applied to

compliance with these administrative requirements. Although the resource impost of these requirements was not able to be quantified within the scope of this research, analysis of the extent to which reporting obligations reorient resources from community services delivery and consultation would be an area worthy of future research.

5.5.4 Indigenous Advancement Strategy: TSRA merger with Department of Prime Minister

Another reform ushered in by the incoming conservative government over the course of 2013, and formally announced in 2014, was reform of governance arrangements pertaining to Indigenous specific policy, programs and funding mechanisms. Central to reforms included merging more than 150 administered Indigenous initiatives (projects, activities etc) delivered by eight different federal agencies under 27 Indigenous specific (and some mainstream policy streams) into the DPMC (ANAO, 2017, p.7). As with the introduction of the PGPA Act, the IAS resulted in further internal resource allocation from the perspective of policy work aimed at aligning and adapting the existing TSRA planning narratives and outcomes statements into something that could be explained as falling within the purview of the IAS. Examples include: how the TSRA’s infrastructure work related to ‘Remote Strategies’ or how community grants funding could be construed as falling within ‘Community Safety’.

Announced as the Indigenous Advancement Strategy (IAS) in 2014, the Government reportedly committed funding of approximately \$4.8 billion in 2014-15 which included statements to the effect that \$534.4 million would be saved through the rationalisation of program and grant administration (ANAO, 2017, p.7). Supporting these reforms, which also included the funding arrangements for the TSRA, was the issuance of a Statement of Expectations by the Minister Indigenous Affairs to the TSRA. In addition to the TSRA’s reporting against the 10-12 PBS KPIs were other reporting obligations to address the expectations of the new Indigenous Affairs Minister, including the expectation that TSRA would:

“develop policy proposals and formulate, implement and monitor the effectiveness of programmes in the Torres Strait area, with a particular focus on:

- a) implementing the Australian Government's school attendance strategy;*
- b) responding positively to initiatives of the Australian Government to improve Indigenous employment measures;*
- c) support a significant increase in home ownership on the Torres Strait Islands, particularly by the sale of existing public housing to good renters;*
- d) facilitate economic development by identifying and promoting sustainable projects that use the natural resources of the Torres Strait to the benefit of locals;*
- e) work with the Australian Government to take all available measures to reduce overheads and operating costs including those of its Board;*
- f) keep me informed regularly of its operations and expenditure, including by providing quarterly reports and agreeing to performance indicators against which its progress will be measured:*
- h) Within the existing scope and functions of the TSRA, engage with the Australian Government as appropriate to highlight the Torres Strait's aspirations for greater autonomy in the future” (TSRA, 2017, 31)*

Just a side note in relation to the IAS. Hudson (2017) had posited a strong case for reform of the Australian Government's approach to Indigenous program evaluation and stated,

“Indigenous people's frustration at the Indigenous Advancement Strategy, which saw community organisations lose funding for programs they felt were working, while programs and services communities did not want or need were introduced” (Hudson, 2017, p.3)

While the introduction of IAS did not immediately disrupt TSRA's financial bottom line to a great degree, it did place an additional resource burden on the organisation in terms of administration and reporting. It also had in effect, with the pseudo introduction of new 'expectations' of performance which could have been construed as additional KPIs (i.e. *Implementing the Australian Government's school attendance*

strategy). Given that the untied budget appropriation to TSRA was treated as one of the IAS initiatives for budgeting purposes (note the single ‘outcome’ statement in Chapter 1), the agency was able to traverse the changing policy landscape relatively unscathed. However, the reforms did result in reduced opportunity for TSRA to supplement income from other Commonwealth sources, for example for aged care, early childhood and community services. With the reduction in available financial resources to the Indigenous portfolio more broadly, the result was the DPM&C would re-direct any funding request from the Torres Strait Region to the TSRA for funding. Having to respond to these requests raised both the profile and the level of political and administrative risk to the agency in terms of having to prepare written responses as to why funding proposals were either accepted or rejected.

5.6 Summary and conclusion

At the initial outset of this research in 2015/16, it was the overarching research aim to assess the impact of the Torres Strait Regional Authority (TSRA) as a case-study via a mix-methods evaluation. This evaluation, it was originally intended, sought to incorporate methodologies based on: quantitative and qualitative Cost/Benefit Analysis (CBA), along with, to the extent possible, aspects of Systems and Complexity Theories. Furthermore, it was intended that the evaluation approach and methods could be combined to ultimately formulate a Return on Investment (ROI) model of assessment and calculation (or cost-benefit ratio). For this to occur, an ex-post design thus retrospective analysis proved the only evaluative approach that was feasible.

Also, at the outset, the broad aim of the research was to assist the TSRA (and thus other similarly oriented Indigenous development organisations) to understand the factors that needed to be considered in order to plan for, ascertain and more effectively report on the impacts they were making. It was anticipated that this somewhat intuitive process might have underpinned the development of an impact oriented social, economic, environmental and cultural program planning, design and implementation framework an approach that was intended to be based on achieving positive impacts in accord with sustainable development principles and goals. This key output, as it was originally conceived, was to be complemented by the development of a performance monitoring, measurement and evaluation system.

The original intention was to establish a monitoring system incorporating a synthesis of appropriate methods and tools designed to assess the efficiency of activities, achievement of results, and more effectively measure and articulate impacts. This aspect of the research project was to be ‘ex-ante’ in approach (i.e. prospective) and include a feasibility assessment of incorporating experimental and quasi-experimental evaluation designs into future TSRA policy, planning and programming.

Therefore, in addition to the explanation of TSRA operating context in Chapter 2, it was important within the scope of this Chapter to undertake a deeper dive into the policy, legislative and administrative context of the TSRA. In this sense, unpacking the reporting and monitoring obligations as set out by the ATSI Act, CAC Act and subsequently the recently introduced PGPA Act was important. It is clear that the Agency’s internal planning and monitoring framework was extremely detailed to the point where it has in excess of fifty program monitoring indicators. However, the extent to which performance against these measures then aggregates to being able to report against the obligations set out by the twelve KPIs as required to report to Parliament in annual reports would serve as a basis for future examination and is suggested as a topic worthy for future research (see Chapter 8).

Given the complexity of TSRA’s programmed activities along with the political and policy reforms that were becoming manifest in changes to reporting and monitoring, refinements to the scope of the research were required in order to best place it from the perspective of adding value for the organisation. This was achieved through three key endeavours. Firstly, in pursuing an avenue to materially apply an evaluation methodology, the scope and terms of reference for the evaluation of the complex Seawalls infrastructure projects were developed. Secondly, a detailed examination of data emerging from the administration of the TSRA community grants program was undertaken in order to ascertain how effectiveness measure might be developed. Ultimately, the review of the monitoring and reporting obligations revealed a paucity in data both to ascertain benchmarking and pre- and post-program outcomes. This observation led to the development of formal agreements with the Australian Bureau of Statistics with the aim of facilitating increased technical capability available to the organisation.

A more detailed discussion of results of the analysis and processes associated with data collation, and other factors associated with approach, and events subsequent to this work being undertaken is explored in Chapter 6 of this thesis.

“Researchers are neither neutral nor objective, but rather are inevitably and intrinsically interested inquirers . . . interested implies a situated inquirer, one who inevitably brings to the process of social inquiry his or her own sociocultural history, beliefs about the social world and about what constitutes warranted knowledge of it, theoretical preferences, and moral and political values” (Greene, 2011, p.81 & 82).

CHAPTER 6: ANALYSIS OF THE CASE STUDY

“Urgent issues, such as climate change, call for new approaches to evaluating sustainability. The scope of environmental problems, multi-national consequences, difficulties in obtaining comparable measures, and persistent evidence of unanticipated consequences all necessitate a complex, multi-method approach to evaluation” (Morra-Imas and Rist, 2009, p.2).

6.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the sources and type of data that was collected and analysed as part of the research thesis. Firstly, it explains how the early stages of data analysis led the researcher to consider more thoroughly the research issues, implications and complexities associated with pursuing an approach that was to an extent exploratory and abductive. As this represented a very new way of working for the TSRA organisationally and politically, the ‘abductive’ approach was considered the most effective given the financial and resource context of the organisation at that time. Therefore, the first section discusses some of the conceptual and theoretical underpinnings associated with that approach.

Following this, the Chapter outlines the process for collating and mapping data over a twenty-year timeframe and presents a broad analysis of largely quantitative financial (income and expenditure) data along with other aspects of the organisation’s investments over this horizon. It touches on some of the challenges and barriers associated with this approach. An analysis of the TSRA’s community funding grants data from its Healthy Communities, Safe Communities and Culture, Arts and Heritage covering a period of three financial years (2012-2015) was also undertaken. This analysis incorporates a quantification of approximately \$8.5 million in approved funding in response to community requests for almost AU\$25 million in that period.

Building on this approach, what follows is an analysis of the reporting data that the TSRA provides to the Australian Parliament annually in its Annual Reports against the Key Performance Indicators in the Portfolio Budget Statements. This part of the analysis spans a period of seven financial years from 2011/12 to 2017/18. This

discussion by virtue of the analysis, highlights some key questions (such as the relevance and conceptual alignment) between the TSRA reporting to parliament via its KPI statements and the actual data points provided.

Prior to concluding and summarising this chapter, an analysis of TSRA's reporting of infrastructure funding including a the joint federal/state government funding co-contribution to the Major Infrastructure Program (MIP) is provided. This mapping process indicates that almost \$300 million (AUD) has been made available for regional essential infrastructures (Water, Sewerage, Roads, Drainage and Solid Waste) over the period 1998-2020. A more detailed discussion of these issues is presented in Chapter Seven.

6.2 Methodological approach to the case-study analysis

Building upon the conceptual and theoretical foundations outlined in Chapter 4 and given the inductive standpoint at commencement of the research, a number of clear steps were undertaken in its early stages. These steps included: i) high-level analysis of TSRA income and expenses; ii) mapping of administrative and program expenditures to program activities; iii) analysis of staffing patterns and community grants data; iv) analysis of qualitative and quantitative performance data produced in annual reports under the PBS requirements; and v) analysis of funding contribution and expenditures on regional infrastructures.

Undertaking a stepwise approach as outlined above was considered suitable in order to establish and articulate key correlates for further research while also aiming to provide some explanatory data to the TSRA administration and stakeholders. In this sense, it was important to be able to produce some early narratives for key stakeholders to justify the merit and methodological foundations of the research to internal and external stakeholders in the attempt to generate broader administrative support for the process. It was considered important in the early stages to generate this support via the presentation and analysis of quantitative data over time. The effectiveness of this approach is considered in more detail in Chapters 7 and 8.

6.3 High-level analysis of TSRA income and expenses (1995 – 2015)

In an attempt to identify and quantify the inter-relationships (including correlations and possibly causes), significant time was invested into collating the financial and other performance information from each and every TSRA Annual Report from establishment in 1995. This effort proved to be extremely onerous as no existing templates or tracking formats had been established previously. Moreover, many of the individual annual reports, particularly from the mid to late 1990s were only available in hard copy, found in bookcases and filing cabinets that constituted the TSRA’s ‘library’ at the main offices on Thursday Island.

This process required the researcher to peruse hard copy records held at TSRA’s offices during visits to the Torres Straits and submit multiple library requests to the national archives. Once either hard or electronic copies had been obtained, the extraction and synthesis of this data was undertaken using templates constructed in Microsoft Excel spreadsheet formats. Table 6.1 provides the actual untied quantum of funds appropriated by TSRA from the federal Treasury (under the single line Outcome) and the figures as an example adjusted for CPI.

Table 6.1: *TSRA Annual Funding Appropriation (Untied under PBS Outcome 1) – adjusted for Consumer Price Index (CPI) discount rates*

Annual Government Allocation for TSRA			
Year	Annual Inflation Rate	Annual Amount (in AUD\$, ,000)	Value in 2015 (in AUD ,000 using RBA Calculator)
1995	4.7	32,983	63,866.06
1996	2.6	36507	58,933.93
1997	0.3	31845	51,292.60
1998	0.7	35063	55,994.19
1999	1.5	40307	63,427.93
2000	4.5	44,352	66,814.99
2001	4.3	46,043	66,434.57
2002	3.1	48,891	68,501.48
2003	2.7	50,201	68,466.03
2004	2.3	51,056	68,037.81
2005	2.7	52,042	67,533.86
2006	3.5	53,664	67,247.85
2007	2.3	54,948	67,290.60
2008	4.4	51,540	60,485.77
2009	1.7	51,904	59,852.89
2010	2.9	67,391	75,508.07
2011	3.3	69,758	75,660.46
2012	1.7	50,454	53,775.15
2013	2.5	45,680	47,522.65
2014	2.5	49,645	50,393.83
2015	1.50	48,159	48,159.00
Total		1,012,433	1,305,199.72
Sources:			
Inflation Rate: http://www.rateinflation.com/inflation-rate/australia-historical-i			
http://www.rba.gov.au/calculator/annualDecimal.html			

Table 6.1 outlines that TSRA as a statutory Commonwealth agency received in untied funding allocations from government alone (not including own source revenue from Government) approximately \$1 billion (unadjusted for CPI) and \$1.3 billion against the discount rates (adjusted for CPI increases). The ‘untied’ component of TSRA’s revenue includes only the lump sum payment received under the PBS. Regarding ‘own source’ revenues, the TSRA is able to apply and has been successful in applying to administer programs from other areas of the Indigenous Affairs portfolio, most notably funding from the Department of the Environment for the Indigenous Rangers and Working on Country funds. In other areas of Australia these funds are typically administered by non-Government Indigenous community-based organisations.

An example of the collation and categorisation of TSRA’s income and expenditure data is provided in the Table 6.2. This table shows the level of analysis that was applied to covering only a ten-year period (1995 – 2005).

Tables 6.2: Mapping TSRA income and revenue (excerpt 1995 – 2005)

TSRA Income/Revenue sources (in AUD ,000)	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
Government Appropriations	32,983	36,343	31,662	34,822	40,294	44,352	46,043	48,891	50,201	51,056	52,042
Resources received from government free of charge	-	-	12	18	13	-	-	-	-	-	-
Liabilities assumed by government	153	164	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Abnormal Items	5,418	-	171	223	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
TOTAL REVENUE FROM GOVERNMENT	38,554	36,507	31,845	35,063	40,307	44,352	46,043	48,891	50,201	51,056	52,042
Bank and Loan Interest	789	1,561	537	287	314	154	378	655	856	800	1,091
Sales of assets, goods and services	39	9	-	-	-	-	-	6	5	3	838
Rental income on properties	-	74	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Reversal of previous write-downs	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Investment Activities - Repayment of Loans	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Net gains from disposal of assets	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	4
Funds from previous years	154	788	-	-	-	-	-	-	393	-	-
Other gains	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	35
Other grants received	-	195	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Other revenue sources	-	-	197	457	445	464	171	787	877	1,605	987
TOTAL OWN-SOURCE INCOME	981	2,627	734	744	759	618	549	1,448	2,131	2,408	2,955
TOTAL REVENUE	39,535	39,134	32,579	35,807	41,066	44,970	46,592	50,339	52,332	53,464	54,997

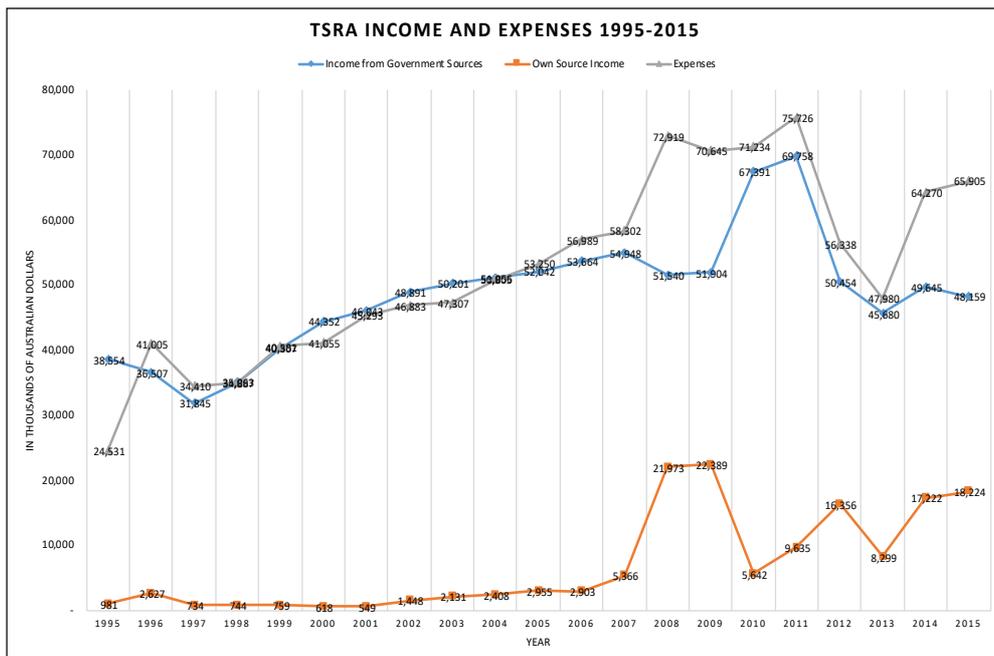
Chapter 6 – TSRA Case Study Analysis

2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
53,664	54,948	51,540	51,904	67,391	69,758	50,454	45,680	49,645	48,159
-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
53,664	54,948	51,540	51,904	67,391	69,758	50,454	45,680	49,645	48,159
596	1,467	1,777	1,650	1,447	2,090	1,777	2,372	2,130	1,742
1,354	1,157	865	414	486	499	506	384	517	460
-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
-	35	-	812	27	-	320	144	-	248
135	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
-	5	-	-	-	-	14	-	-	-
-	-	76	-	-	358	-	-	99	-
37	-	-	800	1	-	-	-	-	-
-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
781	2,702	19,255	18,713	3,681	6,688	13,739	5,399	14,476	15,774
2,903	5,366	21,973	22,389	5,642	9,635	16,356	8,299	17,222	18,224
56,567	60,314	73,513	74,293	73,033	79,393	66,810	53,979	66,867	66,383

Source: TSRA Annual Reports 1995-2015 collated as part of the analysis research thesis

Following the collation of TSRA’s financial information covering a twenty-year period, a range of graphs were produced in an attempt to ascertain expenditure trends. For example, Figure 6.3 attempts to graph income data as part of the early exploratory analysis to map the trends in financial income and expenditure over a twenty-year horizon from 1995 – 2015. This process facilitated further dialogue with the agency of refinements for research scope.

Figure 6.3: Identifying trends in TSRA Financial Data (1995-2015)



Source: TSRA Annual Reports 1995-2015 collated as part of research thesis

Figure 6.3 above maps the high-level income and expenditures for the organisation over a twenty-year period. In accordance with the ATSI Act, the TSRA requires written permission from the Minister Indigenous Affairs in order to incur an ‘underspends’ therefore savings are not generally incurred. In the graph above, both the revenue lines (own source – orange, and from government blue) combined equal the amount expended³⁵. In terms of income, this includes an addition of both revenue streams while the expenses outline the total amount of revenue. Technically, the TSRA must fully acquit all income as it is unable as per the ATSI Act to incur an ‘underspend’ within any financial year³⁶.

6.4 Analysis of TSRA expenses data 1995-2015

As part of the early engagement and in an effort to build support for the research, the initial data analysis undertaken included mapping the proportion of key TSRA expense items over the twenty-year timeframe (1995-2015). The raw data is presented in Table 6.4 and Figure 6.5 below. It was anticipated that research scope could be refined to focus on a correlation of major expense items mapped to social trends (for example infrastructure expenditure or expenses to support community based staff correlated to household incomes). This work was not able to be finalised within the scope of this research thesis, however the principles did inform the design and scope of the Torres Strait Regional Data and Statistics Library Project which was an applied output of this research work.

Table 6.4: TSRA major expense items 1995 – 2015 (source TSRA Annual Reports)

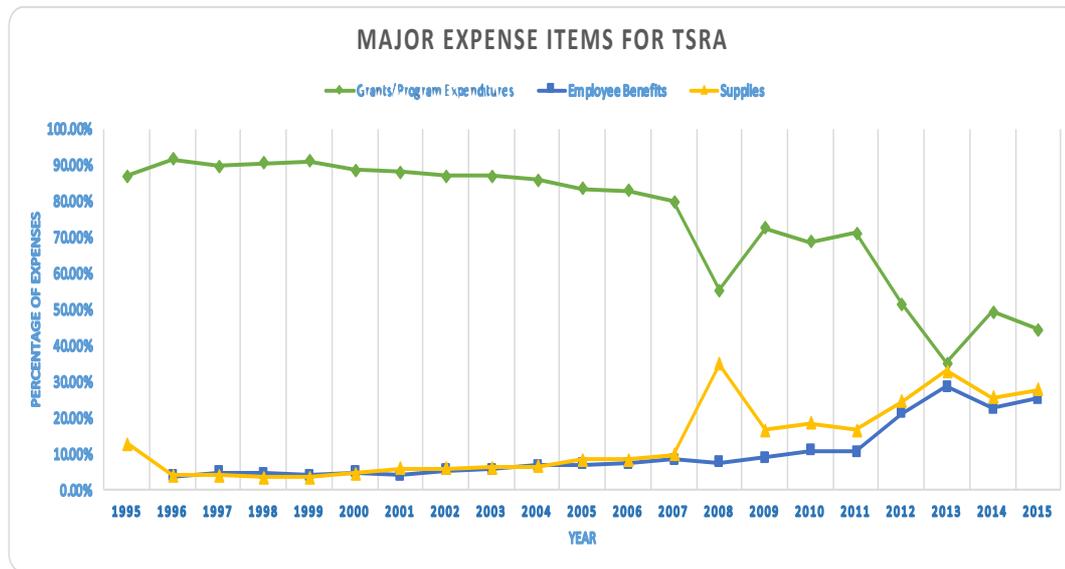
MAJOR TSRA EXPENSES											
Year	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
Employee Benefits		3.78%	4.86%	4.74%	4.26%	5.05%	4.06%	5.57%	5.80%	6.86%	7.24%
Supplies	12.99%	4.29%	4.27%	3.61%	3.68%	4.72%	6.07%	6.01%	6.44%	6.65%	8.50%
Grants/Program Expenditures	87.01%	91.60%	89.63%	90.62%	91.03%	88.74%	88.14%	86.97%	86.98%	85.79%	83.56%
Depreciation				0.98%	0.92%	1.14%	1.04%	0.74%	0.78%	0.70%	0.70%
Write-down and impairment of assets		0.34%	1.23%	0.04%	0.11%	0.35%	0.69%	0.71%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%

2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
7.52%	8.53%	7.65%	9.21%	10.94%	10.65%	21.38%	28.76%	22.74%	25.36%
8.65%	10.03%	34.86%	16.70%	18.61%	16.75%	24.72%	32.95%	25.68%	27.85%
82.83%	79.88%	55.46%	72.69%	68.64%	71.29%	51.54%	35.20%	49.42%	44.53%
0.63%	0.97%	0.61%	0.71%	0.99%	1.11%	1.99%	2.64%	1.94%	2.01%
0.37%	0.59%	1.42%	0.68%	0.81%	0.16%	0.08%	0.28%	0.00%	0.00%

³⁵ Where underspends or under-expenditures are identified these funds can be invested into ‘housing’ funds or other trusts (Major Infrastructure Program -MIP) to ensure acquittal at the end of each financial year.

³⁶ In the event that this might occur the Agency is obligated to return the funds to Treasury.

Figure 6.5: Graph of TSRA Major Expense Items (1995-2015)



Source: TSRA Annual Reports (collated as part of this research)

As the preceding table and figure outlines. In the early years of TSRA, the significant proportion of expenditure occurred by way of grants to other parties. These included to Local Government Councils (who were also at that stage TSRA Board Members) non-government organisations, cultural groups and individuals (artists etc). This peaked in 1996 at 91 per cent of expenditures. Meanwhile, expenditure on staff and suppliers had tracked at under 10 per cent until approximately the new millennium (2001), steadily increasing over time with a peak in 2013 at which time expenditure on these two expense items represented approximately 61 per cent of all expenditure. Expenditures in the form of grants over this period of time decreased from almost 90 per cent per year in the late 1990s and early 2000s to less than 50 per cent by 2015. This form of expenditure by the way of releasing community grants was lowest in 2013 representing 35 per cent of expenditure. This analysis indicates a shift towards TSRA assuming responsibility for internal service delivery as opposed to outsourcing funding resources for delivery by third party organisations. A key driver for this increase was also TSRA assuming the coordinating role for the Community Ranger Program which is reliant on staffing as a key mechanism for service delivery.

6.5 TSRA staffing

Figures outlining TSRA’s staffing profiles commenced in 1998 at which time the agency maintained a total of twenty-six staff employed as Australian Public Servants

(APS). By the year 2015, this figure had increased by more than 450 per cent to 147 APS staff. The cost of employing staff and their entitlements thus grew commensurately representing less than 5 per cent of expenditure in 1998 to more than 25 per cent in 2015.

One of the major contributing factors in this staff increase was the TSRA taking over responsibility for the delivery of the Indigenous Ranger and Federal Working on Country Programs for the region. These Federal programs/services had previously been delivered by the local government agencies, and through changes in policy were gradually taken over by the TSRA. Delivery of these federal programs in the region are an important platform for Indigenous employment and training in the region. The total staffing profile in terms of gender balance as at 2015, was relatively equal with slightly more men than women working for the agency. Prior to taking on responsibility for the Ranger Programs in 2010, there had typically been more female than male employees. The total number of ATSI staff employed by the organisation as a proportion of the total workforce in 2015 was approximately 71 per cent. This was a notable achievement in comparison to the rest of the APS average nationally where the Indigenous staff represented approximately just 2.7 per cent in 2014 (ANAO, 2014, p.7). See Appendices 7 and 8 for additional analysis of TSRA staffing trends.

Table 6.6: *TSRA Employment and staffing 1998 – 2015*

TSRA Staffing 1998-2015						
YEAR	MALE	FEMALE	TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER OR ABORIGINAL	PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES	NON TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER OR ABORIGINAL	TOTAL
1998	12	14	16	0	10	26
1999	12	15	18	0	9	27
2000	12	14	15	0	11	26
2001	17	18	21	0	14	35
2002	19	21	26	0	14	40
2003	19	25	30	0	14	44
2004	20	29	37	0	12	49
2005	17	31	35	0	13	48
2006	28	51	54	0	25	79
2007	26	45	46	0	25	71
2008	28	39	41	0	26	67
2009	30	42	42	0	30	72
2010	51	32	47	1	36	83
2011	53	55	69	2	39	108
2012	47	80	87	1	40	127
2013	71	66	95	2	42	137
2014	71	70	101	1	40	141
2015	76	71	104	1	43	147

Source: TSRA Annual Reports compiled as part of thesis analysis

6.6 Analysis of TSRA community grants data

Also, as part of the exploratory phase of this research was an analysis of the data drawn from the TSRA Annual Reports from the perspective of three of its prominent community grants streams, namely the Healthy Communities (HC), Safe Communities (SC) & Culture, Art and Heritage (CAH) Programmes. There were a number of funding mechanisms associated with the release of grant funds under these three programme areas including: the Major Infrastructure Programme (MIP), Transport Infrastructure Development Scheme (TIDS), Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Legal Services (ATSILS) and individual smaller releases that occurred two times per year under the Common Funding Rounds (CFR).

As a general principle all funding releases provided by the TSRA were entered into by either formal legal agreements i.e. Standard Funding Agreements (SFA) or informal instruments vis-à-vis Memorandum of Understanding (MoU etc), particularly those between the different levels of government agencies in the region (Federal, State or Local). The CFR cycles were a core work priority for grants management staff based within the three aforementioned programmes. Based on TSRA Board decisions on funding mechanisms, the HSC/CAH Programmes were by 2016 the primary source of funds provided directly to community residents and organisations as part of openly advertised community-based grant applications and submissions for funding.

This analytical task was an applied aspect of the research work in that it also informed an internal review of the Grants Management Systems (GMS) of the HSC/CAH Programmes, primarily the effectiveness of TSRA's CFR cycles and processes. It provided an analysis of data accumulated over the course of three and a half (3.5) financial years commencing from the second half of 2012, through to the end of the 2015 financial year. As the TSRA CFR's were convened bi-annually (six monthly intervals), the analysis incorporated data from seven CFR funding cycles. The primary source of data forming this analysis was extracted from the TSRA Annual Reports 2012/13-2015/16.

6.6.1 Data sources for TSRA grants analysis

As the Annual Reports also included CFR data (in the appendices covering payments to third parties) covering each of TSRA’s eight programmes (including Governance and Leadership, Economic Development etc), only relevant data pertaining to the aforementioned HC, SC & CAH programmes was considered as within scope. This data was extracted from Annual Report appendices manually and then aggregated into a master HC, SC and CAH file for analysis.

Part of this thesis also included the development for the original Terms of Reference (ToR) for this analytical work which was prepared for the HSC Programme in April 2016. The original ToRs for the CFR analysis included a scope which articulated that an analysis of the overall grants management context of the HSC/CAH would be undertaken. And that this would include both the processes associated with the CFR assessments, but also the context and resources (administrative burden) associated with the management of HSC/CAH Standard Funding Agreements (i.e. Grants Management, Administration, Monitoring, and Acquittal).

The analysis was guided by the then most recent version of the *TSRA Grant Procedures Manual - Version 2.5, 30 March 2015*. For the purposes of the analysis this document will be referred to as the GPM. Recommendations emanating from the analysis aimed to provide some policy options to assist decision making. Based on directions from the administrative staff concerned, streamlining aspects of the HSC/CAH CFR assessment processes to obtain greater front-end efficiencies which were then anticipated to have a positive impact on resourcing focussed on downstream grants management processes (monitoring, compliance acquittal).

6.6.2 High level grants analysis

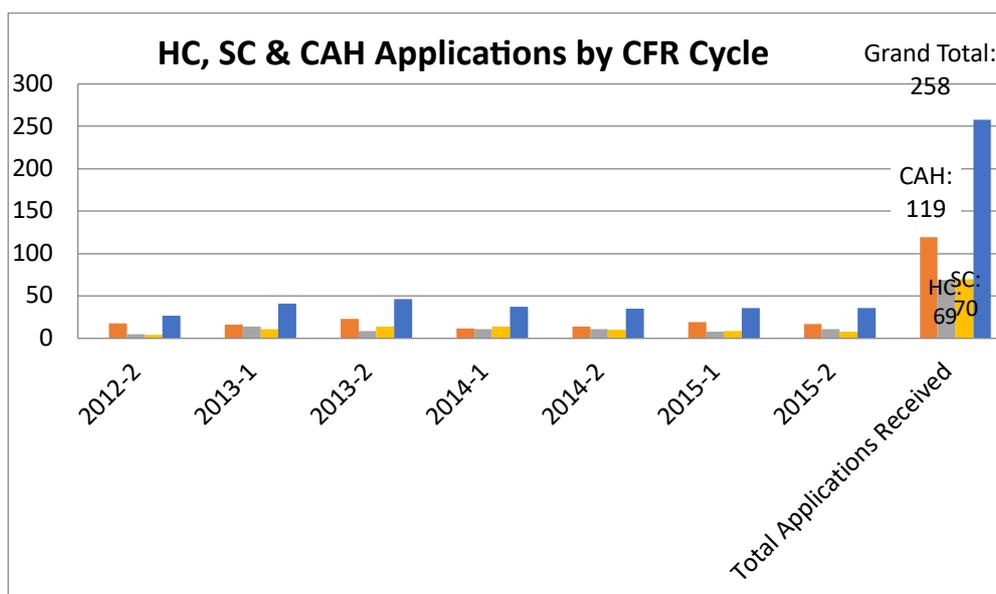
Over the period covered by the analysis (7 x CFR cycles), a total of 258 applications for HC, SC or CAH grant funding were received and processed via the CFR grant assessment procedures. This equated to an average of 37 grant applications per cycle (six months) that were received and processed by the combined HSC/CAH areas. Of these **119** applications (46.1%) received approval for financial support from the TSRA. The total amount requested by grant applicants for the period was

\$26,201,609.00 while the total amount approved by the TSRA Delegate (Chief Executive Officer) was \$8,521,469.00 representing a 33% per cent financial approval rate. Of the 119 grant applications to receive financial support, the amount eventually approved (\$8.5m) differed markedly from the amount requested (\$13,211,751.00) representing a 64% financial approval as a proportion of the amount requested. This outcome reflected an increasing requirement from the TSRA for funding applicants to have identified within their applications additional funding sources other than the TSRA. Essentially over time there was an increasing reluctance by the TSRA to be the sole funder for applications based on the notion that this model was becoming increasingly a less sustainable way of funding service delivery in the region.

Grant applications to the HC and SC Programmes over the period (\$23,772,850.00) equated to 90.1 per cent of the total requests for financial support to the organisation. Despite having proportionately, the highest level of financial requests (\$12,391,900.00), the HC Programmes had the lowest approval rate at \$2,789,436.00 (23%). The highest number of actual CFR applications was processed by the CAH Programme 119 (46%) with the remainder of applications distributed relatively evenly between the HC & SC programmes. The CAH also had, in percentage terms the highest approval rate for applications at 45 per cent (\$1.1 million approved of \$2.4 million requested). A possible reason for the higher approval rate (as a proportion of grants applications) is the relatively small amount of funds requested (e.g. the cap on CAH grants is \$25,000 AUD per application). However, the financial value of both the CAH grant requests (9.2%) and approvals (13%) is proportionately the lowest across the three programs in overall financial terms.

Available TSRA Risk Assessment Panel (RAP) rating data for applications (86% or 221 of 258 applications) indicated that 149 (67%) of applications were rated as 'Low', 'Medium' or 'Moderate' risk, whilst the remaining 71 applications (33%) were rated as 'high' or 'extreme risk. Graph 6.7 outlines the number of applications received by Programme area for this period. This is supported in numerical and percentage terms by *Tables 2 & 3*. In general, high-risk applications were assessed by internal panels of TSRA field staff based on their knowledge of the applying organisation and the track record in previous delivery of projects and grants administration for funds received by the TSRA.

Graph 6.7: *TSRA Common Funding Round submissions 2012-2016.*



Source: TSRA Annual Reports and data collated as part of this thesis (Orange – Culture, Arts, Heritage; Grey – Healthy Communities; yellow – Safe Communities Programmes)

Table 6.8: Applications for TSRA community grants 2011-16

Program	2012-2	2013-1	2013-2	2014-1	2014-2	2015-1	2015-2	Total Applications Received
	Applications received							
CAH	18	16	23	12	14	19	17	119
HC	5	14	9	11	11	8	11	69
SC	4	11	14	14	10	9	8	70
Grand Total	27	41	46	37	35	36	36	258

Source: TSRA Annual Reports and data collated as part of this thesis

6.6.3 Discussion on grants received and processed

The TSRA GPM (TSRA 2015, Pg. 6, Graph 3) provides a summary representation of the bi-annual grants timeframes and process charts (a roadmap outlining what activities should be completed by when). An initial work priority involved in the grants processing cycle, is the requirement for relevant work unit area to review and update CFR Programme Guidelines and Application forms. This updating and clearing process had consistently involved at least one full day of a senior managers time to review, clear and forward documentation prior to advertising, and approximately two full days of a mid-level managers (executive 1 level) time to consult across programmes stakeholders where required.

On average 37 grant applications per cycle are received and processed by the combined HSC/CAH Programme. A flowchart (page 5, Figure 2) of the TSRA GPM outlines the stages of a grant assessment with Section 1.6 (pg. 11) of the GPM articulating the procedures for receiving grants to the TSRA. At the time, it was considered important to understand, and where possible to quantify the time and resource impost associated with administration of the receiving grants processes, prior to them being assessed for relevance and suitability. This was considered important from the perspective of the potential for increased administrative and compliance burden in the event a funding recipient become non-compliant. The criteria for assessing grants were generally based on a relatively subjective assessment of the extent to which any particular funding proposal articulated the ways in which the activities undertaken would make a contribution to the ‘outcomes’ that the TSRA sought to achieve in the Development Plan. This is the subject of a more detailed discussion in Chapter Seven.

Table 6.9: Applications approved as a proportion of applications received for TSRA community grants 2011-16

Total Number of Applications Approved, 2012-2015			
Program	Total Applications Received	Total Applications Approved	% share
CAH	119	69	58.00%
HC	69	19	27.50%
SC	70	31	44.30%
Grand Total	258	119	46.10%

Source: TSRA Annual Reports and data collated as part of this thesis

6.6.4 Grants application financial requests vs financial approvals

The following tables and graphs denote the total amount of financial support for each of the three HSC/CAH Programmes over the period of seven CFR cycles as a percentage per programme. The HC Programme received the highest proportion of requests for financial support, followed closely by the SC Programme. CAH whilst having the highest actual number of applications represented less than 10 per cent of the financial requests for support. One possible explanation for this is that the HC and SC areas within the organisation were responsible for processing applications for infrastructure funding under the MIP and TIDS which were generally far higher than application for community based social events and activities.

Table 6.10: Amount requested for TSRA funding per program area community grants 2011-16

Total Amount Requested, 2012-2015		
Program	Total Amount Requested	% share
CAH	2,428,760	9%
HC	12,391,900	47%
SC	11,380,950	43%
Grand Total	26,201,609	100%

Source: TSRA Annual Reports and data collated as part of this thesis

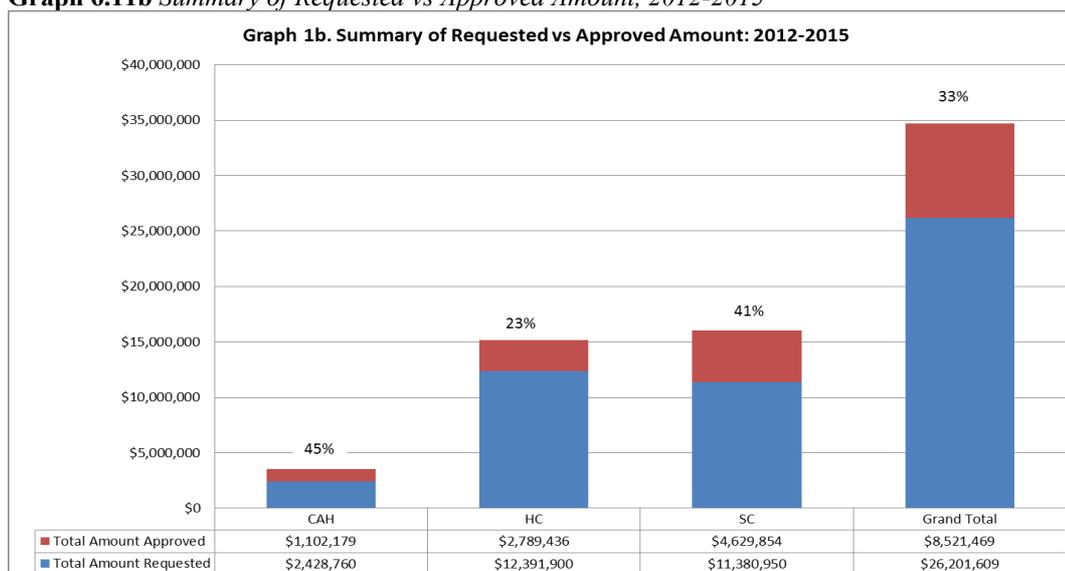
The following table and graphs labelled 1b. summarise in financial and percentage terms the financial approval rate. Whilst requests for financial support to the HC Programme were the highest, this programme had the lowest financial approval rate of 23 per cent. Many of the requests for community-based infrastructures (community halls, basketball courts etc) would be processed via that programme. Tables and graphs 6.11 a) and b) below outline this analysis.

Table 6.11a Summary of Requested vs Approved Amount, 2012-2015

Program	Total Amount Requested	Total Amount Approved	% share
CAH	\$2,428,760	\$1,102,179	45%
HC	\$12,391,900	\$2,789,436	23%
SC	\$11,380,950	\$4,629,854	41%
Grand Total	\$26,201,609	\$8,521,469	33%

Source: TSRA Annual Reports and data collated as part of this thesis

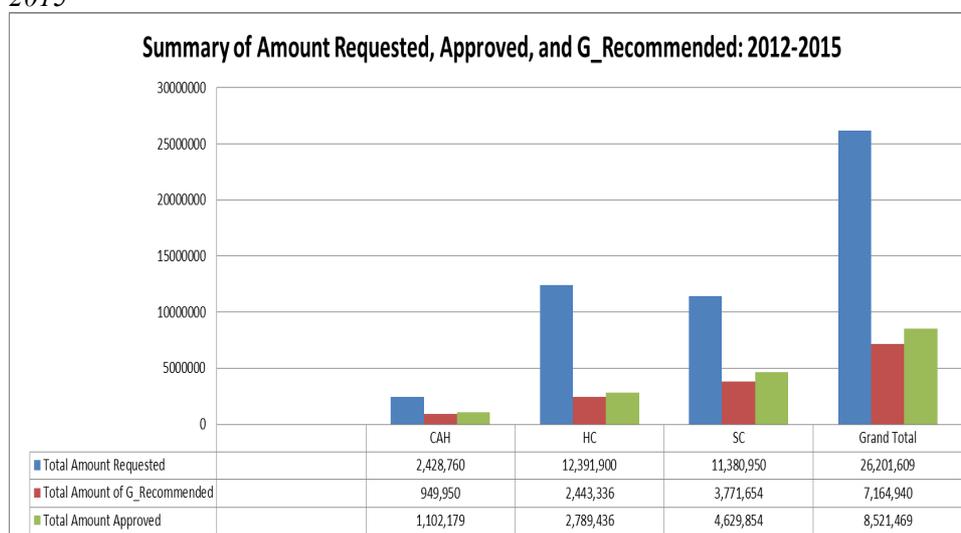
Graph 6.11b Summary of Requested vs Approved Amount, 2012-2015



Source: TSRA Annual Reports and data collated as part of this thesis

On occasion, the TSRA financial delegate (Chief Executive) would take other considerations into account when making decisions on the final amount that was approved for funding. These considerations may have been an internal recommendation from programme staff or other considerations with proposals (sometimes the advent of co-contributions by other State and local agencies). Over the period analysed this amounted to approximately AU\$1.39 million. As the final delegate for decisions over grant expenditure (following Board approval for overall budget allocations), the CEO is accountable for explaining these decisions to the Board.

Graph 6.12 Summary of grant funding requested, recommended vs Approved Amount 2012-2015



Source: TSRA Annual Reports and data collated as part of this thesis

6.6.5 Financial approval rates for supported grants

As outlined at Table 6.13, there were 119 applications that did receive TSRA funding support over the period. An important aspect to consider is that the total requested for financial support was for approximately AU\$13 million. Of this 64 per cent of the financial value requested was given approval. This outcome was generally the result of detailed internal assessment of proposed budgets where specific line items within funding applications were given part approval, modified or not supported even though other aspects of the application received financial support³⁷. Sometimes,

³⁷ Sometimes it may have been parts of applications (e.g. administration, accounting or audit fees and overheads, quotations etc)

decisions over part-funding of grants would become a source of criticism over TSRA grants administration processes.

Further investigation would be required with the grant recipients in order to determine whether projects with reduced budgets were able to be delivered effectively. Particularly with the requests for funding support for infrastructure projects (sporting facilities etc), the general principle applied was that TSRA funding would be contingent on co-funding from other sources (local government own source revenue or other grants). In some cases, even though TSRA approved a part-funding contribution to grant submissions, the projects did not ultimately proceed as the applicants were unable to realise the requirements for co-funding (by State and/or Local Governments). In these cases, the TSRA funds were re-allocated to other program activities.

Table 6.13 Summary of Requested vs Approved Amount as a percentage by program 2012-2015

Total Requested Amount of Applications Approved, 2012-2015					
Program	Total Applications Received	Total Applications Approved	Requested Amount of Applications Approved	Total Applications Approved	% share
CAH	119	69	1,187,000	1,102,179	93%
HC	69	19	5,917,437	2,789,436	47%
SC	70	31	6,107,315	4,629,854	76%
Grand Total	258	119	13,211,751	8,521,469	64%

Source: TSRA Annual Reports and data collated as part of this thesis

In relation to its internal grants assessment processes, the TSRA had established small teams of staff who undertook an assessment of the risks associated with a particular application from the perspective of whether there was duplication, the recipient had a prior poor record of delivery, or some other risk (Risk Assessment Panel). Table 6.14 outlines the risk rating applied to individual funding applications. The majority of applications (n117) were rated internally as medium risk with approximately 186 applications internally rated as medium to high risk (i.e. 72 per cent). It was only in very exceptional circumstances that grant proposal that received an internal rating of ‘high-risk’ was allocated TSRA funding.

Table 6.14 Summary of internal risk rating of grant funding applications 2012-2015

Risk Assessment Panel (RAP) Risk Rating for Applications, 2012-2015							
Program	Total Applications Received	RAP Risk Rating					Total
		Extreme	High	Low	Medium	Moderate	
CAH	119		23	27	57		107
HC	69	1	28	2	26	1	58
SC	70	2	18	2	34		56
Grand Total	258	3	69	31	117	1	221

Source: TSRA Annual Reports and data collated as part of this thesis

6.7 Analysis of TSRA reporting to Australian Parliament (2011/12 – 2017/18)

The next section of the analysis considers the performance data as reported by the TSRA to Parliament as a requirement of the high-level Key Performance Indicators stipulated by the Portfolio Budget Statements (PBS). The source of the figures for this section are drawn from the successive TSRA Annual Reports over a seven-year period covering the financial years ranging from 2011-2018. This section only presents a summary of the data as reported. A more detailed consideration of some of the theoretical and conceptual issues associated with conducting this analysis is undertaken in Chapter 7.

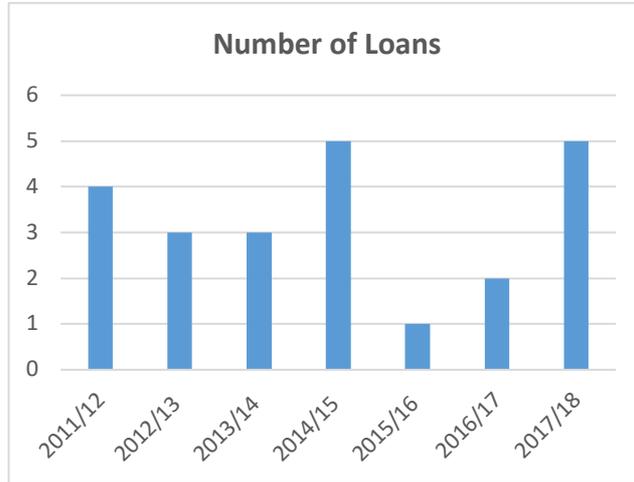
6.7.1 Increasing local Indigenous owned commercially viable businesses

While the KPI states quite emphatically that the aim or objective of this KPI is an increased number of ATSI owned businesses that are also commercially viable, the data reported by the TSRA relates to both the number of concessional business loans it funds and the value of these loans for each of the financial years. Over the seven year period the number of new business loans processed ranges between one in 2015-16 and five in 2014-15 and 2017-18 with an average number of concessional loans processed being three per annum. The value of the concessional loans provided ranges from a lowest of \$20,628.00 in 2015-16 to a high of \$928,213.00 in 2014-15. The total amount provided over the seven years was approximately \$2,513,000.00 with an average amount of funds over the years being approximately \$359,000.00.

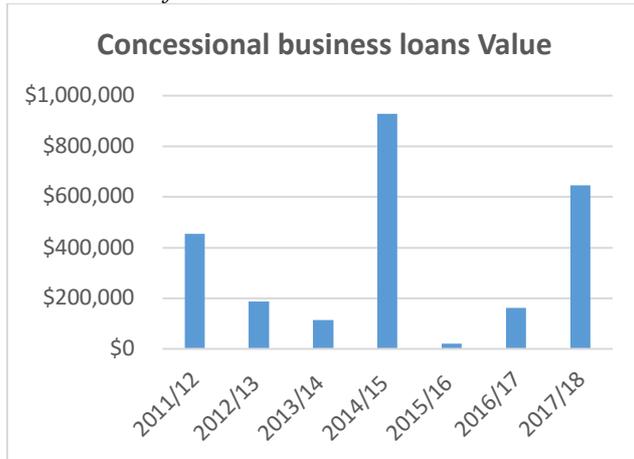
A key observation though with this data is the absence of any pre-data serving as a benchmark to measure performance. Nor does the reporting of quantitative data on

the number of loans processed give an indication of ‘commercial viability’ of the said businesses. Therefore, a qualitative statement would be required to more fully explain this data.

Graph 6.15a: *Business loans 2011-18*



Graph 6.15b: *Value of TSRA Business loans 2011-18*



Source: TSRA Annual Reports 2011- 2018

6.7.2 Increased availability of approved business training

Data as reported against this PBS KPI relates to the period 2013-14 to 2017-18. Over this period there was a reported increase in the number of approved business training workshops and in the number of people who participated in them. If the first that time data was reported serves as a benchmark with six workshops and twenty-four participants, then the following year in 2014-15 there was a noticeable decline both in the number of workshops provided and in the number of participants.

This however, was exceeded in 2015-16 and consistently in the three reporting years since. Over the period a total of sixty-four business training workshops were provided with a total number of 343 participants. While there had been an increase in the number of participants attending training, a potential for future research might consider the extent to which these participants progressed to establishing business activities.

Graph 6.16: *Business workshops and participation 2011-18*



Source: TSRA Annual Reports 2011- 2018

6.7.3 Fisheries data and reporting

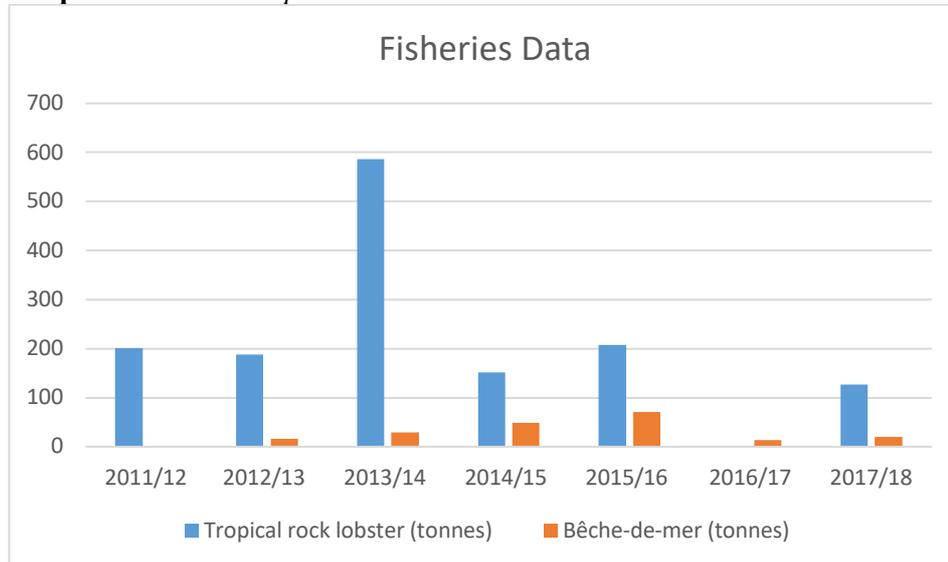
Over the seven-year period where fisheries data was reported by the TSRA, there seemed to have been some revisions and recalibration, notwithstanding the obvious complexity associated with catch data as multiple State and Federal agencies are involved in the process. Fishing data originally related to the catch of Tropical Rock Lobster (TRL), Coral Trout, Spanish Mackerel and Beche-de-mer. In terms of TRL, the reported catch data is provided over six financial years, as no data was reported in 2016/17.

The highest tonnage reported to have been obtained by TSI&A fishers in 2013/14 at 586 tonnes. The lowest was reported to have occurred in 2017/18 at 127 tonnes. Over the six years reported, the total TRL catch by local fishers was 1470 tonnes with average being 245 tonnes³⁸. In terms of the KPI statement, it is not entirely clear how

³⁸ Note that the TSRA fisheries data as reported in Annual Reports underwent some revisions which will be subject of the discussion in the next Chapter.

catch data ultimately led to strengthened claims on increased ownership thus making a compelling case for future case study or qualitative research explanation.

Graph 6.17: TSRA Tropical Rock Lobster and Beche-de-mer catch data 2011-18



Source: TSRA Annual Reports 2011- 2018

In terms of finfish (Coral Trout and Spanish Mackerel) catches, were reported to have been under one tonne for three of the years for where data was published. Spanish Mackerel catches had not been reported as exceeding two tonnes while Coral Trout was at first reported to have exceeded this slightly in the first reported year 2011/12 at 2.29 tonnes³⁹. Beche-de-mer (or colloquially known as sea cucumber) catch data was also reported for six out of seven of the financial years. Over those years the total catch was reported to have been 199.2 tonnes, with average catch reported to have been 33.16 tonnes. The lowest tonnage was recorded in 2016/17 at 14 tonnes with the highest in the preceding year at 71 tonnes.

Table 6.18: TSRA Finfish catch data 2011-18

YEAR	Coral trout	Spanish mackerel
2011/12	2.29 tonnes	1.86 tonnes
2012/13	1.08 tonnes	1.64 tonnes
2013/14	Under 1.00 tonne	Under 1.00 tonnes
2014/15	Under 1.00 tonne	Under 1.00 tonnes
2015/16	Under 1.00 tonne	Under 1.00 tonnes
2016/17	2	2
2017/18	2	2

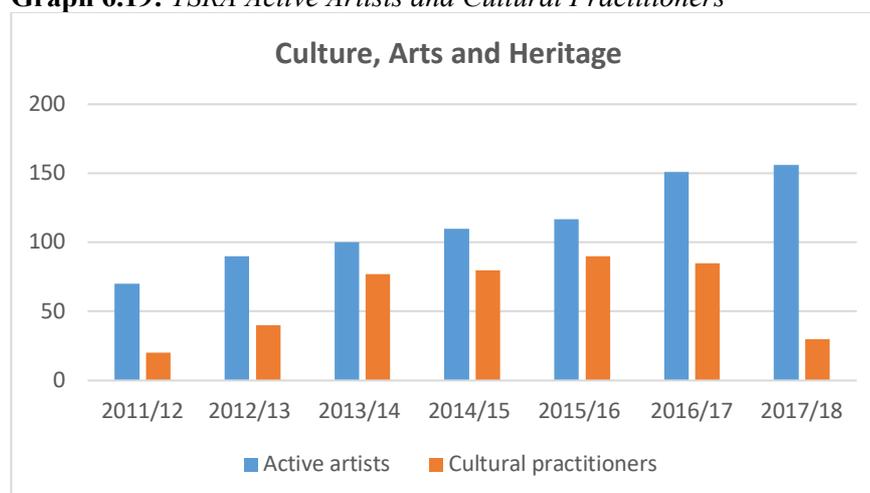
Source: TSRA Annual Reports 2011- 2018

³⁹ A more detailed discussion of some high level issues with fisheries data as relevant to IE is outlined in discussion in Chapter seven.

6.7.4 Emerging and professionally active artists and cultural practitioners

In relation to some of the TSRA’s Culture, Art and Heritage PBS KPIs, the TSRA reports on increases in the number of emerging and professionally active artists and cultural practitioners that have access to information and support to ensure copyright and intellectual property rights number of ‘active’ artists and cultural practitioners. Although the KPI makes reference to these individuals having access to information and support aiming to ensure copyright and intellectual property rights. This aspect is not captured within the data which only presents numbers related to individual practitioners. The articulation of this KPI presents a number of issues in relation to how it might be effectively measured and in effect what the desired outcomes are. An area for future research might assess the definitional issues pertaining ‘emerging’ and ‘professionally’ active. Furthermore, the measurement of access to copyright and IP rights would require more conceptual explanation for the measures to elicit greater clarity on progress.

Graph 6.19: *TSRA Active Artists and Cultural Practitioners*



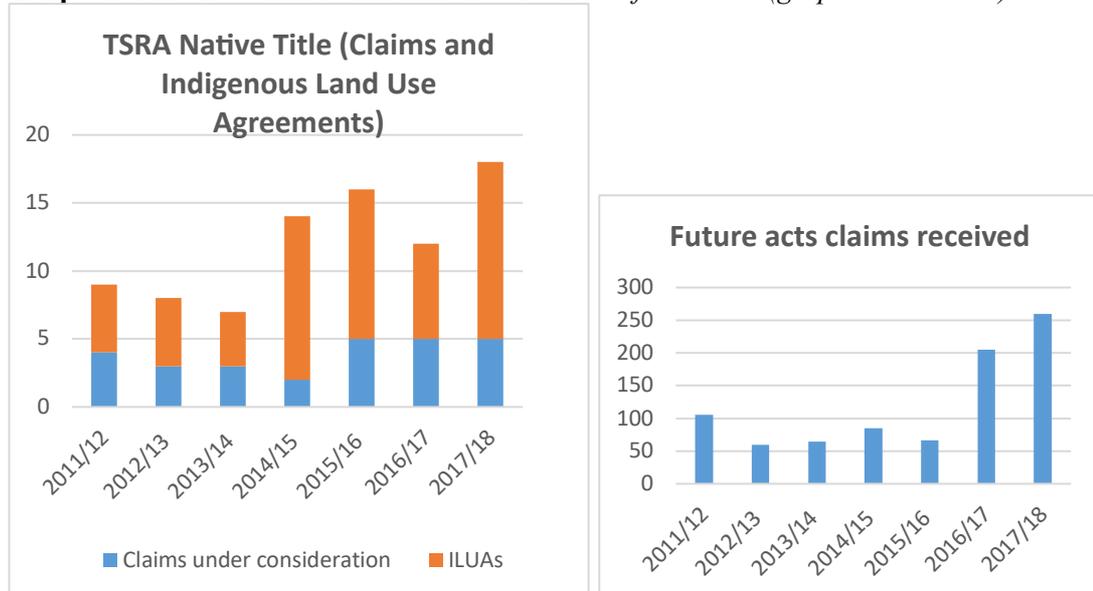
Source: *TSRA Annual Reports 2011- 2018*

Over the timeframe TSRA reports that it has supported 794 active artists with the average per year at approximately 113 artists. This number has been incrementally increasing over each year as reported with the lowest in the 2011/12 financial year of 70 and the highest in the 2017/18 period at 156. Alternatively, the reported total number of cultural practitioners supported over the same timeframe is significantly less at 422, or on average 60 per annum. Although steadily increasing for the first six years of reporting up to 90 in 2015/16, this number decreased to 30 in the last year of the reporting.

6.7.5 Native Title data

Data presented in its annual reports for the TSRA’s Native Title (NT) over the seven-year period is outlined in the graph. Although there are two KPIs in the PBS the TSRA uses three metrics in its reporting. While the KPI relates to the number of Native Title claims successfully determined, and b) Number of Indigenous Land Use Agreements (ILUA) that have compensation or other benefits as part of ILUA claims successfully determined, the TSRA reports on claims ‘under consideration’. This has oscillated between one claim being considered in 2014/15 and five claims being considered over the last three years of reports. It is not clear whether the reduction in the claims labelled as under consideration were in fact successfully determined based on the reduction in the figures.

Graph 6.19a: TSRA native Title Claims ILUA’s and future acts (graph 6.19b below)



Source: TSRA Annual Reports 2011- 2018

The second metric reported is based on the number of Future Acts Received⁴⁰. The number of registered future acts ranged between sixty in 202/13 to two hundred and sixty in 207/18 with the total number of registrations over the period being 845. This equates to an average of 82 notifications per annum. One factor leading to the elevated number of notifications received was the roll-out of the National Indigenous Housing in the region whereby newly constructed houses were required to have

⁴⁰ “Future Acts - In native title, a “future act” is a proposed act on land or waters that affects native title rights and interests. This can include: Exploration; Mining; Prospecting; Building public infrastructure; Tourist resorts; Water licenses; Some legislative changes; and Some lease renewals.(See, Native Title Tribunal

leases notified. This is likely related also to the last metric associated with Indigenous Land Use Agreements (ILUA's) where there had been a total of 57 agreements over the period, representing an average of approximately eight per annum.

6.7.6 Number of endorsed community-based management plans

Graph 6.20: TSRA Ranger Program – Community Management Plans



Source: TSRA Annual Reports 2011- 2018

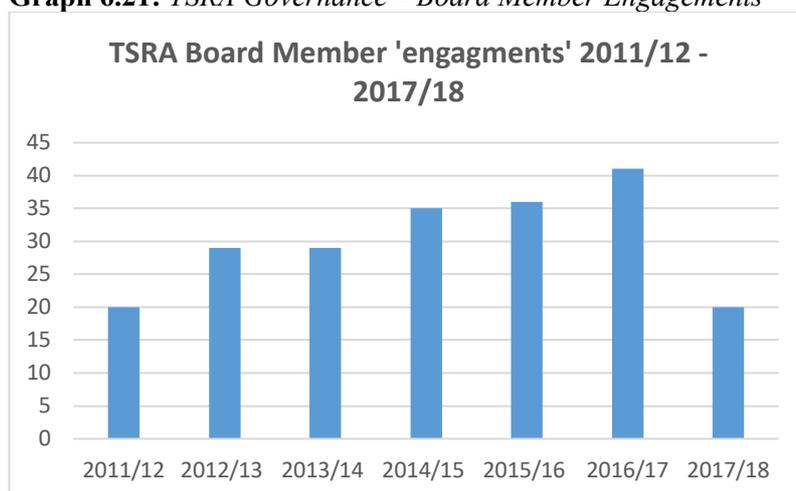
Under the TSRA's Working on Country or Ranger Program, data reports on the number of endorsed community-based management plans for the natural and cultural resources of the region being actively implemented there were a range of community management plans related to the natural resources of the particular community. These resources often involved both the land and ocean-based resources for example traditional hunting of protected species such as sea turtles and dugong and land-based resources including traditional indigenous species of plants and horticulture. In terms of 'cultural resources' these focussed on traditional land management practices e.g. managing burn off, invasive species (lucena weed and cane toads) etc.

Other aspects of community plans included; documenting traditional knowledge related to the ecology and culture, traditional stories of land management, hunting, or land based cultural practises (burial sites). The number of plans being implemented was almost 100 per cent more in the second year of data (32) than in the first year of data recorded in 2011-12 (17). However, this remained static for a period of five years at 32 community-based management plans over the period 2012/13 – 2016/17. In the last year of reporting 2017/18, there was an increase of approximately 15 per cent with the inclusion of an additional 5 community-based plans. This would be an

area suitable for further research and evaluation where for example the scope might assess the approach, content and effectiveness of the community-based planning process in relation to benefits for the community.

6.7.7 Increasing the level of engagement of elected leaders

Graph 6.21: TSRA Governance – Board Member Engagements



Source: TSRA Annual Reports 2011- 2018

According to the TSRA (2017), the KPI articulated at 6.7.7 is,

“The primary indicator of the level of engagement is the number of meetings between the elected members of the TSRA and government ministers. This includes engagements by the TSRA Chairperson and Board Members during visits to Canberra, and also engagements with ministers with the TSRA Board during visits by ministers to the region”. (TSRA, 2017, p.19)

Reported data indicates that there was a total of 210 ‘engagements’ over the seven years of data reported, thus on average thirty per annum. The lowest number of engagements occurred in the years 2011/12 and 2017/18 with twenty, the highest being in 2016/17 with 41. Given the rather qualitative aspect of this KPI, it is unclear from reporting on various aspects and elements of the engagement whether there were positive outcomes for the organisation and Torres Strait communities. In this respect some more substantive narrative on the costs and benefits derived through political level engagements would be beneficial.

6.7.8 Proscribed Body Corporate registration

Proscribed Body Corporate (PBC's) are body corporates established comprising acknowledged Native Title land holders of the Island communities, although more recently a PBC was also established to preside of aspects of the regional native title sea claim. The KPI measures the number of PBCs that achieve Office of the Registrar of Indigenous Corporations (ORIC) compliance as at 31 December each year. Over the first three years this number remained static and increased by 1 in 2014/15. In 2016 the TSRA identified that two out of the 21 PBC's had established fee-for-services thus reducing their ongoing dependence on grants funding. Among the range of services included were advice on land tenure and use, leasing, and at times cultural and language advice (TSRA, 2016, p.20).

6.7.9 Increased investment into new and existing regional environmental health infrastructure.

The data reported by TSRA commencing 2011/12 relates to the number of 'projects' as opposed to the quantum of funding allocated. However, this form of reporting against this KPI ceased in 2015/16 in its place a narrative explaining the level of funding that had been approved and various works under a telecommunications upgrade and transport infrastructure projects constructed under the Transport Infrastructure Development Scheme (TIDS). Over the period of seven reporting years the TSRA provided data based on the actual number of projects approved under the Major Infrastructure Program (MIP). The MIP has been a long-standing Commonwealth and Queensland Government jointly funded initiative that aimed to integrate planning and consolidate the funds for a wide range of regional environmental infrastructures.

These infrastructures included those focussed on fresh water, sewerage, sanitation, solid waste and roads and drainage (dust reduction and removal of water ponding and inundation etc). In fact, joint contributions to the MIP and related coastal protection infrastructures totalled approximately \$300 million AUD over a twenty-two year period 1998-2020. This is outlined in the table 6.22 consolidated below:

Table: 6.22: Summary of MIP Programme Funding 1998-2020

Funding Organisation	Australian Government	Queensland Government	Total MIP Funding Provided or committed (1998 – 2020)
MIP1	\$17,186,420.00	\$14,431,818.00	\$31,618,238.00
MIP2	\$15,460,000.00	\$15,150,710.00	\$30,610,710.00
MIP3	\$16,200,000.00	\$16,200,000.00	\$32,400,000.00
MIP4 (A)	\$28,000,000.00	\$28,000,000.00	\$56,000,000.00
MIP4 (B)	\$29,000,000.00	\$28,000,000.00	\$57,000,000.00
MIP5	\$21,200,000.00	\$9,200,000.00*	\$30,400,000.00
(Seawalls)	\$14,237,400.00**	\$12,000,000.00	\$26,237,400.00
MIP6 (Released and committed)	\$15,000,000.00	\$15,000,000.00	\$30,000,000.00
Total	\$156,283,820.00	\$137,982,528.00	\$294,266,348.00
Difference in matched funding between Australian and Queensland Government		<i>(-\$18,301,292.00)</i>	

* Includes State Government allocation direct to Councils (accepted by Minister Macklin in 2012 as contribution to MIP matched funding)

** Includes \$5m funding from Dept Infrastructure & Regional Development; \$ 7m Dept Prime Minister & Cabinet; and \$2.37m TSRA. Source: Analysis of data reported on TSRA Website, Torres Strait MIP Implementation Plan and Annual Reports⁴¹

Source: TSRA MIP Program Reports 2011-2018

6.8 Conclusion

This chapter outlined a wide range of primarily quantitative financial and performance data which the TSRA has generated and both reported to the Australian Parliament and in information provided to the public domain. The analysis of the performance and financial information is also a central objective, in terms of framing the case-study, and essential to ascertain findings along with identifying issues for further discussion in the chapters to follow. Consistent with the narrative and principles of inductive and abductive research practise, it is clear that collation and analysis of the TSRA’s financial information and organisational trends over a relatively long timespan has allowed for a number of insights.

At a high level, it has flagged trends in the organisational machinations associated with how it has determined to deliver its activities and services. Notably, the

⁴¹ See MIP Section on TSRA website www.tsra.gov.au

orientation of its funds towards steadily increasing staffing and internal administrative costs represents a shift towards internal control over service delivery.

Thus, to an extent this analysis highlights the TSRA's steadily decreasing focus on outsourcing aspects of its service and project delivery via community grants, to more of a model based on increased internal staffing and resources and direct implementation of a number of activities (e.g. working on country, rangers and environmental management etc). Following this relatively high-level (broad brush) analysis of financial trends, the analysis of the community grant funding data indicates that the requests for funding support often far exceed the funding approved for release. Data available for analysis also indicates that internal assessments over time of the risks associated with delivery of social development activities via the grant funding modality in the region were proportionally considered medium-high risk.

Following this, TSRA's quantitative performance data as required by the Federal Government's Outcomes and Performance Framework, incorporating the KPIs stated in the Portfolio Budgets is provided over a timeframe of seven years. This process is based predominantly on the quantitative statistics reported by the agency in each year. It is clear from this process that interpreting performance in terms of effectiveness and efficiency directly from the stated KPI indicators coupled with the stated measures themselves involves a degree of conceptual malleability. It is clear that an interpretation of the quantitative aspects of the data requires supplementation with more qualitative narrative in order to give a more robust performance story.

It is also apparent, even by a cursory assessment of the sheer amount commitments towards the MIP alone that the TSRA is responsible for coordination and oversight of a complex and challenging array of project activities. The extent to which this level of complexity can be captured within a single number or a one sentence statement is certainly an area for assessment and debate unto itself. Some of the nuances and considerations that have to be made when tasked with undertaking an assessment of these complex activities in such a challenging remote and politically, culturally and socially sensitive environment are topics canvassed in the chapters to follow. Importantly, the analysis did provide insight into where best the focus of the research could be applied – notably in undertaking an evaluation of a complex

infrastructure project and establishing the policy architecture and agreements to facilitate production of statistical benchmarks and data on pre- and post-program activity and performance.

“It will be clear ... that policy decisions will typically be influenced by much more than objective evidence, or rational analysis. Values, interests, personalities, timing, circumstance and happenstance — in short democracy — determine what actually happens”. (Banks, 2009, p.3)

CHAPTER 7: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

“The reality of program evaluation, however, almost always deviates wildly from the theory. What is straightforward when discussed in the pages of a textbook, becomes anything but when discussed in a policymaker’s office. Real world public policy evaluations are conducted under a number of constraints, both methodological and political”. (Cobb-Clark, 2012, p. 82)

7.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to build upon the predominantly descriptive analysis of the wide range of quantitative program and financial data and administrative information derived from TSRA public reporting outlined in the previous Chapter Six. At the outset, the Chapter provides a discussion of the evolving nature of the Indigenous evaluation policy at national level including renewed calls for better use of data for evidence-based policy, increasing regional data availability and optimizing data use in decision making at community level.

Following this, discussion in this Chapter focusses on providing a more detailed critique of the ANAO’s findings and some of the factors (largely inferred) associated with how overall audit conclusions were ultimately formulated. Key to this discussion are their observations of amongst other things that:

- The limitations associated with TSRA being a relatively ‘small’ agency and the extent to which it could generate broader social outcomes on its own;
- That TSRA was and remains reliant on the cooperation of other federal, state and local agencies in order to perform its effective coordination and monitoring mandate as required by the legislation (ATSI Act);
- The absence of a formally negotiated monitoring and coordination role despite the previous efforts in service gaps and needs mapping;
- A recommendation that due to being a service delivery agency, a formal process for handling feedback and complaints was not in place, as this would form a source of qualitative information with which to improve services; and,

- The previously touched upon narrative pertaining to the agency not having a strong measurement basis to assess the impact of its activities on reducing disadvantage (although its internal monitoring framework was generally sound) (ANAO, 2013 p.18-19).

This aspect of the discussion is particularly important in that the ANAO also provided a series of suggestions in the narrative about possible ways that the organisation could draw on data and trends to better demonstrate its impact. Therefore, this chapter explores some of the issues and implications associated with the ANAO's logic and rationale for formulating its conclusions and findings of the 2013/14 ANAO performance report structure. While ultimately the guidance that this key oversight agency provided may have been sufficient to influence some changes in the format of the TSRA's monitoring and reporting practises, some of the fundamental issues in terms of demonstrating clearly the agency's direct impact in an ex-post context are significantly complex and following an extrapolation of the ANAO's logic did not provide a reliable basis for evaluating impact for a number of reasons as will be highlighted.

It is apparent, given the ANAO's approach to undertaking the performance audit, the scope of its field work, and the subsequent articulation of its findings and recommendations, that its statements about the lack of a measurement framework with which to assess impact may have been less than well-conceived. Fundamentally, the narrative in the audit findings were formulated on what was clearly a limited understanding of the TSRA's context and evolution in terms of its service delivery obligations. The research conducted as part of this thesis, including the theoretical framework for applied evaluation, allows for a different perspective to be put forward which can better inform the work of the TSRA and other similar organisations. Articulating the rationale for this claim will be undertaken in this Chapter.

Following a reflection of the ANAO's review and relevant commentary is an assessment of the changes that were introduced by the TSRA for its annual reporting structures to Parliament. This includes an assessment of the inclusion of additional metrics and data pertaining to social trends and the extent to which they might reinforce performance claims. In addition, in its later annual reports, TSRA included

a range of metrics based on service gaps and needs drawn from a 2009 service mapping process subsequently published as community service delivery booklets. Therefore, this chapter considers some of the issues associated with reporting on services and activities based on previous evaluations of Indigenous services delivery in other locations under the since abandoned national partnerships on services delivery.

A consideration of the mixed methods evaluation approach to Indigenous policies and programs as promulgated by the CIS in their 2017 Indigenous Evaluation Toolkit is provided. Here discussion focusses on which aspects of TSRA programs, activities and reporting might facilitate assessment against the strong methodology as posited by CIS (as opposed to the moderate and weak Indigenous evaluations). This discussion is framed in the context of the preceding analysis of TSRA's PBS KPIs statements that the agency had reported annually to the Australian Parliament. The discussion considers the applicability of some of the essential elements of the Indigenous program evaluations that CIS pointed to in the toolkit which they considered to be 'strong' evaluations including a consideration of which aspects of those evaluative designs may have been either suited to, or not-compatible to TSRA's reporting context. To this extent an approach to assessing 'evaluability' is canvassed.

This Chapter culminates in a discussion of two key practical and applied projects that were developed and adopted by the TSRA as a direct result of this research and become realised through dialogue between this author and the Agency. Firstly, a description of the scoping and design process of establishing a comprehensive Torres Strait Regional Data and Statistics Library (RDSL) was provided, including the development and ratification of a formal agreement between the TSRA and the federal Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). This embryonic partnership details the scope and framework for the construction of key social and economic statistical trends and analysis geared towards enhancing evidence-based decision making and for building regional statistical capability and capacity.

The second of these key project (and research) activities chronicles the development, process and outcome of an evaluation of complex remote and high profile infrastructure construction projects, namely the Torres Strait Seawalls Evaluation.

This project, following being instigated by the Minister for Indigenous Affairs, was scoped and designed by this researcher who provided the technical and analytical oversight to the overall evaluation process. The result and final outcome of this Seawalls evaluation process was an award of an additional AU\$25 million to fund further construction works in the region. This Chapter thus provides key observations and a chronology of how this process was undertaken and aims to serve as a demonstrable example of how to apply a rigorous evaluation logic in a complex cross-cultural setting.

At the conclusion of this Chapter, a six step model is proposed outlining how a more contextually applied evaluation process and framework might be pursued for future evaluations. This model might include steps such as: i) Analyse the funding environment and existing reporting requirements; ii) Identify the key objectives and organisational aims (Theory of Change); iii) Assess data availability and review previous evaluations; iv) Consult with stakeholders on applicable evaluation design options; v) Design the evaluation (and gain approval); and vi) Conduct the evaluation. Detail on the elements of each of these particular steps will be incorporated into the Chapter conclusions.

7.2 Evolving nature of Indigenous evaluation policies

Policy dialogue on the role of Indigenous data in Indigenous policy including the ‘democratisation of data’ became manifestly more prominent during this research (Empowered Communities, 2015; Parkinson, 2017; Anderson, 2017). For example, in 2017 Martin Parkinson, the most senior Federal bureaucrat at a Wentworth Lecture when outlining fifty years of Indigenous affairs, proclaimed that “*data is gold in policy development and implementation*” (Parkinson, 2017, n.p). As head of the public service he noted that even though the government had at its disposal extensive longitudinal administrative datasets, there was “*very little use*” of them (Parkinson, 2017, n.p.).

In concert, Professor Ian Anderson, Parkinson’s appointed Deputy in the Indigenous Affairs portfolio called for more “*rigorous evidence-based policy, using high quality, granular data to empower better regional and governmental decision-making*” (Anderson, 2017, n.p). In his address, Anderson noted that even though

Australia possessed “*one of the best Indigenous data collection systems in the world*”, they were beset by quality issues, particularly in relation to the small remote population groups where data was often “*not collated transparently, burying important information about Indigenous outcomes in population-wide trends and averages*” (Anderson, 2017, n.p).

A common antecedent to both of the speeches outlined above was the Federal Government’s support for a design report calling for ‘Empowered Communities’ (EC) earlier in 2015. This design report argued strongly the need for the establishment of baseline data as early as possible in order to develop an effective monitoring and evaluation framework for its policy position. It argued that the ‘democratisation’ of this baseline data establishing targets and trajectories involved making it accessible to Indigenous leaders in order to measure and inform their reform and change agenda in terms of “*policy decision making, service delivery coherence and improving financial arrangements*” (Empowered Communities, 2015, p. 92).

Buried within the ANAO’s audit commentary is a statement that the TSRA should consider expanding the scope of the ‘external review’ to “*include an evaluation of the outcomes of the MIP, particularly in relation to environmental health issues*” (ANAO, 2014, p.77). Here both issues related to the MIP ‘external reviews’ along with a mini-case study of the processes associated with undertaking an independent evaluation of one quite significant infrastructure project related to coastal seawalls is discussed.

A broader discussion of program and policy assessment in terms of evaluating effectiveness and impact with respect to government policy and program interventions in complex political, organisational and cultural contexts is also considered. This is often the case where there is either an absence of data or a lack of access to the information that exists or could be obtained. Here the discussion is of the key ingredients required for measuring program performance (established baselines etc) and broader ethical and political considerations with respect to Indigenous control and empowerment are considered. This is also discussed in the context of an increasing push for better Indigenous data at community level, and an accompanied call for more and better Indigenous program evaluations.

The chapter concludes with an enumeration of some of the basic circumstances and sensitivities that influenced the work of the researcher and the conduct of the research. This includes importantly the changes in the political and thus organisational landscape over the course of the research journey. In particular, the political and organisational context altered significantly following approval of this research in 2015, with the election of a new TSRA Board and Executive in 2016. The result of this is that the collection, analysis and presentation of data (even though previously reported publicly) became politically sensitive to the extent that the project scope and conduct of the research required significant modification.

7.3 A critique of ANAO's TSRA Performance Audit – a realist perspective

An essential precursor to undertaking an analysis of the TSRA as the case study is a more in-depth examination and critique of the principles and practices associated with one of the primary research drivers being the ANAO's PA. Discount the fact that the reported cost of conducting the audit, "*in accordance with the ANAO Auditing Standards*" (ANAO, 2013, p.37) was approximately AU\$356,000.00 AUD⁴², the one objective was an "*assessment of the effectiveness of the TSRA's program and service delivery functions*" (ANAO, 2013, p.18). In order to formulate its conclusions on the audit objective above, the ANAO identified a "*high-level criteria*" that comprised TSRA's; "*a) arrangements for identifying service delivery needs; b) co-ordinate and deliver services; and, c) monitor and report on performance*" (ANAO, 2013, p.18). They are analysed in turn below.

7.3.1 TSRA's identification of service delivery needs

A critical examination of the audit authority's logic and approach would justifiably commence at this point. As outlined previously, first in the criteria required for ascertaining audit conclusions were questions as to what arrangements were in place for identifying service delivery needs. However, the ANAO's report structure is unclear at this point, because, rather than structuring its summary of findings in

⁴² *This caused a degree of internal consternation within the organisation where it was expressed verbally that these funds may well have been deployed for more pertinent service priorities (2016, internal communication between researcher and senior managers)*

sequential order by criteria, they are summarised by chapter, and the title of the summary chapter two is “*Arrangements to Support Coordination and Service Delivery*” (ANAO, 2013, p. 19). Whilst the other sets of findings are summarised in line and with reference to the actual criteria with which they relate, this set of findings, technically is not.

What the ANAO outlines in this set of findings is the circumstances involved with a regional planning process, described as the Integrated Service Delivery Framework (ISD) which commenced in 2008 with (the previous) Labor federal governments’ imperatives for better coordination of services for Indigenous people (ANAO, 2013, p 19). Following this ensued a four-year long process to validate and map service gaps and needs at community level broadly aligned to COAG ‘building blocks’ and subsequently produce community booklets listing service availability and a report by community on service gaps and their resolution (TSRA, 2016, p.7).

While the key outputs of the mapping activities resulted in a booklet being produced for each community, the notion of a formal ISD co-ordination mechanism has never materialised. Furthermore, with the persistent changes in governments at all levels, and the associated policy pulses⁴³ that ensue, there may be little likelihood that there might be such a mechanism developed in the foreseeable future.

7.3.2 Co-ordinating and delivering services

Again, in the summary of its findings the ANAO’s logic becomes even fuzzier still and the title of the summary section relates to development and implementation of services rather than co-ordination per se. Technically it might be considered that service co-ordination was largely dealt with in the previous set of its findings vis-à-vis the statements regarding the ISD. The main thrust then of this section is the ANAO’s statements that the TSRA’s 2009-13 Development Plan was generally aligned with the COAG Building Blocks and importantly the *Torres Strait &*

⁴³ See Empowered Communities (2015): “*There is a level of frenetic chopping and changing, and policy pulsing, that comes with electoral cycles and as the political pendulum swings from left to right*”. (Wunan foundation, 2015, p. 27)

Northern Peninsula Area Regional Plan—Planning for our future: 2009 to 2029 (regional plan) (ANAO, 2013, p.20).

It is at this point that the ANAO made reference to the potential for TSRA to enhance its alignment to CtG and regional planning objectives by the inclusion in the next iteration of its development data and statistics to better articulate the prevailing level of disadvantage experienced in the region. As touched upon earlier though, given the timing and release of the audit report, these ‘suggestions’ were not incorporated into the following iteration of the TSRA four-year plan (2014-18) as it had already been substantively drafted with input from the then Minister of Indigenous Affairs.

One of the notable aspects of this particular document and harking back to the opening quotation of this chapter, is the absence of any reference to evaluation of the plan either at mid-term or at the conclusion. What the planning document does include (at Part D, p. 7) is a narrative related to “*Implementation, Monitoring and Review*” (TSRA, 2009, p.7). The core of this narrative is based on an ISD Steering Committee being established with the delegates being local political representatives of the TSRA and local governments with departmental representatives of the State Government. Given that the ISD framework was not able to be endorsed by the various levels of government, the committee TSRA mooted to provide monitoring oversight never materialised, thus negating any impetus to evaluate progress on this key regional plan.

7.3.3 Monitoring and reporting arrangements

It is the fourth chapter in the ANAO performance audit report that consists of nomenclature that is on one hand possibly the most technically and theoretically complex, whilst on the other, depending on perspective, bordering banality⁴⁴. Although the rationale for the latter description might seem a little harsh, once a summary of the performance vernacular is provided it seems hardly surprising that when faced with having to translate and describe these ‘performance’ concepts in a

⁴⁴ This was one sentiment expressed informally to this researcher by mid-level managers in the TSRA. With particular reference to the ANAO’s narrative regarding ‘deliverables’ ‘outputs’ ‘stretch-targets’ ‘strategic focus’ etc.

cross-cultural environment regional staff at the forefront of service delivery flounder. Particularly, when trying to interpret this commentary to an audience comprised largely of Indigenous stakeholders (English as a second language), a certain level of ‘eyes-glazing over’ occurs.

The section on TSRA’s performance measurement and reporting summarises and scrutinizes both the internal (between TSRA administration – Board) and external (TSRA- Parliament) monitoring and reporting arrangements. Its rationale is to describe the requirement for government agencies to submit Annual Reports to Parliament is that they serve as the “*key mechanism*” enabling agencies to “*account for the efficiency, effectiveness and economy with which it manages the resources it administers*” (ANAO, 2013, p. 68). Therefore, the agency’s annual reports are to demonstrate “*strong links*” between the internal and external reporting obligations. What occurs then is a summary of the elements of the Outcomes and Programs Framework (as described in the previous Chapter) specifying performance measurements as requiring statements on “*program outcome, objective, resourcing, deliverables and KPIs*” (ANAO, 2013, p. 68).

Here the ANAO quotes from the Department of Prime Minister 2013 guidance on requirements for preparation of agency Annual Reports which emphasises the desire for compatibility and a “*clear read*” between those and the PBS statements as “*essential*” to the accountability system. These synergies are to allow for comparison between budgeted targets and figures “*to those actually achieved*” (DPM&C, 2013, as cited ANAO 2014, p 68). In harking back to more government guidance, the ANAO refers to requirements for reports to tell an “*accurate but succinct performance story about what has happened as a result of government actions*” (ANAO, 2014. P.69). It is perhaps paragraphs 4.6 and 4.7 on pages 69 and 70 respectively of the ANAO’s report that are among the most complex (and also somewhat troubling). Here the narrative revolves around the wording of the thirty three ‘deliverables’ and 12 KPIs included in the TSRA’s 2013 PBS. Drawing again on government performance guidance, the ANAO provides a description of a ‘deliverable’ as,

“the goods and services produced by the program in meeting its objective. Collectively, the deliverables represent the intervention government has chosen to take to meet a particular policy need” (ANAO, 2013, p. 69)

Following this, the ANAO suggests that the *“number of grants provided to a target group”* constituted an example of a deliverable. Furthermore, within the context of the government’s performance framework, KPIs were not intended to be a measure of a program ‘output’ rather the *“effectiveness of the program in achieving its objective”* (ANAO, 2013, p.p. 69-70). They report then, again in quoting government guidance, describing KPIs as measures that are to be taken as a demonstration of performance with respect to *“achieving its objectives, thus contributing to its respective outcome”* (ANAO, 2013, p.p. 69-70).

In critiquing TSRA’s reporting, the ANAO considered that some of the KPIs measured “deliverable outputs” as opposed to advancing towards ‘Program’ objectives. Here the report points to an indicator that measures the number of artists and cultural practitioners supported (as a deliverable output) whereas (according to its view) a measure of *“an increase in the skill levels of artists/cultural practitioners”* (ANAO, 2013, p.70), would measure better progress towards objectives, thus by inference, outcomes. A brutally honest assessment of this section of the ANAO’s report would suggest that it was attempting to add content without in fact offering much in the way of substance. It also suggests that other KPIs included statements of ‘measurable change’ without articulating what was being measured (but it does not provide an example of this). This narrative led to the view that the government’s Outcomes and Programs framework required a more ‘strategic focus’ and while the TSRA’s Development Plan, KPIs and reporting allowed for internal monitoring, it was not focussed on CtG in the region.

7.3.4 Performance reporting and broader regional trends and indicators

Possibly in an attempt to add substance to its claims, the ANAO over the last 10 or so pages of their report offers commentary on statistical inputs and reporting styles that the TSRA might adopt to more fully articulate its impacts. Somewhat buried within the nomenclature is the statement that, *“the TSRA does not conduct trend*

analysis over time which further inhibits assessment of progress” (ANAO, 2013, p. 85). In fact, this particular statement, underpinned a proposal and ultimately a formal agreement for a partnership with the ABS to produce such trends - an issue that will be discussed in the following Chapter.

Following the commentary above, the ANAO offered its insights into the articulation of TSRA’s short- and long-term internal monitoring indicators and made a number of suggestions related to the inclusion of ‘stretch’ as opposed to static targets (economic development). Also, it clarified the descriptions of the ‘benefits’ along with explanations of short- and long-term indicators. Then, possibly in an attempt to guide the TSRA (noting rather acerbically – in the absence of long-term assessment and reporting by them⁴⁵), ANAO outlines examples of regional trends, through the presentation of some regional comparative data sets including;

- i) Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas;
- ii) Non-school qualifications; and,
- iii) Real household income.

The following tables are based on the trends as presented in the ANAO’s Performance Report updated with the latest population ABS population Census data as at 2016.

Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas

Paragraphs 4.18 – 4.20 of the ANAO report present an analysis of the Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA) indexes covering the period 2006 – 2011⁴⁶. These SEIFA indexes combine in aggregate a specified suite of population and statistical measures in order to form a comparative ranking, in this case between local government areas. The indices are represented by deciles on a scale between 1 and 10 with 1 representing the lowest and ten the highest in ranking. Local government areas are compared on State basis whereby the Torres Strait local

⁴⁵ Although they also point to the COAG Reform Council comments with regard to the NIRA regarding the paucity of publicly available information in key areas make assessment difficult (ANAO, 2013, p. 74)

⁴⁶ According to the ABS, it produces four domains of Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA). SEIFA is extrapolated from social indicators drawn Census data, providing a summary measure of the social and economic conditions in geographic areas across Australia (ANAO, 2014).

Government areas are compared with the rest of Queensland (ANAO, 2014). In summary, the ANAO and ABS the four SEIFA indexes are:

- i) **Index of relative Socio-economic Disadvantage (IRSED)** – ranking based on a continuum - most disadvantaged to least disadvantaged based on indicators of disadvantage. Higher score indicates an area is less disadvantaged;
- ii) **Index of Relative Socio-Economic Advantage and Disadvantage (RSEAD)**, ranks areas according to most disadvantaged to most advantaged. Higher score indicates higher relative incidence of advantage and a relatively low incidence of disadvantage;
- iii) **Index of Economic Resources (IER)**, areas with higher scores have relatively greater access to economic resources than those with lower scores; and
- iv) **Index of Education and Occupation (IEO)**, low score indicates a high proportion of people without qualifications, without jobs, and/or with low skilled jobs. (ANAO, 2014, p.95)

Table 7.1: Updated ANAO Analysis - Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas

SEIFA Index	Local Government Area	2006 Decile (1–10)	2011 Decile (1– 10)	2016 Decile (1-10)
Index of relative Socio-economic Disadvantage	Torres Shire Council	1	2	1
	Torres Strait Island Regional Council	1	1	1
	Northern Peninsula Area	1	1.5	1
Index of Relative Socio-Economic Advantage and Disadvantage	Torres Shire Council	2	2	2
	Torres Strait Island Regional Council	1	1	1
	Northern Peninsula Area	1	1.5	1
Index of Economic Resources	Torres Shire Council	1	1	1
	Torres Strait Island Regional Council	1	1	1
	Northern Peninsula Area	1	1	1
Index of Education and Occupation	Torres Shire Council	6	6	4
	Torres Strait Island Regional Council	2	3	1
	Northern Peninsula Area	3	4	1

Source: ABS 2016 and ANAO, 2014⁴⁷

⁴⁷ Figures based on calculation for this thesis using ANAO 2014 data supplemented with ABS 2016 Census data – using Local Government Areas for Torres and Torres Strait Islands and Bamaga (and surrounds) and Seisia

In the ANAO's 2014 suggestion that the SEIFA indices might well serve as one form of trend data the TSRA could incorporate as a basis for planning and reporting, the ANAO were quick to point to the incremental changes which had occurred over the five year inter-census period 2006-2011. An example is the slight increases in the Torres and Northern Peninsula Area figures in that period. However, they noted that all three of the Torres region's Local Government Areas remained among the twenty per cent of those most-disadvantaged compared to other Qld Local Governments. The picture in terms of trend analysis seems far less optimistic when the SEIFA indices emanating from the 2016 Census are included.

As can be seen from the last column on the right of table 7.1 above. This indicates a downward trend, or in effect a worsening in social outcomes for the region when compared to other Queensland areas. This can be seen in decreases in relative advantage for TSC between 2011 and 2016 (from 2 to 1), and NPARC (from 1.5 to 1) for example. Table 7.1 also shows quite starkly decreases for all local governments between 2011 and 2016 on the Indexes for Education and Occupation. This is particularly apparent for all of the regional local government areas on IEO indices indicating a 30-50 per cent reversal in progress.

Given the level of granularity in SEIFA data though, where a slight increase of 0.5 in one of the indices would give a suggestion of improvements, it would be uncertain as to how these trends could provide any substantive guide for TSRA in terms of the orientation of its resources, the design of its programs and thus how it might more effectively report on its achievements. The updated data table outlined in Table 7.2 is based on Census data relevant to those aged over fifteen who have attained the following educational qualifications:

- Bachelor's degree level and above
- Advanced Diploma and Diploma level
- Certificate level IV⁴⁸

community specific data for Northern Peninsula). For percentage see Indigenous Population figures for the region on page 31 and 32 of this thesis.

https://quickstats.censusdata.abs.gov.au/census_services/getproduct/census/2016/quickstat/LGA36960?opendocument

⁴⁸ See Australian Government Qualifications Framework. Certificate III explanation "Graduates at this level will have theoretical and practical knowledge and skills for work and/or further learning".

<http://www.aqf.edu.au/Portals/0/Documents/2013%20docs/AQF%202nd%20Edition%20January%202013.pdf>

- Certificate level III

What the analysis indicates in Table 7.2 is that, while more individuals in total have obtained these qualifications, there has been a relative decline of approximately three per cent in the number of people obtaining qualifications as a proportion of the population of the region. This can be seen as a drop between 2011 and 2016 from 29.3 per cent to 26.17 per cent of the regional population with non-school qualifications.

Table 7.2: Updated ANAO Analysis – non-school qualifications (15 over) Torres Strait Region

	2001 Census	2006 Census	2011 Census	2016 Census
Indigenous individuals with non-school Qualifications ¹	420	1123	1268	1993 ⁴⁹
As a percentage of Indigenous population	11.3%	25.8%	29.3%	26.17%

Source: ABS 2016 and ANAO, 2014

The presentation of Table 7.3 serves as an interesting case in point, if not a relatively persistent conundrum regarding the analysis and presentation of statistical data across regions. While showing a slight increase in household income of less than one percent, the table was derived from the methods used by the ANAO in 2014. It was based on the data from the Torres Local Government area’s supplemented with analysis of the two communities in the Northern Peninsula Area - Bamaga and Seisia. Table 7.3 indicates that real household medium income has increased by approximately 4 per cent over the decade from 2006 to 2016.

Table 7.3: Median weekly income 2001 – 2016

Income type	2001 Census	2006 Census	2011 Census	2016 Census
Real median weekly household income	\$799–\$931	\$935	\$951	\$986

Source: ANAO 2014 and analysis undertaken by researcher using ABS 2016 Quickstats

⁴⁹ See ABS 2016

https://quickstats.censusdata.abs.gov.au/census_services/getproduct/census/2016/quickstat/IREG307?opendocument

In contrast, based on data produced later by the ABS under the agreement with the TSRA alternate numbers of household income for the 2011 and 2016 Census were put (ABS, 2018, p.8). In their publication *Changing Characteristics of the Torres Strait and its People*, ABS reported that there had been a 13 per cent increase in the median household income between 2011 and 2016. Importantly, the ABS figures contradict those of the ANAO. The ABS report a median weekly household income in 2011 of \$969.00 not the \$951.00 as the ANAO states. Even though these anomalies might seem relatively inconsequential on paper or small (less than 2% in this case), they often lead to a level of contestability when used in practice in terms of briefing and engaging in evidence informed discussions with local leaders.

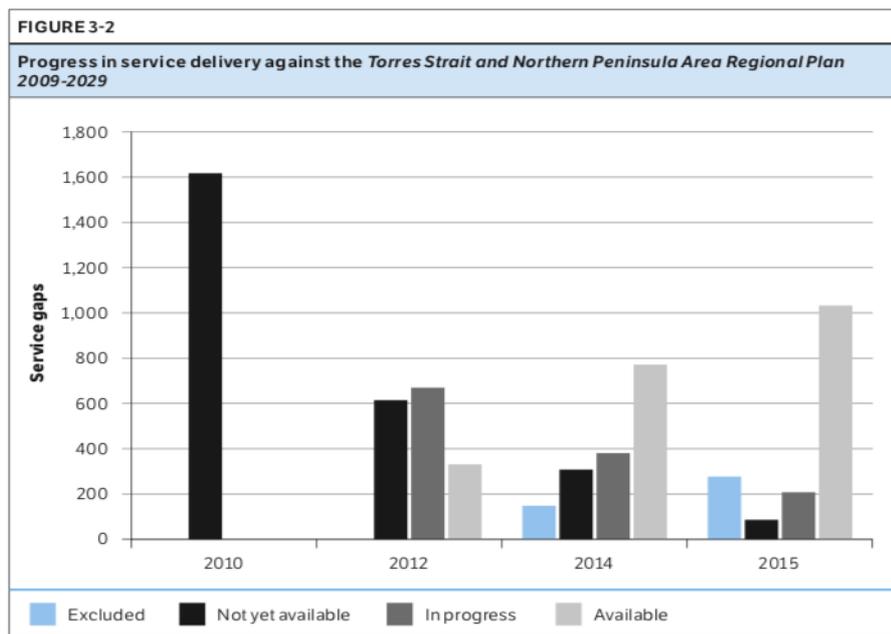
7.3.5 Service delivery: a discussion of reported integrated service delivery metrics

Following the ANAO's findings, and generally coinciding with the introduction of the PGPA Act, the TSRA made some structural changes to its annual report document, including moving to a 'dashboard' style of reporting on programmed activities and service delivery metrics from ISD. Notably, in the report published at the end of 2016 (relating to the 2015/16 financial years) progress updates drawing on metrics from the ISD community service mapping booklets were included. The presentation of this information is preceded by a narrative that aims to explain the links to TSRA's programs being based on the CtG framework.

Broadly, the TSRA ISD mapping project was conducted in accord with the push for a service delivery focus as enshrined in the National Partnership Agreement Remote Service Delivery (NPA-RSD) the policy imperative of the previous 2007 Labor Government Federal policy. Under the NPA-RSD service mapping activities were conducted in twenty-nine priority communities and locations across the country. These mapping processes were drawn upon as the basis for developing Local Implementation Plans (LIPS). To an extent these processes were mirrored in the TSRA's Community Booklets. According to the 2013 evaluation of the NPA-RSD, approximately four thousand service actions were identified across the twenty-nine priority communities (Australian Government, 2014, p. 6)

The TSRA reports that the regional service mapping process undertaken in 2009-10 yielded 1613 service gaps originally identified as “not yet programmed” in 2010 (e.g. pre-school availability for under four-year olds, community policing and night patrols, youth and employment services etc), although this was later adjusted to a baseline of 1608 following the removal of some duplicates (TSRA, 2016, p.87). Metrics are then reported against three criteria, a) services available, b) services – in progress, and c) services “not yet programmed”. The graph 7.4 is drawn from the TSRA’s 2015/16 Annual Report. Based on this data, it is purported that there was in excess of a thousand-fold improvement in services availability across the region. Of the 1600 or so service gaps identified in 2010, this had been reduced to just 87 in 2015, with over a thousand services being addressed. According to the reported data, 200 of the identified services were identified as ‘in-progress’ (assumedly being planned for delivery) while 276 had been excluded (possibly due to duplication or no longer being required).

Graph 7.4: TSRA Annual Report extract – Service Delivery 2010-2015



Source: (TSRA, 2015, p. 89)

This emphasis on service delivery as an assumed driver of improved social and economic outcomes is of note in terms of data collection and in lieu of findings from the previous evaluation of the mapping and service needs under the LIPs in the NPA-RSD. Notably, the 2013 evaluation of the NPA-RSD concluded among other issues that while there had been an increase in the number of services, there “was less

evidence of a significant and fundamental change in service practice and delivery” (Australian Government, 2014, pp. 4-5). Moreover, the evaluation found that, *“There were mixed views on service coordination with some stakeholders and service providers suggesting that, in some instances, additional services had made the coordination task more challenging”* (Australian Government, 2014, pp. 4-5). Notwithstanding the relatively low proportion of service providers who perceived the LIPs as effective in generating change or increasing accountability, in relation to service delivery as a focus the evaluation pointed out,

“The NPA RSD has a focus on service coordination. While coordination can be beneficial, the evidence on the impact of improved service coordination is thin. No credible evidence suggests that service coordination itself can bring about large improvements in outcomes. This does not mean that coordination should not be pursued but coordination alone may not bring about desired change.” (Australian Government, 2014, pp. 4-5)

Furthermore that,

“The NPA-RSD has clearly led to increased service provision in RSD communities over and above what would have happened in the absence of the NPA RSD. However, the impact of additional services depends on their effectiveness.” (Australian Government, 2014, pp. 4-5)

Based on the analysis above, and with the benefit of being able to retrospectively critique the ANAO suggested approach for the TSRA to use data to make impact claims, it is clear that this would in fact not have provided an adequate platform for reporting on achievements. Given that the regional macro level data indicates either only marginal improvements, or in some case a deterioration in outcomes over the inter-census periods, it would not be prudent nor sensible for the TSRA to take responsibility for these outcomes.

7.4 Evaluability assessment of TSRA’s key program activities

There is a growing body of literature, notably again in the international development sectors, that is related to concepts of policy, program and project ‘evaluability’

(Davis, 2013). According to the OECD DAC, evaluability is becoming increasingly accepted conceptually by many international agencies and offers the definition “*The extent to which an activity or project can be evaluated in a reliable and credible fashion*” (OECD in Davis, 2013, p.1). Historically, proponents for conducting preliminary ‘Evaluability Assessments’ have identified both cost considerations and the poor quality of evaluations produced, along with the desire for efficiency and economy of effort (Leviton, 2010; Ogilvie et al., 2011) as drivers in assessing the evaluability of an intervention.

Davis in a 2013 working paper for the UK Department for International Development (DFID) identifies that,

“An Evaluability Assessment should examine evaluability: (a) in principle, given the nature of the project design, and (b) in practice, given data availability to carry out an evaluation and the systems able to provide it. In addition, it should examine the likely usefulness of an evaluation.” (Davis, 2013, p.8)

The rationale for conducting a preliminary evaluability assessment for the TSRA’s key programs and activities would be entirely consistent with some of the research challenges outlined in previous chapters, notably in the literature review Chapter 3 (e.g. White, 2010). Dawkins (2010) reiterates that often weak evaluations are more often than not the by-product of poorly designed programs. The lack of substantive findings often reflects programs that either didn’t exist or were not fully implemented, a lack of logic in program design, or misstated goals (grant output rather than social outcomes etc). Lastly, Dawkins highlighted instances where program goals and objectives only existed on paper (not in reality), or objectives were not clearly articulated, where stakeholders could not agree to them, or more commonly were the actual activities that were being carried out were not consistent with them (Dawkins, 2010, n.p).

Ruben (2012) also weighs into the debate arguing the case for the utility of evaluability assessments rather than evaluations per se, noting a review of the Netherlands’ aid program whereby there was a level of dismay at the growing number of “pseudo evaluations” (Ruben, 2012, p.3; ppt). Furthermore, Ruben (2012)

found that for many Dutch private and public aid evaluations, two-thirds of them were deficient and un-usable, citing the following reasons:

- evaluation agency not fully independent
- stated objectives too broad/vague
- no clear indicators defined
- data at too aggregate level
- absence of baseline data
- no representative sampling
- too general intervention theory (Ruben, R., 2010, *as cited in Davis 2013, p.8*)

Arguably, there would be a strong case for this research case-study to have been more focussed on producing an ‘evaluability assessment’ rather than to have struck out on a path of a full evaluation. This would then have provided important insights on the availability of key data, and a more refined synopsis of which strategic TSRA activities might best be suited to an evaluation process. To this end, the work might have focussed more on answering questions similar to those prompted by Better Evaluation (2019), such as:

- Why and for whom the evaluation is being done?
- How the evaluability assessment would be accomplished?
- Who would undertake the assessment and the accountabilities?
- Milestones deliverables and timelines
- And what resources would be required.

However, as the Better Evaluation team warns, sometimes it is not appropriate to undertake either an evaluation, nor in fact an assessment of evaluability in cases where:

“Some project designs are manifestly unevaluable, and some M&E frameworks are manifestly inadequate at first glance. In these circumstances, an Evaluability Assessment would not be needed to make a decision about whether to go ahead with an evaluation. Efforts need to focus on the more immediate tasks of improving project design and/or the M&E framework”
(Better Evaluation, 2019, n.p)

As outlined in the literature review at Chapter Three, the work and typology for evaluative strength proffered by Hudson (2017), in *Evaluating Indigenous Programs: a toolkit for change*, may have provided an opportunity to test (at a high level), aspects of the TSRA’s program characteristics for evaluability against reported performance trends outlined in PBS KPIs. For example, for the first elements of a strong evaluation, CIS posits a mix of qualitative and quantitative data completed by analysis based on a triangulation of inputs. The strength of the design would be enhanced by pre and post measures or assessment against benchmarks with the strongest design preference for experimental designs based on RCTs or incorporating a control group. Where experimental designs are not possible, CIS promotes the inclusion of an econometric analysis (CBA or cost-effectiveness) or meta-analysis incorporating “*reviews of multiple evaluations*” (Hudson, 2017, p.12)

This section has provided a deep dive into the structure and content of the ANAO Performance Report findings regarding the TSRA, including a dissection and analysis of the suggestions for how the agency might more clearly demonstrate and make claims about its impacts. Following extrapolating this data, including key regional social and economic statistical indexes, this process shows that the recommended approach would have had a counter-intuitive outcome in that social outcomes may have in fact deteriorated. This section has also considered issues, such as mapping and counting numbers of services as also recommended by the ANAO. Again, this approach is also left wanting in that reporting the mere existence of services does not serve as a proxy for ‘effectiveness’. Thus, this early analysis was essential to informing the decision making rationale for the adoption or incorporation of different methods into a revised more suitable evaluative framework for the TSRA as outlined in Section 7.5 below.

7.5 Adequacy impact evaluation designs and methods relevant to the case study

The following sections aim to recap some of the key literature on different IE methods with the aim of identifying more suitable evaluative designs and methods to TSRA’s operating context. Recommendations for the most suitable mix designs and methods are then considered. It includes a discussion on the availability and utility of past evaluations and reviews, and the strengths and limitations associated with reviewing past evaluations as inputs into this and future research.

7.5.1 Experimental methods

One of the fundamental objectives of IE is to establish that the development intervention either will provide or has provided the catalyst or the cause of the effects being observed in targeted beneficiary groups (White and Philipps, 2012). Primarily, IE aims to determine or attribute cause and effect via the establishment of the ‘counter-factual’, i.e. the likely outcome had the intervention not been in place (Lewis, 1973; Kwart, 2001; Duflo, 2004). Bamberger et al (2010) note the steady increase in quantitative experimental IEs in the development sector, and the push from international organisations (such as the World Bank) and academia to adopt methods akin to bio-medical type clinical trials as a precursor to claiming program effectiveness.

Experimental methods, as previously touched upon against the criteria set out in studies eligible for the 3ie repository in Chapter Three, seek to establish the counterfactual by randomly allocating beneficiaries either to treatment or control groups. Treatment groups receive the benefit of the intervention and those that don’t, are the ‘control’ or comparison group (Suresh, 2011). Randomised Control Trial (RCT) evaluations have been undertaken on many wide ranging international development initiatives, including on nutrition, water, agriculture, conditional cash transfers, education, economic and productive sectors (Bamberger and White, 2007).

In arguing that RCTs should be the ‘gold standard’ in development IE, and therefore decisions to either scale-up, or cease particular programs, some theorists (e.g. Banerjee and Duflo, 2007; Duflo and Kremer, 2004) have suggested that knowledge claims based on alternate IE design approaches are not only inferior but could be construed as fundamentally dubious in that they cannot completely negate the potential for researcher bias to the extent that RCT’s can.

During presentations to TSRA management in early 2016 for this research the concept of establishing an RCT model for some of its grants and economic development activities was flagged by the author of this thesis. This was swiftly rejected by the leadership on the basis that each Island representative was given equal say (and equal vote at the Board). Moreover, it was indicated that there would

be little chance of establishing an RCT on the basis that the political leadership would resist a decision making process that relegated some communities or groups as a ‘non-intervention’ group.

7.5.2 Quasi-experimental methods

Random assignment of individuals, families or communities to either treatment or control groups while delivering critical development assistance has generated strong reactions among applied development practitioners on ethical grounds. Notably, dilemmas are associated with either withholding or providing fewer effective treatments to those in need (Sarker, 2014; Karliwish & Pack, 2001). The primary objectives of quantitative evaluation designs are attainment of statistical rigour in order to articulate the counterfactual. Without denying the importance of statistical rigour obtained from quantitative designs, Deaton (2009) and Ravallion (2009) interrogate the exclusivity of RCTs by the “randomistas”.

White and Sabarwal (2014, p.34), in a methodological brief developed for UNICEF, enumerate a range of quasi-experimental methodologies. They promulgate careful theorizing and aim to test causal hypotheses based on those theories, incorporating quantitative methods such as, propensity score matching, precise structural modelling, regression discontinuity design, and use of instrumental variables. The authors note that as with RCTs, “*in quasi-experimental designs, the program or policy is conceived as the ‘intervention’ whereby a treatment (e.g. the elements of the programme /policy being evaluated) is tested*” (White and Sabarwal, 2014, p.34), for achievements against objectives, assessed by a pre-specified set of indicators.

Random assignment is the only facet absent in quasi-experimental design. Although, as Shadish (2002, p.14) outlines, assignment to conditions (treatment/control) or construction of a comparison group can be included by self-selection (where participants choose), administrator selection (officials, teachers, policymakers etc. make the assignment) or a combination of both approaches. When this concept was floated with the local leadership, similar concerns as those with RCTs were raised initially. Although there seemed slightly more interest in models that used comparison groups as a basis there was a general sentiment reflective of the distinctiveness of Torres Strait Islander Identify as discussed in Chapter 2. Notably,

the reluctance of the TSRA leadership to support a comparison group-based evaluation was based on their position that Torres Strait islanders are distinct culturally and are not comparable to mainland Indigenous communities.

In this regard discussions of comparison groups were met with discouraging responses from the leadership that they would not be supportive of such comparative research designs as these would not be valid based on the distinctive aspect of the Torres Strait Islanders geographic and cultural context. Essentially their rationale is that there are differences between regions and communities that are not comparable. Given that any support for the study design or findings would not be supported efforts to undertake this work by the researcher were abandoned.

7.5.3 Non-experimental (qualitative) methods

Downplaying the role that concrete figures and statistics play in attributing impacts to investments would be inconsistent with mainstream practice where, as White (2009, p.11) notes, clearly counterfactual focused paradigms using “*statistical and (quasi-) experimental methods*” address this requirement. However, Stern et al (2012, p.32) claim that these IE methods are generally costly and often challenging to operationalise in complex environments. Furthermore, they have limitations in terms of explaining impacts and thus corresponding limits in fostering an engaging and learning environment for stakeholders.

Often statistical rigour is method-specific, which can be unaccommodating for other (including participatory) methods. Rao and Woolcock (2003, p. 61) go further to declare that development economists in particular, by restricting IE to econometric analyses, are in effect caught in a ‘Cartesian trap’ (i.e. the methodological use of doubt as a route to test knowledge claims). Essentially, the authors view that quantitative data accumulated via closed-ended survey questionnaires are constrained and inherently limited, particularly in relation to obtaining important information about the broader political, socio-cultural, and economic structures where development conundrums are often enmeshed.

Van-Hemelrijck and Guijt (2016) contend that quantitative analysis alone may not account for important aspects of critical economic issues such as “*informal*

economies, or labour markets that function outside formal salary or wage structures” (Van-Hemelrijck and Guijt, 2016, p.7). Moreover, there may be a tendency to overlook peripheral markets that are important for policy (i.e. drugs, political favours, and/or sex) which cannot necessarily be uncovered by a short field trip or questionnaire. Often these issues require a high level of engagement and rapport with respondents (Booth et al, 1998, p.4).

Other limitations and criticisms with purely quantitative IE methods include: limited ability to describe the processes of implementation, therefore unable to ascertain the extent that failure to achieve impact can be attributed to design or implementation failure (sometimes referred to as the ‘black box’). Moreover, there have been criticisms that with some quantitative analysis, the research is shaped by data imperatives instead of the search for data being shaped by research questions (e.g., Stame, 2010; Pawson, 2010). Theorists such as Atieno (2009); Whittmore et al (2001); Tinker and Armstrong (2008), propose a strong case for research that requires a more heterogeneous approach to data collection.

Accepted qualitative techniques that might have been incorporated into the scope of this research (had it not been for late restrictions to scope driven by political factors) would have been observation, participation, analysis of text-based information (e.g. sound recordings, newspaper articles etc), open-ended / interactive questioning, free-ranging interviews with key informants and/or focus groups, among other sources of information. Note that in the context of this research, incorporation of experimental and quasi-experimental methods were not possible in-terms of the ex-post analysis of TSRA’s performance. Nor ultimately would they have been given support due to the political changes that swept through the organisation after approval to proceed had been given.

7.5.4 Avenues for meta-evaluation

One of the approaches to strengthening an evaluation design spelt out but Hudson (2016) in Table 4.1, was that in the absence of being able to incorporate a control group or form of randomisation was to focus on data triangulation supplemented by, a) either an economic / cost analysis, “and/or”, b) “meta-analysis – reviews of multiple evaluations” (Hudson, 2016, p. 12). In order to assess the option of pursuing

this approach, a lengthy desktop scan of the web-based literature along with Agency records was undertaken. This process revealed that there had previously been a number of evaluations and audits of various aspects of TSRA’s programme delivery carried out. These had been conducted by the Office of Evaluation and Audit (OEA) which had been established under ATSIC but subsequently subsumed within the ANAO (see Chapter 8 for a more detailed discussion on this). Despite repeated efforts, none of these documents were able to be obtained in either hardcopy or electronic form.

A desktop scan of what literature is available on the web showed that a number of audits and reviews of the TSRA were undertaken. According to an OEA summary report from 2004/5, it was required by Section 76 of the ATSIC Act to “regularly evaluate and audit the operations of the TSRA” (OEA, 2005, p.17) . For example, in the TSRA’s 1998-99 Annual Report, the then Chairperson writes of an OEA Audit of the TSRA Native Title Programme thus:

“In September 1998, the Office of Evaluation and Audit conducted a review of the TSRA Native Title Office under the request of Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Senator the Hon. John Herron. As a result, the Director of the Office of Evaluation and Audit, Mr Bill Miller, presented the TSRA with a positive report of the office’s performance” (TSRA, 1999, p.2).

Following this, the Chairperson claims that the TSRA

“effectively managed its responsibilities as per the Native Title Act. It also recommended that funding be significantly increased. The independent report was fair and unbiased and was well received by the TSRA Members. It proved that the TSRA Native Title Office is successfully fulfilling its role as the native title representative body in the Torres Strait.” (TSRA, 1999, p.2).

Another record indicates that one of the first OEA evaluations of the TSRA was undertaken in 2001 whilst ATSIC was still operational. The executive summary of this work noted that it was the first evaluation of the TSRA since establishment in 1994. In terms of scope the summary noted that the focus of the evaluation was on

the then CDEP and Business Funding Program (BFS) delivered by the TSRA which was reported to, “*account for 58% of the total TSRA budget since its establishment*” (ATSIC, 2000, n.p). Furthermore, the executive summary notes that

“This evaluation also compares the profile of Torres Strait Islanders living in the Torres Strait region with those of Torres Strait Islanders and Aboriginals living on the mainland to identify the areas of greatest need for assistance in the Torres Strait region, including that of health, housing and law and justice.” (ATSIC, 2000, n.p)

Apparently only four hard copy versions of this document existed in Australia in collections of University of Technology Sydney, National Library of Australia, Department of Social Services and the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS). Despite multiple formal requests to these institutions over the course of 2016-17, documents were not able to be obtained.

By records available it seems as though over the period 2004 – 2007 up to three performance audits were undertaken of various TSRA activities. One OEA record indicates that following an audit report issued in November 2004, findings were that, “*although considerable progress had been made in implementing the audit report recommendations, improvements in a number of areas still required attention*” (OEA, 2005, p.17). Later in 2008, a then Director of the OEA, Colin Plowman (2008) when delivering a presentation on the ‘public value’ created by the OEA’s Indigenous Program Audits wrote of one TSRA audit (not unsurprisingly) that:

“TSRA is a small organisation with limited capacity to implement policy and program reform, they have an increasing number of coordination activities on behalf of other government agencies they are being asked to perform in the Torres Strait and they require more assistance from Government agencies in Canberra” (Plowman, 2008, p.6).

Plowman goes on further to state that:

“In this case we have created value by independently highlighting a broad perspective to their overall responsibilities which was arguably less apparent

to individual agencies. It gives the TSRA an opportunity to put this case to Government.” (Plowman, 2008, p.6)

It is unfortunate that none of the complete records of these early TSRA evaluations were able to be obtained as they may well have provided an opportunity to benchmark previous performance and measures facilitating better progress over time.

7.5.5 Recommendations on the choice of evaluation methods

Given the discussion outlined in this section, any evaluation design and choice of methods would need to be clearly articulated and approached well in advance of embarking on an evaluation proper in order to effectively manage risks associated with organisational and political change. Furthermore, priority consideration should be towards selecting the choices of methods that are both the most feasible (desk-top review, meta-searches, secondary data analysis etc), least administratively burdensome and those that can be conducted without elevating the reputational and political risk, i.e. minimising burden on communities who already experience high level of consultation fatigue. These factors were taken into account with the development and undertaking of key evaluative activities concerning an infrastructure evaluation and establishment of a regional statistical data-base for benchmarking purposes.

What followed then after a detailed consideration of the available evaluation methods was a decision by the TSRA to identify a key project suitable for the subject of an evaluation. The next section discusses the processes and development of a framework for the evaluation of one of the high profile infrastructure projects that TSRA was responsible for coordinating and monitoring. This researcher, in working closely with the TSRA, identified a key complex infrastructure project as the subject for an evaluation proper. The Torres Strait Seawalls Project Evaluation is described in Section 7.6 below.

7.6 Torres Strait Seawalls: Evaluating complex remote infrastructure projects

This section of the findings chapter of the thesis outlines a further example of how the research dialogue and additional conceptual capacity for evaluation supported the

TSRA role in commissioning and oversight of an independent evaluation of a high profile and politically sensitive infrastructure construction project, Torres Strait Seawalls. The researcher was integral to the design, commissioning, oversight and production of this evaluation activity. Its conduct and design were directly informed by the learning and understanding imbued through understanding the evaluation literature and context work produced for this thesis in Chapters Two and Three. It is provided in order to highlight some of the fundamental and practical issues associated with evaluating infrastructure works.

This is of particular importance when there are multiple stakeholders from a funding perspective as the project was part of the joint State and Federal funding under MIP. It aims to add to the critique of the ANAO's narratives and findings regarding that TSRA should consider evaluating the MIP and environmental health outcomes, based on the provision of essential services infrastructure for the region. The fundamental criticism here is that when faced with a project or programme of this complexity, recommending an evaluation is much easier said than done. Therefore, the analysis of the Seawalls Project Evaluation identifies a high level of specificity, in fact what the strengths, limitations, challenges and opportunities are involved with conducting complex evaluations in remote cross-cultural contexts.

7.6.1 Torres Strait Seawalls Infrastructure – the project background

Seawalls infrastructures to address factors such as sea level rise, tidal inundation and coastal erosion have been constructed increasingly in many coastal areas in Australia. Since 2012, seawalls construction has been undertaken to mitigate significant threats to a number of island communities in the Torres Strait. The impact of tidal inundation and protection of key community facilities (housing, schools, health clinics, community use buildings and facilities), and critical essential services infrastructure to support environmental and public health (fresh water storage and supply systems, sewerage and waste water processing facilities, and solid waste/landfill disposal sites), have for many years continued to be among the most sensitive social and political issues in the region.

Coastal inundation of Torres Strait Island communities during the monsoonal seasons driving king tides pose a significant threat to public health and community safety. Since 2010, the TSRA had undertaken significant work to assess the coastal

risks and preferred inundation mitigation options for communities. Coastal works (seawalls and bunds) were identified as required to minimise inundation on Saibai and Boigu Islands as public health priorities, with additional works required on Iama, Masig, Poruma and Warraber islands. Sea level in the Torres Strait is reported to be rising at approximately twice the global average rate, and current spring tide and storm surge events are predicted to worsen over time as sea level rise increases (TSRA, 2016). The particular circumstance of the islands involved (small, remote, low-lying and flat) in the Torres Strait Seawalls Construction Project preclude certain adaptation options available to mainland communities (e.g. retreat).

The timeframe for the Seawalls Project within the scope of the evaluations commenced in February 2014 when the Australian and Queensland Governments announced joint funding commitments of AU\$26.2 million for coastal protection works across six Torres Strait communities. At the time, the author of this thesis was employed as a senior official in the TSRA and by virtue of this employment had significant corporate knowledge of and experience in establishing the construction parameters for the seawalls. Six island communities were identified for the construction of urgently required seawalls and coastal erosion control projects (Saibai, Boigu, Poruma, Masig, Iama and Warraber). Seawalls construction in the Torres Strait represented a technically complex and logistically challenging task given the remoteness and geographically dispersed nature of the identified island communities. The Torres Strait Seawall Project had two primary objectives:

1. Stop further coastal erosion at sites adjacent to communities and community infrastructure where current erosion poses a significant risk to community assets;
2. Provide a level of immunity and protection to communities and coastal assets to the impact of tidal and storm surges.

7.6.2 Seawalls Project funding

A total of AU\$26.2 million in funding for the Seawalls Project was provided by the following agencies:

- Queensland Department of Infrastructure, Local Government and Planning (DLGIP) - **\$12 million**

- Australian Government Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (DPM&C) - **\$7 million**
- Australian Government Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development (DIRD) - **\$5 million**
- Torres Strait Regional Authority (TSRA) - **\$ 2.36 million**

A number of formal instruments and agreements were established between agencies outlining funding and delivery requirements. The majority of the Seawalls Project funds were held in the Torres Strait Major Infrastructure (MIP) Trust where payments were made to the TSIRC upon receipt of certified claims/invoices. Funds provided from the DIRD were initially paid directly to TSIRC upon successful completion of construction milestones. Table 7.5 provides the initial funding allocations to each of the proposed seawalls infrastructures to be constructed under the Torres Strait Seawalls Project.

Table 7.5: Seawalls Project Budget – By Community (as per original Implementation Plan - IP)

Community	Activity	Budget in IP
Saibai	Cemetery wall	\$ 540,000.00
	Bund wall	\$ 5,040,000.00
	Seawall	\$12,723,705.00
Boigu	Overtopping wall	\$ 1,800,000.00
	Bund wall	\$ 540,000.00
Poruma	Seawalls erosion control	\$ 1,170,000.00
Masig	Sand replenishment	\$ 180,000.00
Warraber	Extend existing seawall	\$1,080,000.00
Iama	Rock wall upgrade, bund/wave return wall	\$ 540,000.00
Project Management Costs (5%of total)		\$ 1,311,872.00
Contingency (5%of total)		\$ 1,311,872.00
TOTAL		\$ 26,237,449.00

Source: TSRA, 2018 – Seawalls Implementation plan

7.6.3 Project governance

A joint inter-governmental Project Governance Committee (PGC) was established comprising of a senior representative from each of the aforementioned funding agencies along with senior representatives of the local council the TSIRC. The Queensland Government provided the secretariat, coordination functions for the

Seawalls PGC for the entire period of construction being from 2013 to 2018. The PGC met generally on a quarterly basis with other ad-hoc meetings as required.

7.6.4 Seawalls planned project implementation and delivery

From the early stages of project planning it was agreed that the TSIRC would be the implementing partner and project manager for seawalls construction works as all affected islands are within its Local Government jurisdiction. In the early stages of project planning, the TSIRC developed a Seawalls Implementation Plan. Table 7.3 outlines the original planned scope of works and completion timeframes for works at each island.

Table 7.6 Original planned Torres Strait Seawalls project construction scope and schedule

Site	Works	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
Poruma	Emergency repairs				
Saibai	Cemetery Wall				
	Seawalls				
	Bund Wall				
Boigu	Overtopping wall				
	Bund wall				
Iama	Rock wall upgrade				
	Raise boat ramp				
	Bund Wall				
Masig	Sand replenishment				
Warraber	Seawall				

Source: TSRA, 2018 – Seawalls Implementation plan

The following summary outlines many factors for how and why the Seawalls Project was not delivered on time or on budget, thus serving as the rationale for an independent evaluation.

7.6.5 Seawalls progress 2017 - the case for an evaluation

Despite being awarded the funds in 2014, by the end of 2017 it was apparent the delivery of the project commitments had not been realised. Based on a number of factors, the original budgets allocated for works on the six communities was identified by the local government council delivering the project to be insufficient. The funding allocations eventually only supported the full scope of work at Saibai Island and only a limited number of critical work items at Boigu Island. Major construction works on Saibai Island represented the most remote and technically

complex aspect of all of the regional Seawalls project activities. Approximately 75 per cent of the original project budget allocations were directed to the construction of three works components on Saibai. Due to a range of factors including, but not limited to, latent conditions (acid sulphate soils), granite armour rock supply, scope increases (rear cemetery wall), and other factors, the Saibai works eventually consumed approximately 90-95 per cent of budget allocations. The initial budget estimates had been undertaken by an engineering firm contracted to the local government and subsequently approved by the State and Federal Government Funding agencies.

By the end of 2016, it had become apparent that only partial works were able to be delivered on Boigu, therefore there was a funding shortfall required to complete all works scheduled for the remaining five islands identified as at risk. At the time the quantum of funds required to effectively complete the remaining works was also unknown. An additional complicating factor was that at the time there was a high likelihood that the contractor resources (plant, equipment and personnel) would have had to demobilise from the region at completion of works on Sabai and Boigu, thus leading to a more rigorous estimate of the level of funding required to complete identified works at all communities. Following formal deputations from political leaders in the Torres Strait, the then Federal Minister Indigenous Affairs requested that an evaluation of the project was undertaken in order to inform on the success or otherwise of the project. Issues associated with project budgets and costs, quality, risk management, and other factors that have impacted on project delivery was also to be considered as within the evaluative scope.

The author of this research thesis provided the technical and conceptual support for ascertaining evaluation design, scope, process and output structure. This is explained in the sections to follow.

7.6.6 Technical support for the evaluation

Given the researcher's work with the TSRA it was requested that this experience was deployed in order to develop a Terms of Reference (ToR) and scope for a lessons learned evaluation of the Seawalls Project. Therefore, the researcher developed a document that was agreed by both levels of government. Fundamentally the evaluation was intended to inform more accurately costs, benefits, future directions

and advocacy related to securing funds to construct the remaining seawalls and associated coastal mitigation works. It was also to identify improvements to delivery of these projects in terms of time, cost and quality along with improved, governance, planning/estimating, implementation (contracting/procurement), risk management and project monitoring. The following key stakeholders were identified as being the primary audience for the evaluation outcomes:

- Australian Government Ministers (Indigenous Affairs, Infrastructure)
- Queensland Government (Minister Local Government, Infrastructure and Planning)
- Torres Strait Regional Authority (TSRA) Board
- Torres Strait Island Regional Council – Councillors
- Torres Strait Community members

7.6.7 Key Seawalls evaluation questions

It was intended that the evaluation would document the key lessons learned and provide recommendations to both funders, implementing partners and other stakeholders that sought to answer the following questions:

- a) What were the successes or impeding factors associated with delivery of the remote Seawalls Project works in the Torres Strait in terms of time, cost and quality?
- b) Have effective and efficient planning, governance, administrative systems been implemented, and what facets of these arrangements could be strengthened or improved in order to manage construction risks (financial, environmental, design etc)?
- c) What benefits had been derived from delivery of the Seawalls Projects (employment, training, Indigenous enterprise) and what are the likely impacts (positive/negative & intended/unintended)?
- d) What are the key lessons learned from the Project to date and what improvements could be made to existing arrangements for future projects?

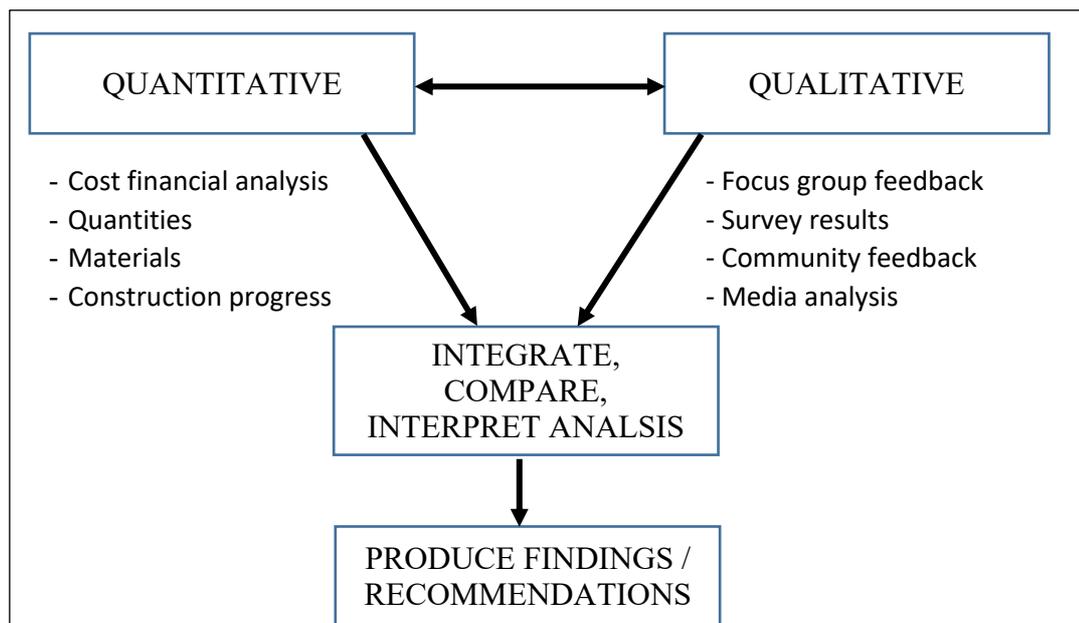
It was originally intended that the approach to the evaluation would be inclusive and incorporate the views of all key stakeholders equally. The following principles were

designed by the researcher and subsequently approved by the TSRA and State Government who agreed that they would underpin the evaluation:

- Independence and impartiality
- Participative, inclusivity and fairness
- Co-operation and collaboration
- Undertaken in good faith and ‘no-blame’ between the parties

The funding agencies and TSRA expressed a desire to articulate these principles in order to reassure key stakeholders (notably the local Government and communities) about the role of the respective parties (noting that the Local Government implemented, and State and Federal Governments funded the project). The funding agencies also agreed to the following combination of methods outlined in the triangulation model at Figure 7.7. In aggregate, the three key elements outlined in the model provided the evaluation design/methodology. These are based on the triangulation principles and approaches as previously outlined in Chapters 4 and 7. The following triangulation approach underpinned the Seawalls Project evaluation design. A high level typology for the Seawalls evaluation design is provided in Figure 7.6.

Figure 7.7. *Seawalls Evaluation – Triangulation Model*



Source: Typology adapted from CIS (2018) and Olsen (2004)

a) Desktop review of key project documentation

This element of the evaluation will include a review of key project documentation including (but not limited to):

- Feasibility and preliminary studies, opinions of cost etc;
- Implementation plans and early planning documentation;
- Funding agreements/instruments and technical reports;
- Meeting minutes, decisions and formal correspondence,
- Accounting and audit reports
- Procurement records and contractual documentation; and
- Performance, status and progress reports.

b) Focus group workshop with key stakeholders

It was intended that at least two workshops were convened with participants including representative/s nominated by each of the key organisations associated with the delivery of the Seawalls Project who have either been involved in the coordination or management or have an understanding and corporate knowledge of the project. These workshops' aims were to collate qualitative feedback on key aspects of the strengths and limitations of project delivery.

c) Direct interviews with key stakeholders

Feedback on key elements of the project, such as community engagement, employment and training outcome (local employees), community benefit and impact, were to be obtained via direct interviews with key political, head contractors and community stakeholders. The list of stakeholders was to be determined and agreed upon by the project partners during the focus group workshops. With the support of this researcher, the independent Seawalls evaluation team was required to possess or be able to draw upon demonstrated skills, expertise and professional qualifications in:

- Previous evaluation experience of remote civil construction projects;
- Facilitation, negotiation, communication and stakeholder engagement in cross-cultural contexts
- Draw upon civil engineering expertise with remote construction projects;
- Accounting, public financial management and financial audit experience;

- Previous experience in social research and impact evaluation and knowledge of Indigenous employment, skills and Indigenous enterprise in the construction industry.

7.6.8 Evaluation budget, process and outcomes

Early on in the discussions about the evaluation process and cost, the author of this thesis provided comments about the average costs of an evaluation⁵⁰. It was recommended at this stage that a ball-park cost of an evaluation of similar size and complexity would equate to approximately 1 per cent of the total project budget (i.e. AU \$262,000.00). This was roundly scoffed at by the government representatives where an off the cuff figure of \$30,000.00 was touted⁵¹. Ultimately, an amount of \$100,000.00 was approved. Once approved, the ToRs were sent to three consultancy firms in order to provide a quotation for undertaking the work. The details of the amounts quoted are not available, but it is understood that one of the companies declined to express interest.

Once the private firm (a small consultancy company with predominantly accounting and risk management expertise) was selected the evaluation process commenced and was conducted over a period of approximately six months throughout the middle of 2017. What is notable is that during this period, the researcher was required to provide significant oversight and conceptual and technical input into the draft evaluation outputs. This arrangement eventuated as the selected evaluator had little understanding and experience with the project including the complex governance and funding background⁵². For the financial and technical aspects of the evaluations (designs, costs), predominantly quantitative analyses were required while for the stakeholder consultation, predominantly open ended questions were developed and analysed qualitatively.

What also became apparent was that the costs of editing and re-editing multiple drafts, and the time applied to editing and correcting the report by government

⁵⁰ This included the cost of the ANAO TSRA Audit and research by Hudson (2017) identifying the average cost of the Indigenous evaluation was in the vicinity of \$382,000.00)

⁵¹ Comments at meeting between TSRA and State Government February 2017.

⁵² The researcher was also under contract to the TSRA at the time and as previously mentioned had been the senior TSRA APS Officer in charge of the Seawalls project.

officers in what became the final evaluation report were not factored into the approved budgets. Had they have been, it would have been apparent that the true cost of conducting such an ‘independent’ evaluation would have been closer to the original estimates of 1 per cent of project budget. In fact, by all accounts, the principles of independence and impartiality were in fact disregarded as officer level employees of the State and TSRA had a significant involvement in the finer workings of the evaluation and made multiple edits and adjustments to the final evaluation recommendations.

Released towards the end on 2017 the final ‘independent’ evaluation unsurprisingly confirmed the value of the Seawalls Project to the community, from an asset protection perspective and that the project was value for money. Among the key Seawalls Project evaluation findings included:

- That the project had been effective in protecting historical and cultural assets.
- That the seawalls are providing protection for over \$300M of assets on Saibai and Boigu.
- The projects governance structure was effective.
- The evaluation report includes a broad evaluation of the total costs incurred on the Torres Strait Seawalls Project and other seawalls projects within Australia. Whilst every project is unique, the analysis indicates the cost of the Saibai seawalls construction was cost effective (TSRA, 2018).

Based on both the State and TSRA advocating the results of this report, the State Government made an additional funding commitment of AU\$20 million over three years commencing in 2018/19. However, this commitment was on the basis that it was to be matched by the Federal Government. This was then subsequently generated into an election promise by the Federal opposition in the build up to the 2019 election⁵³.

7.7 Development of a monitoring and evaluation framework for TSRA - ABS Baseline and trends (democratising data)

⁵³ See SBS News 2019 - <https://www.sbs.com.au/nitv/article/2019/05/10/federal-labors-20m-seawall-election-promise-praised-state-and-torres-strait1>

In line with the research objectives adopted for the thesis, significant work was undertaken with the organisation to develop a comprehensive suite of regional baseline datasets and trends. This became manifest in a formally approved project, namely the Torres Strait Regional Statistical Data Library Project (RSDL). This RSDL activity was given momentum and propelled by the researcher and a key applied output of the Thesis research. It was undertaken in an effort to work more closely with the organisation to demonstrate the value or benefit in how the research output and writing could be tangibly applied. This is of particular relevance for RO-3 related to the establishment of an M&E framework for the TSRA based on sustainable development principles.

It was fortunate that at the time, the pendulum of national policy rhetoric considered also in the introductory section of the chapter had swung to the role of data and evaluation in the Indigenous policy space. For example, in 2017 the then Prime Minister’s Indigenous Advisory Council (IAC) issued a communique on the topic of quality regional data and stated:

“The critical importance of regional data to informing Indigenous leaders and communities to design and deliver effective local solutions was cited and all governments must make accessible quality data at a regional level. This will enable community leaders to activate locally designed and delivered solutions” (Indigenous Advisory Council, 2017, n.p)

In Martin Parkinson’s “data is gold” pronouncements, the notion that a new policy approach which was going to be “genuinely place-based”, it was posited that building data capability into Indigenous leadership represented an “un-tapped opportunity”. Furthermore, it was argued that there was:

“so much scope to understand our data better; use it to paint a more nuanced picture of Indigenous life and challenges; tailor our policy and program responses to place and demography; and most crucially, to move away from a broad-brushstroke disadvantage lens”. (Parkinson, 2017, n.p)

This section of the Chapter explains the processes and approach that the researcher undertook to establish the RDSL Project in the Torres Strait in conjunction with the ABS and the TSRA.

7.7.1 Rationale, logic and scope

Renowned for an immense body of work with Indigenous demography and statistics, social demographer, Professor John Taylor developed what would become a schematic for the TSRA RDSL Project. In this sense Taylor's (2004) work to establish social indicators facilitating governance in the Thamarrurr region in northern Australia provided a solid logic and architecture including how to go about establishing baselines for key social indicators including:

- Torres Strait - demography and social statistics
- Housing and infrastructure
- Health status
- Education and training
- Criminal justice
- Jobs and economic status
- Culture and language
- Environment
- Key service delivery and longitudinal data

Using informal networks from the researcher's past employment with the ABS, allowed contact to be made with the ABS Centre of Excellence for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Statistics (CoEATSIS). This relationship was instrumental to establishing the early engagement and dialogue on the initial conceptual basis for partnership. To facilitate this partnership, the researcher produced the project documentation articulating processes associated with, a) collating, producing, analysing and disseminating key regional statistics (data trends, dashboards and analysis tools etc), b) an assessment framework for mapping historic TSRA program investments in order to evaluate the Impact of the TSRA (as recommended by the ANAO – e.g. Major Infrastructure Program (MIP)). It also provided the rationale for the establishment of an ongoing monitoring framework for assessing and measuring the longer term impact of TSRA's policies and programs, and its contribution to improved social and wellbeing and Closing the Gap (CtG) outcomes over time. This full scope of what was to be included in the RDSL library is provided at **Appendix 11**.

The agenda for the partnership between the ABS and the TSRA covering a period of three years (initially) was to assist the TSRA to strengthen its monitoring and coordination role in the region as recommended by the ANAO and intended to underpin a more formalised structured and strategic approach to engaging with key stakeholders (including but not limited to: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW), Department of Health (DoH) and Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet (DPM&C) and Queensland Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships (DATSIP).

7.7.2 TSRA / ABS: Torres Strait Regional Data Library Project

A project plan was developed by this researcher, setting out a number of phases (or steps) that sought to establish a Torres Strait Regional Development Statistics Data Library (RDSDL). The first phase was developing and agreeing to a formal arrangement with the ABS, including mapping out the costs and financial arrangements. In subsequent phases, the project was designed to complement this library with statistical collections and agencies such as the AIHW, DoH, and DPMC. Through these relations it was anticipated that TSRA would facilitate the establishment of comprehensive data repository of regionally specific, official and service delivery data and statistics.

At the time the ABS was in the process of releasing the 2016 National Census of Population and Housing data. The TSRA had also previously partnered with the ABS to compile key regionally specific social development statistics collected in national population censuses and other official data collections (e.g. National Health and Social Survey's etc). It was hoped that the ability to track progress over time would have enabled the formulation of benchmarks and better track regional progress towards Closing the Gap in disadvantage objectives. Historically the Torres Strait had been pooled with statistics from across Queensland. Supporting the development of the RDSDL, Phase Two of the project also required the technical capacity to develop a data systems and analysis framework which included;

- Data dictionary
- Data quality, storage, access and reporting / clearance protocols
- Develop publishing / style guidance

- Communication protocols (TSRA/ABS)
- Jointly agreed Risk Management plans

Phase Three of the project was to involve the compilation and statistical analysis of data trends and output production on key variables covering the census periods ranging 2016, 2011, 2006, 2001, 1996 and 1991 where available. This required data comparability analysis over inter-census years for relevant sectors (education, household structures etc) and variables associated with Census data over time, including issues such as alignment of regional statistical boundaries / geographies, and data collection / enumeration methodologies where relevant.

A first attempt at this involved the development of an ABS publication / report output ‘Changing Characteristics of the Torres Strait Island region and its people’. This publication only attempted to identify changes that had occurred between the 2011 and 2016 Census’s. For all intents and purposes, notably to do with a noticeable deficit in ABS capacity, this output could only reasonably be construed as bland. This reflection is based on the objective of the RDSDL of being able to assemble key social trends over a twenty year period by synthesising and harmonising both ABS Census data with other nationally comparable household survey and health data, along with regionally appropriate administrative data over time (e.g. from regional health and education providers).

Statistical literacy and data analysis capacity building was an objective of Phase four of the Torres Strait RDSDL Project Plan. At the time, the TSRA had a Board representative on the ABS Roundtable on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Statistics. Other TSRA Board Portfolio representatives had participated in other monitoring and evaluation forums convened by DoH and AIHW for example. It was anticipated that work with the ABS was to conduct analysis of social trend data and prepare regular policy updates and presentations to the Board. It was also to be complemented by a regional workshop with key service delivery agencies in order to build support for the project and establish suitable monitoring partnerships. The TSRA was also earmarked to work with the ABS to promote opportunity for participating in cyclical Health and Social surveys (including engagement of enumeration staff etc). The researcher was responsible for all facets of the Torres Strait RDSDL, including drafting projects plans, approval documentations, drafts of

formal agreements between agencies, and specifically scope and priority of data collection.

Torres Strait RDSDL Project Phases Five and Six included activities such as mapping key TSRA program and policy investments over time and ascertaining relationship to social, health and wellbeing characteristics, trends and outcomes. In order for TSRA to strengthen its monitoring and co-ordination role in the region, and in order to promote evidence-based policy and programming it was intended to establish formal data sharing arrangements where possible with key institutions relevant to the Torres Strait. These included notably the DPMC (grants and financial data), AIHW, DoH, the Torres Strait and Northern Peninsula Area Health Services, and the Queensland Government (via DATSIP). The applicable methods it was sought suitable to this project related to quantitative and descriptive analysis. This was to be followed by more in-depth case-study and qualitative analysis in future stages. However, these had not come to fruition within the timeframes of this thesis research.

Lastly, the approved proposal included the development of data output (monitoring and reporting) frameworks, tools and systems (dashboards etc) for disseminating and promoting statistical data and trends that are geographically bounded and comparable to broader state and national indicators. At that time the COAG had launched a new national performance dashboard which was to provide an accessible access point in relation to all COAG national indicators (including the Indigenous Closing the Gap indicators). A number of the proposed functional sub-categories of the COAG indicator framework (e.g. housing and health) display key Indigenous indicators, to be accessed at jurisdiction by jurisdiction levels as well as nationally. At the TSRA Board meeting on 30 November 2017 the ABS and TSRA executed a formal Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for the establishment of the (RDSDL). A media release celebrating this agreement is provided at **Appendix 10**.

The Torres Strait RDSDL Project was one key major output as a result of this research work. It would have been highly unlikely to have been realised without the researcher driving and engaging in dialogue with both the administrations of the TSRA and the ABS. It was intended to provide a tangible and long-term increase in

statistical literacy and sustained analytical capacity for key agencies in the Torres Strait region.

7.8 Contextual and situational issues and sensitivities

A number of important contextual and situational events transpired that ultimately had a significant impact on the conduct of this thesis research process in terms of the extent to which the research objectives could be realised. As mentioned in Chapter Four of this thesis my enrolment in the Doctorate Sustainable Development Degree course was first approved in June 2015 whilst I was a permanent APS officer with TSRA. It was approved by the CEO who had noted at the time that he had communicated with the then Chairperson and that they were both supportive in principle pending further details being provided on how it was to be undertaken and the details in the ethics agreement.

7.8.1 Research support and approvals

Following this approval to undertake the research degree, in early 2016 following agreement to assist in the local Indigenous staff succession strategy, I relinquished my permanent APS position which was then filled by a local Indigenous Manager. My consultancy contract at that time required that I both work to support and build capacity of the incumbent and complete an impact or return on investment study for the organization. This arrangement proceeded well with preparation of the more detailed Candidacy Proposal in the middle stages of 2016. As flagged earlier, in mid-2016 a TSRA Board election was undertaken which saw an almost 50 per cent turnover in elected Board Members.

In August 2016, a Draft Doctorate Research Candidacy proposal was endorsed by the CEO and the former Chairperson. However, in September 2016 the TSRA convened its internal Board office bearer nominations at their first official meeting in December 2016. This occurred following undertaking mandatory induction training in the latter half of 2016 as required under the ATSI Act. There was significant adverse media coverage in the lead up to the first Board meeting that December, and after the official election results were made public following a period of due diligence checks

(tests of whether those elected were in fact entitled to be⁵⁴). Soon before the incoming Board’s first meeting, at which key governance positions are elected, a number of unsuccessful Board candidates – some of whom had been previous Board members made public comments in the media criticising the previous Board and CEO (and by inference the Administrative arm of the agency under the previous political leadership).

7.8.2 Changes in the TSRA political landscape

Some of these assertions included that the previous TSRA Board were merely ‘rubber stamping’ decisions of the CEO and administrative arm and not performing effective governance and leadership functions. These public declarations were not countered publicly by the political nor the administrative leadership (those who had approved the Doctorate research). What transpired was that all of those in the previous elected Board roles of Chairperson, Deputy Chairperson and Alternate Deputy Chairperson experienced a change in personnel. Further, the Board roles of Portfolio representatives (those elected leaders guiding each of the TSRA Programs area) also experienced change.

This significant change in the political representation was the catalyst for a palpable nervousness among the administration, and whereas there had been quite explicit support for the research prior to this time, it was not the case afterwards. In fact, the level of nervousness was so stark that it seemed that the research proposal was in a state of persistent jeopardy. This became manifest during a presentation to the senior staff during one of the quarterly visits to the islands in April 2017. It was as though anything that had been supported by the previous administration was treated with a level of disdain from the incoming politicians. This situation effectively ruled out any interviews or focus groups, which unfortunately is a fundamental aspect of the SROI methodology. It also limited one key avenue of qualitative data to support a broader approach to triangulating performance information to assist assessments of impact.

⁵⁴ A requirement is that TSRA Board nominees are required to have lived in the region continuously for a period of at least two years prior to the election.

7.8.3 Lessons and findings – navigating complex terrain

Even when faced with a rapidly changing political and organisational context, there are a number of key lessons that emerged throughout the conduct of this research. Given the organisational sensitivities and political machinations that occurred notably those stemming from a sense of perceived guilt by association (e.g. researcher’s past working experience with TSRA), some of the achievements with respect to the two key research outcomes should be acknowledged. Perhaps the central lessons are based upon embedding policy and planning logic and rationale with the purpose of engendering support by third parties and engaging key organisational interlocuters in purposeful dialogue on evaluation concepts.

With these approaches in mind, it was essential that the researcher was able to use both informal and formal tactics when designing and developing documentation and engaging with stakeholders. In particular, engaging in early conceptual dialogue followed by a rapid production of written outputs to support concept level ideas was essential. This was particularly important with both the Seawalls Evaluations and the development of the Torres Strait Regional Data and Statistical Library. Pacing the release of documentation, starting first with short, concise and easily understandable discussion points was essential to both stimulating the agenda and to allow adequate time for debate and negotiation by stakeholders.

In this sense, while the previous employment background of the researcher resulted in many reputational challenges, it was the understanding and experience with the organisational decision making architecture and protocols which also facilitated the establishment, design and completion of the work that was able to be undertaken. More specifically, this included an understanding of internal management meeting structures and timeframes, formulation of agendas, understanding and experience with production of internal project planning documentation and knowledge of budgeting protocols and timeframes. Without this set of skills and knowledge, it is highly likely that any fully external research would have had a high probability of floundering. Therefore, one of the most fundamental learnings from this process reflects back to the work of White (2009) whereby “going deep on context” was of paramount importance.

7.9 Chapter summary and conclusion

This chapter has sought to situate and discuss the factors associated with the findings of this research including the provision of more contextual analysis for the research process overall. In the early stages of the discussion of the findings it was important to delve more into the content and structure of the ANAO's initial performance audit. In particular, some of the implications associated with implementing the suggestions that they made in the audit findings regarding the production of regional statistics including the SEIFA and other data that TSA might consider incorporating into their reporting to demonstrate impact.

As seen from this chapter this was often easier 'said' than 'done'. Moreover, commentary such as measures of deliverables rather than outputs (in relation to artist and cultural practitioner skills for example) in terms of reporting and measuring are particularly problematic. Further, when the data presented on regional progress as per the SEIFA indices, along with household income are extrapolated using the 2016 Census data it indicates that those particular measure of regional development may not be sufficient. In fact, they allude to the region going backwards in terms of a reduction in the level of socio-economic disadvantage. Reflecting on conclusions drawn by Hudson (2016) related to the elements that characterise a 'strong' evaluation. Some analysis is undertaken on the twelve high-level KPI indicators that the TSRA is required to report to parliament. When assessed against the elements of the CIS criteria, it is apparent that evaluating the entire four-year TSRA Development Plan as proposed by the ANAO would be extremely complex if indeed achievable. However, it would be technically more feasible and cost effective to identify a limited number of project activities from the different TSRA portfolios to be subject to evaluation.

In responding to the increasingly more public rhetoric calling for data to be made at community and individual level, an example is provided in order to demonstrate the applied and practical application of this research. Here in somewhat mini case-study format is an explanation of the drivers and conceptual processes leading to a formal partnership between TSRA and the national statistical agency, the ABS. Without the technical momentum, arguably provided by the dialogue surrounding the research and engagement with the researcher, it would be debatable whether the partnership

would have ever materialised at all. Unfortunately, in line with the sensitivities that emerged following the election of a new TSRA Board in 2016, an assessment of the outcome of the ABS partnership was not able to be explained. What was apparent though, was that in order to deliver a relatively robust regional data set in library form seemed at the stage of writing beyond the technical and conceptual capability of both TSRA and the ABS.

In order to provide a more practical explanation of how an evaluation of a complex infrastructure project could be undertaken, the chapter also provides a discussion of the processes and outcomes of a TSRA led evaluation of the remote seawalls infrastructure. This brings into focus some of the technical complexity, cost and political factors that should be considered before undertaking such a task. Although the outcome of the evaluation served to underpin both State and Federal Government commitments of up to AUD\$40 million, it was clear that principles of independence and impartiality were not necessarily applied, and if they had been, then the result was more likely than not to have been less than optimal. This in a sense reconfirms some of the cynicism alluded to by Hudson (2017) at the CIS and commentators Chaney (2013) about a general absence of impartiality and independence in many Indigenous evaluations, and something that attention will be given more to in the concluding chapter. To conclude, it is perhaps appropriate to dwell on the following quote before proceeding to the final chapter:

“Regardless of the program’s characteristics, it is expected that program managers and public service officials understand the need for evaluating public sector programs and will have considered evaluation requirements during program development and implementation” (Qld Evaluation Guidelines, 2017, p.6).

The rationale for the inclusion of the quote above might well be construed as slightly facetious given the discussions outlined in this thesis thus far. Notwithstanding, there is little evidence of the above expectations regarding program evaluations being incorporated into the strategic policy or programs by government or public officials at any level in the Torres Strait region. In fact, what is clear from both the historical and proximate analysis of the TSRA operating context, is that there is both an implicit almost passive resistance, and at times a general overt and explicit resistance to it.

CHAPTER 8: RECOMMENDATIONS, FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

“The TSRA has been largely immune from the ideological and political battles that undermined ATSIC and demonstrates in microcosm the unfulfilled potential of the ATSIC model (Westbury and Dillon, 2019, p.26).

8.1 Introduction

This thesis has sought to enunciate some possible avenues that the TSRA or any similar Indigenous organisation might consider measuring its impacts on reducing disadvantage for the residents of the Torres Strait Region. The process has involved exploration of key contextual, political and organisational factors and conceptual and theoretical constructs related to IE. It is difficult to prescribe the best approach based on the evaluation conducted in this thesis; however, there are some clear findings that can inform the work of the organisation and any other institution that is involved with monitoring its performance. Informed by this research, the way TSRA will have to evaluate its achievements will depend on a range of external factors but the main contribution of this analysis is in the following areas: (1) understanding data and data availability; (2) understanding the possible methodological approaches to the evaluation; and (3) outlining the challenges in conducting a meaningful evaluation. There are also lessons for any policy-makers who often impose requirements without understanding the enormity of the task, particularly given the Indigenous environment in which it will have to be conducted.

The findings, if based on just the analysis of reported financial, performance, grants and other statistical data, reveals that meeting this objective would be an extremely complex and challenging endeavour, if indeed possible at all. Therefore, this final chapter reflects on the initial research objectives, in order to provide a more nuanced response to the overarching research question pertaining to whether or not TSRA’s development impact might be evaluated. Despite that many barriers and challenges to meeting these objectives became manifest almost from the onset of the research process, this chapter seeks to offer constructive input into what criteria or conditions might impede or facilitate the conduct of an effective IE.

Following a reflection on the thesis research objectives and questions, a summary of the key issues and discussion points from each of the preceding chapters is provided. This is followed by consideration of some of the deeper and more fundamental critiques of evaluating policy and programs in the Australian Indigenous affairs domain. Some of these include observations that policy in Indigenous affairs is not determined by evidence but ‘ideology’. This critique is supported by a brief summary of the outcome of recent work by the ANAO including an evaluation of the effectiveness of the Indigenous Evaluation Framework launched by the DPM&C and their follow-up visit to the Torres Strait in 2018. This narrative chronicles what was at first supposed to have been an ANAO assurance review of how the recommendations of the 2013/14 performance audit had been implemented by TSRA. However, what was eventuated was quite starkly different from this.

Further, the concluding sections of this chapter discuss the development of the framework for monitoring and evaluation for the TSRA in the context of a resurgence in calls for regionally specific and contextually relevant data. At least an applied output of the research was the technical advice and writing support that led to the establishment of the formal partnership between the ABS and TSRA on a Torres Strait regional statistical data library. Lastly the chapter considers the implications of this research process in terms of the SDGs framework, concluding with a discussion of areas for further research.

8.2 Reflection on addressing research objectives and questions

The overarching question guiding the conduct of this research was on measuring the extent to which the TSRA has impacted on the well-being of the Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal residents. This included an assessment of how, and in what ways these impacts could be effectively evaluated. In an attempt to provide answers to this question, four key research objectives were formulated, the first of which involved an assessment of the adequacy (including the strengths and limitations) of IE designs and methods and the contextual barriers or enablers of particular approaches.

Research Objective Two, sought to identify both the conceptual and practical refinements that would be required to accepted IE methodologies in order to assess

TSRA's work including how and whether adaptations to particular data sets could be used or whether they were applicable to an economic analysis (SROI). The third and fourth research objectives concerned the feasibility of developing an Impact focussed planning, monitoring and evaluation system that might be consistent with principles and practises of sustainable development along with an assessment of the way in which such a framework might be implemented.

The last of the four research objectives sought to examine the issues and opportunities associated with the transferability of a model or framework and potential implications for broader sustainable development. An assessment of whether this research has effectively addressed its research questions and objectives is highlighted in the concluding content of the following narrative.

8.3 Research learning and chapter summary

The persistent and entrenched disadvantage experienced by many Indigenous Australians, predominantly those in the remotest regions of the country continues relatively unabated. This circumstance continues despite the plethora of various policy measures declared by successive governments of all political persuasions. According to some estimates, funding allocated to address this disadvantage by direct expenditure from Federal and State Governments is in the vicinity of AU\$34 billion per annum as targeted funding (Productivity Commission, 2017, p. xii). A broad level summary at the outset of this thesis describes some of the issues associated with this context. It also presents the motivation and background for undertaking this research thesis. The findings of the national Audit Office following the review of the Indigenous Statutory Agency of the Torres Strait Region the TSRA, are key drivers for this research.

Here the research questions and objectives are stated along with the initial scope and intent. The thesis also points to recent research that highlights that despite the level of expenditure focussed on alleviating disadvantage, surprisingly few policies or programs have been subject to any formal independent evaluation or review. Even where there had been some form or review, only a paltry number of those were released by government for public scrutiny.

Following this overview, Chapter Two of the thesis aims to give context to this work by situating it in its geographic, cultural, political and organisational context. Here discussion outlines the earliest antecedents of the Torres Strait region and some of the key points in its history. Far from being exhaustive (as this has been the subject of numerous works already), key milestones in the chronology of the region's colonial past, and the struggles by local Torres Strait Islanders to overcome the shackles of this imperialist incursion are discussed. This includes briefly a discussion of the multi-cultural facets of the region's original inhabitants, the arrival of the missionaries, and the establishment of state and local governing structures. Key to this are also a number of unique historical milestones directly propelled by Islanders' sense of autonomy and efforts to assert their rights and promote their cultural distinctiveness as evidenced by the maritime strike, Mabo decision, and calls for regional autonomy.

In order to develop a theoretical and conceptual framework for this research, Chapter Three traverses the literature underpinning IE and social research more broadly. It highlights the push internationally to enhance the reach and use of IE in the context of the SDGs and in order to ascertain the effectiveness of ODA. However, pervasive in the literature review is what has been described by White (2009) as the "raging debates" over what are the most rigorous evaluation paradigms, approaches, designs, methods and tools. The debate continues whereby even an internationally agreed definition of what IE remains elusive. It is here that high profile proponents of the evaluation discipline such as Michael Scriven (2013) and others have promulgated the trans-disciplinary and multi-disciplinary facets of what evaluation requires, endorsing that evaluation is in fact an applied form of social research, indeed a meta-profession.

Moreover, the review of the international evaluation and IE literature, despite its abundance is rife with methodological concerns, poor data quality, and low levels of reliability and validity. Some of this criticism is highlighted in a recent meta-review by Raifman et al (2018). Whilst there are quite valid concerns with the international body of IEs, there is arguably a more perplexing circumstance when considering the role of evaluation in the sphere of Australian public financial management and perhaps even more pronounced in public policy and programs' design for services targeted at increasing the well-being of Indigenous Australians. Here the recent work

in mapping of Indigenous programs and assessing the context of Indigenous policy evaluation by Sara Hudson (2016) of the Centre for Independent Studies is of note.

Chapter Four of this thesis provides the rationale for the adoption of the case-study research design noting the work of Yin (2009), Luck et al (2006) and DeVaus (2001) who have promoted this method as a unifying framework when combining different research philosophies, disciplines and even data collection and analysis strategies. Again, the formative work by Hudson (2017) offers salient insights and a concise typology for how to develop a ‘strong’ evaluative design and reinforces calls from evaluators such as Bamberger (2013) and others for increasing pluralist and pragmatic mixed method social research. Importantly, this chapter intends to provide for the reader the ‘recipe’ of methods for data collection and analysis some of which include triangulation techniques and thematic content analysis, for example. The chapter culminates in a statement outlining the ethical considerations that were required along with enunciating measures to reduce possible bias and the researcher’s position in terms of past working relationship in the region.

Chapter Five draws on some of the elements of the 2014 ANAO review of the TSRA findings as the research drivers and aims to give greater clarity on the scope and parameters to be considered in an evaluation. It discusses how the TSRA as the subject of the case-study both plans for and delivers its services and conducts its activities. Importantly, it considers the organisation’s legislative and statutory requirements in terms of delivering and reporting on the commitments outlined in the four-year Torres Strait Development Plan (2014-18) along with the KPI measures agreed with the federal government under which it draws its financial appropriations.

A wide range of data analysis is the key focus of Chapter six. This includes an explanation of the abductive research approach that guided the initial broad scope of data collection and analysis. Included is the mapping of financial income and expenditures over a twenty-year horizon as the initial research approach which, without the benefit of hindsight, was thought could incorporate this type of analysis. Here it was considered that by mapping expenditures, such as employment, community grant expenditures or funding for regional infrastructures, it would be possible to identify a correlation with broader regional social, economic and demographic change. Although this ultimately proved unworkable within the context

of this research, it did provide the rationale for the establishment of the partnership between the ABS and TSRA on increasing statistical literacy and developing an agreed set of baseline statistics to serve as a framework to measure change.

The financial data mapping and analysis in Chapter Six highlights changes in the operational context in terms of an increasing staff profile for the organisation with a corresponding decrease in the administration of community grants. Analysis of the TSRA's community grants funding from three of its major programs over a number of years indicates that the requests for funding from community organisations persistently outweighs that which is approved. Here the likelihood that a proposal is approved is in the vicinity of a 33 per cent per submission. The analysis of the performance data reported by the agency against the agreed KPIs in the Portfolio Budget Statements does not (when analysed in isolation) necessarily yield a sound basis for concrete performance claims.

These issues are elaborated on further in Chapter Seven where a deeper consideration and discussion of the findings is undertaken. This includes a reflection on the ANAO's suggested reporting approach for TSRA (e.g. framework incorporating ABS SEIFA indices etc) which indicates that there has been a relative decline in social and economic measures for the region over time. Such an observation is consistent with trends in educational achievement which indicates that while there had been an increase in the total number of individuals with non-school qualifications between 2011 and 2016 this in fact represented a decline in terms of those with qualifications as the proportion of the projected population at the time. What the discussion in this chapter also brings to attention is that discrepancies or differences in reported statistics by the various agencies (i.e. medium weekly income – Table 7.2), has the overall effect of reducing the level of credibility among senior regional political representatives and policy makers in the region.

Importantly Chapter Seven provides two key examples of how an applied approach to evaluation research can assist and enhance organisational statistical and evaluation capacity. An applied application of the evaluation tools, techniques and methods resulted in both a completed evaluation report for a complex infrastructure project (Seawalls) that was used as an evidence-based input for a decision to allocate an additional AU\$25 million in funding to the region. Furthermore, it was via an

analysis of data availability and assessment of organisational capacity to collate, synthesise and interpret complex social trend data that a project was formulated (including the allocation of financial resources) to develop a regional Statistical Data Library. The first series of outputs from this work had begun at conclusion of this research. They would be likely to support furthermore in depth evaluation and research going forward, should the TSRA wish to do so. However, in order to effectively conduct IE on complex service delivery in the Torres Strait Region, there would be a number of systemic barriers and challenges to overcome. These are considered in the discussion to follow.

8.4 Systemic barriers to evaluating Indigenous policy and programs

The section in the final commentary of this research identifies some fundamental issues relevant to the evaluation of Indigenous policy. These include the debates on the systemic facets that impede evaluation serving as an effective evidence base in the Indigenous policy making process. It also focuses in particular on systemic barriers to conducting evaluations, the competing discourse over ideology vs evidence, and finally the dissonance between evaluation rhetoric as opposed to substantive action. The section also includes a summary of how these systemic barriers emerged through the conduct of this research and what steps were taken to overcome them.

8.4.1 Systemic barriers

According to the Indigenous affairs commentators Dillion and Westbury (2007), it has been the systemic failure of governments to redress Indigenous disadvantage in Australia. They pose the questions,

“How is it that governments at all levels, and of all political persuasions, have allowed this level of systemic failure for so long? Why is it that governments have found it easier to ignore systemic failure, while promoting worn out policy approaches that have proved unworkable?” (Dillon and Westbury, 2007, p.192)

A former Australian politician and once Minister for Indigenous Affairs, Fred Chaney also offered a scathing critique on systemic policy failure at a Productivity

Commission Roundtable seeking to consider how evaluation might lead to better Indigenous policy in 2014. While not refuting that there was a clear and urgent need to draw on research and evaluation to identify both successful programs, along with the reasons for their success, Chaney notes,

“The evaluation of programs had limited value in overcoming the structural deficiencies of government, which seemed unable to act in accordance with its own understanding of ‘what works’.” (Chaney, 2014)

Going further, Chaney (2014) argues that while the “idea” that Indigenous programs should be evaluated is “incontestable”, he insists that the purposes and means by which they are undertaken are significant. Here Chaney (2014) points to a resistance in evaluating how the critical responsibilities of governments are met, or, how they are transferred to service providers (Indigenous community organisations), communities, families or individuals. Further, he emphasised that evaluation is largely ineffective if it is perceived as an audit-punish tool rather than a tool for learning by doing. The rather searing critique includes observations of Indigenous evaluations being merely academic exercises, and questioning whether they are a means of *“keeping someone, the evaluator, in a nice job?”* (Chaney, 2014, p.34).

Moreover, Chaney lays out a series of vignettes about program funding being removed despite there being positive evaluation findings, and the application of different evaluation principles to the purchaser of services (e.g. government) as opposed to the providers. Following Chaney’s account of being witness to many flawed and non-rigorous evaluations, he concludes that,

“Without systemic change the idea that we can do better through evaluation I think is a vanity. The system under which we operate is broken, and it is the broken system that we should be evaluating.” (Chaney, 2014, p.34)

In a more contemporary reflection, ‘*Overcoming Indigenous exclusion: Very hard, plenty humbug*’, Dillion and Westbury (2019) examine a number of case studies detailing the systemic exclusion of Indigenous interests. Informed by both the policy experience of ATSIC, and the more recent calls for constitutional amendments allowing for an Indigenous voice to Parliament, the authors argue that,

“The systemic and structural issues that underpin the longstanding policy failures of governments in Indigenous Affairs are central to the nation’s future.” (Dillon and Westbury, 2019, p.iii)

In concluding, the authors reiterate the acutely structural determinants of Indigenous exclusion, identifying that a single policy or constitutional change would likely not be sufficient in reversing them. Their thesis is that ensuring greater Indigenous inclusion in key national institutional frameworks requires systemic reforms *“pursued incrementally and sustained over time”* (Dillon and Westbury, 2019, p.iii)

8.4.2 Ideology vs evidence

A number of policy commentators and analysts have pointed to an increasing tendency for governments to disregard evidence and retreat to ideological presumptions as a basis for decision making (Hudson, 2012; Sanders, 2010). Hudson, for example argues that Indigenous issues are effectively ‘pigeonholed’ between *“two ideological camps - the Left and the Right-and never the twain shall meet”* (Hudson, 2012, p.15). This analysis concludes that rather than drawing from a pragmatic or evidence base, the dichotomous nature in the ideological positions of the political left and right result in reform proposals being identified with each particular side. Hudson observes that, *“Neither side takes the other’s arguments seriously with one side automatically assuming the other side’s proposals have no merit”* (Hudson, 2012, p.15).

These observations became far more pronounced during the period of the then conservative Howard Government’s intervention framed as the Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER). In this case, Hudson writes of the political Left being inclined to favour policies of ‘cultural relativism’ (particularly upon issues such as private vs communal land holding etc), with the Far Left’s proposition that Indigenous people *“need to live separate lives to retain their unique cultural identity”* (Hudson, 2012, p.15). The Right by contrast, has tended to focus on policy positions typified by private economic interests (e.g. such as moving to secure job opportunities etc), which tends to invoke hostility from the Left, according to Hudson (2012).

Sanders (2010) provides perhaps a more nuanced expose of the debates over ideology vs evidence in Indigenous policy. This includes an explanation of the policy debates that occurred throughout the NTER covering the changes in government from that of the conservative Howard led coalition to the Labour leadership of Kevin Rudd in 2007. Here Sanders (2010) outlines the commentary put by the prominent Indigenous scholar Noel Pearson based on the view of two “insistent and deafly opposed camps” comprising “ideological tribes” (Pearson, 2007, as cited Sanders, 2010, p. 311). As a schema Pearson characterised the ‘tribes’ as one comprising the Indigenous leadership and perhaps a significant proportion of Indigenous constituents and their progressive supporters who viewed the absence or insufficient realization of rights as the basis for the Indigenous policy predicament. The other ideological camp, according to Pearson comprised,

“most non-progressive, non-indigenous Australians and their conservative political leaders (including substantial numbers in the Labor Party) who hold the view that it is the absence of responsibilities that lies at the core of our people’s malaise” (Pearson 2007a, as cited Sanders 2010, p. 311).

In drawing on Pearson’s advocacy for policy to be formulated from a radically centrist position, synthesising both rights and responsibilities paradigms, Sanders (2010) promotes an analytical schema that identifies the policy process of arguments concerning opposing or competing principles. In viewing the policy making process according to a dialectical discourse featuring a tension between principles based on; a) guardianship, b) equality, and, c) choice; Sanders notes,

“Evidence in Indigenous affairs plays just a small role in a much larger argumentative struggle, not only between competing principles but also between different, largely unavoidable, ideological tendencies. The simple dichotomising of evidence as good and ideology as bad needs to be transcended in Australian Indigenous affairs” (Sanders, 2010, p. 329)

8.4.3 Evaluation rhetoric or substantive action?

Throughout this thesis, reference has been made to the ostensible crescendo of rhetoric placing evaluation at the epicentre of efforts to ameliorate disadvantage among Australia’s Indigenous populations. Arguably, this rhetoric has been building

pace from the point of increased Federal involvement in Indigenous affairs stretching back over fifty years since the 1967 referendum (Parkinson, 2017). As to the motivations underpinning some of this rhetoric, Dillion (2019) suggests, that they are premised on not only historical but contemporary anxieties over “*waste, effectiveness and accountability*” (Dillion, 2019, n.p). Propelled by periodic, but intense episodes of political and media scrutiny, various dedicated ‘special audits’ functions have been established within Indigenous policy departments and agencies, including the Office of Evaluation and Audit (OEA) that was embedded in the ATSIC legislation in part to mitigate these concerns. Following the abolition of ATSIC, Dillion reports that the OEA was moved to, and subsequently subsumed within the ANAO (Dillion, 2019, n.p).

As one of the most domestically sensitive areas of public and social policy in Australia, the Indigenous Affairs portfolio has often and routinely been subjected to the machinations of various governments. Over a period of less than fifteen years since the closure of ATSIC, direct policy and administrative responsibility for first Australians has been shuffled between four different departments. Often the policy obligations of these departments have included a range of rather disparate portfolios such as Immigration, Community Services, Housing and Family Services, until the 2013 reform led to the amalgamation of Indigenous policy and programs within the DPM&C. These permutations in the machinery of government have corresponded with broader shifts to performance and results-based financing, monitoring and reporting as previously outlined in discussions of NPM.

As Dillion (2019) notes, each of these different administrative departments have subjected Indigenous policy and programs to their own particular evaluative regimes, cultures and processes. Debating the extent to which Indigenous policy may have been subjected to more arduous burdens of accountability, including measures of efficiency, effectiveness and value for money, Dillion argues that,

“Consequently, it is not surprising that the substantive (as opposed to rhetorical) focus on accountability has diminished over time. In turn, the impetus for effective and substantive evaluation has diminished, even as the

prevalence of rhetoric advocating greater use of evaluation has increased”.
(Dillion, 2019, n.p)⁵⁵

In an erudite enumeration deliberating on the crescendo of evaluation rhetoric in the Indigenous affairs domain, Dillion cites multiple examples of speeches, reports and proclamations by leaders in the public sector who promulgate increased use of evaluation *“as the solution to ongoing policy failure in Indigenous Affairs”* (Dillion, 2019, n.p). This recount includes selective quotations from agencies such as the Department of Finance who in 2009 called for a *“more rigorous approach to program evaluation at a whole of government level”* (DoFD, 2009, as cited Dillion, 2019 n.p). Moreover, orations from the Secretary of DPMC Martin Parkinson in 2016, urging more stringent gathering of evidence, *“which shows we are improving the lives of Indigenous Australians. And if that evidence tells us otherwise, we must change our approach* (Parkinson, 2016, as cited Dillion 2019, n.p). This also includes a speech by the Deputy Chair of the Productivity Commission, cajoling policy makers to,

“just get back to the dirt under the fingernail work of building evidence-based policy and building a much stronger evaluation culture (we need to know more about what works and why) (Chester, 2016, as cited Dillion 2019, n.p).

The rhetorical attractiveness of this nomenclature tends to imply that there is a linear relationship between positive behaviour change, enhanced socio-economic outcomes and the effectiveness of the policy levers deployed to meet the political objectives of Governments. These assumptions generally pay little heed to the conundrum of ensuring that policy measures are sufficiently coherent to incentivise behaviour change and generate improved outcomes in cross-cultural and remote social contexts. In this regard, Dillion believes that:

“even if policies were technically able to improve outcomes, robust policy evaluations inevitably come into conflict with the deep-seated political imperatives to frame policies and programs to advance political objectives

⁵⁵ See Michael Dillion’s online policy blog (2019), *A Walking Shadow: Observations on Indigenous public policy and institutional transparency*: <http://refragabledelusions.blogspot.com>

and also to avoid any admission of failure that might create political embarrassment for Ministers or the Government” (Dillon, 2019, n.p)

8.4.4 Systemic influences and barriers encountered in this evaluation

The factors and influences that can impede evaluations of Indigenous programs outlined in this section all materialised in various forms throughout this research. In terms of the systemic factors outlined in 8.4.1, the change in the Indigenous policy landscape with the introduction of reforms by the conservative government seemed to influence the perception of local Indigenous leaders that evaluation was in fact a euphemism for ‘audit’. This perception informally relayed to this researcher was also compounded by an overt sentiment that the primary beneficiaries of evaluation activities were the evaluators rather than the organisation or its constituents.

Also pervasive over the course of the research was a sense of tension as a result of policy reforms and new reporting arrangements in the Indigenous Affairs portfolio more broadly. There was a culture throughout the TSRA Administration to not make waves or do anything that would be perceived as not framing activities which are inconsistent with the government’s policy objectives. The CDEP policy reform imperatives were notable in this regard whereby TSRA, rather than highlighting problematic issues with implementation, would take various measures to support outsourced management arrangements. An example is the boosted appropriation based infrastructure funding from its own sources to allow for increased cashflow to the Government’s chosen provider.

It is clear by the analyses presented throughout this research that the challenges and barriers outlined above have all had to be traversed to an extent. While a number of firewalls were inserted into the Seawalls ‘independent’ evaluation to maintain a sense that it was indeed independent, without the researcher’s previous background with TSRA, it is unlikely that the evaluation could have been undertaken as effectively. Some of the factors that underpinned being able to conclude this project included the theoretical and technical experience and corporate understanding of the entire Seawalls Project chronology. Without this technical input, it is somewhat doubtful that additional funding allocations could have been secured. Moreover, the preparatory design work for the Torres Strait Statistical Library and corresponding

capacity building elements in the approved project plan (should they come to fruition) represents a commitment by regional Indigenous leaders to focus on local trends and analysis to better inform their decision making at local and regional level.

8.5 Who evaluates the evaluators? – A question of legitimacy...

As the ANAO's 2014 TSRA performance audit provided the catalyst for this research journey, a keen interest was applied to monitoring any organisational or institutional changes that have occurred as a result of the process. Notably, close attention has been given to follow up work, not only by the TSRA, but also to the ANAO, and ultimately the Federal Government. Events that unfolded in the last two years of the research pathway, demonstrated almost overwhelmingly a legitimate scepticism among Indigenous and non-Indigenous commentators about not only the premises, but the promises about the role of evaluation in improving Indigenous policy outcomes. Towards the end of writing, pro-evaluation rhetoric of Indigenous policy had become progressively shallow.

This section illustrates three examples that would tend to reinforce Chaney's concerns of systemic failure, referencing in particular the very institutions with a mandated obligation to improve social outcomes. It was a recognition of these criticisms that informed more clearly the undertaking of this research along with the process of the Seawalls Evaluations and establishment of the Regional Statistical Library to address and counteract concerns such as these if they were to occur in the future. However, despite the relative success of the work with the TSRA, two recent examples tend to reinforce the negative stereotypes and perceptions of evaluation in the Indigenous policy sector. The first of them concerns the ANAO's promises to conduct an assurance review of the TSRA in 2018; the second relates to the failure of the Government's lead Indigenous agency the DPMC to meet its own self-imposed Indigenous policy evaluation commitments for the Indigenous portfolio. Lastly, this section considers the calls for the capacity of the Government's evaluator, the ANAO itself to be evaluated.

8.5.1 ANAO 2018 Assurance Review in the Torres Strait

On their 2017 work program, the ANAO reported that they would be conducting an

‘Assurance Review’ of the TSRA in 2018 as a follow up to their 2013/14 Performance Audit. Here the ANAO originally suggested that the proposed follow up in 2018 was to ‘assure’ that TSRA had enacted the recommendations of their 2013/14 performance audit of the agency. It was advertised publicly on their website that this assurance review would be tabled in the Australian Parliament in the late 2018 parliamentary sitting period. However, at some stage during late 2017 there was a quite significant change to the terms of reference and scope of this follow-up ‘assurance review’ and the accompanying narrative on the ANAO website.

Without much explanation, the description of this activity was altered significantly with the result that the ANAO conducted a ‘performance audit’ of “*Coordination arrangements of Australian Government entities operating in the Torres Strait*” (ANAO, 2019, n.p website). Whereas the initial scope of the proposed assurance review was to focus primarily on the TSRA - and the extent to which it had implemented the 2013/14 recommendations - the revised body of ANAO work involved an audit with the supposed objective of assessing the effectiveness of Australian Government entities with operations in the Torres Strait region. The entities included within this revised audit were not only the TSRA but the:

- Australian Fisheries Management Authority
- Department of Agriculture and Water Resources
- Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
- Department of Home Affairs.

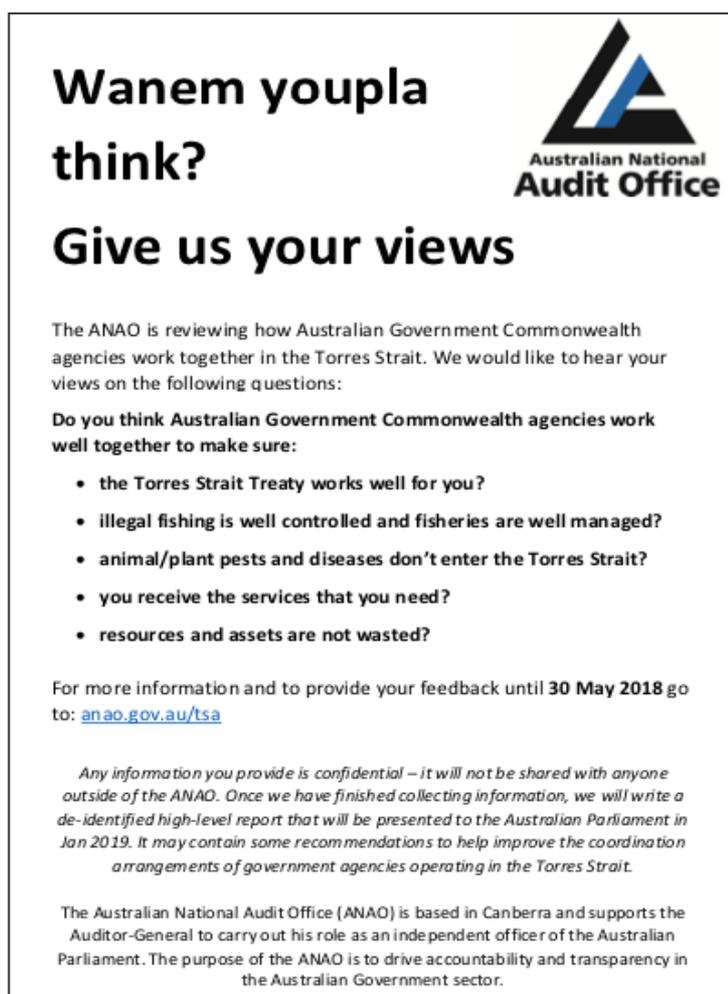
The new criteria for this 2018 ‘assurance review’ audit involved the ANAO examining whether:

“Australian Government entities operating in the Torres Strait have appropriate governance arrangements to support the coordination of their activities; and the coordination arrangements are effective in supporting Australian Government activities in the Torres Strait” (ANAO, 2019, n.p.).

Through largely internal and informal discussions among administrative staff within the TSRA it appeared as though the ANAO commenced this audit towards the end of 2017 and most of the way through 2018. As part of the process, the ANAO audit team sought to solicit community feedback by placing notices on the billboards of

the regional Island Local Government Councils and their website. The version of this notice is replicated below at Figure 8.1.

Figure 8.1: ANAO Community notice seeking Torres Strait views 2018



Wanem youpla think?

Give us your views

The ANAO is reviewing how Australian Government Commonwealth agencies work together in the Torres Strait. We would like to hear your views on the following questions:

Do you think Australian Government Commonwealth agencies work well together to make sure:

- the Torres Strait Treaty works well for you?
- illegal fishing is well controlled and fisheries are well managed?
- animal/plant pests and diseases don't enter the Torres Strait?
- you receive the services that you need?
- resources and assets are not wasted?

For more information and to provide your feedback until **30 May 2018** go to: anao.gov.au/tsa

Any information you provide is confidential – it will not be shared with anyone outside of the ANAO. Once we have finished collecting information, we will write a de-identified high-level report that will be presented to the Australian Parliament in Jan 2019. It may contain some recommendations to help improve the coordination arrangements of government agencies operating in the Torres Strait.

The Australian National Audit Office (ANAO) is based in Canberra and supports the Auditor-General to carry out his role as an independent officer of the Australian Parliament. The purpose of the ANAO is to drive accountability and transparency in the Australian Government sector.

Source: ANAO Website 2018 (since removed)

The report was originally advertised by the ANAO for release by December 2018. Then subsequently slated again for release in February 2019. Finally, the Auditor-General Report No.41 2018–19 Performance Audit – “*Coordination Arrangements of Australian Government Entities Operating in Torres Strait: Across Entities*”, was issued to the public on 29 May 2019, almost one year after beseeching the community for feedback. According to the ANAO, the cost of conducting this exercise was AU\$450,000.00. The ANAO’s stated methodology included, fieldwork, review of records, interviews and meetings with Federal, State and Local Government entities and finally; “*Interviews with, and submissions from, community members and organisations based or operating in Torres Strait*” (ANAO, 2019, p. 21)

Notwithstanding the delay in producing and issuing the evaluation report, it is immediately apparent that ANAO had omitted any mention of the community feedback it had received throughout its consultations. In none of the sixty-nine pages, which are split into four sections, is there any mention or reference whatsoever of the previous work they had undertaken for the 2013/14 review of the TSRA, or indeed any reference to community feedback, or on the efficacy or otherwise of services. There was not even any mention or discussion of what must have obviously been a complete lack of engagement or response. Furthermore, not one of the any four recommendations refer to the TSRA, or any mention of the key role it plays in service provision in the region. The only slightly critical findings are directed towards the Australian Fisheries Management Authority (AFMA) which they recommended should “*work with the Protected Zone Joint Authority’s other member entities, the TSRA and Queensland Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, to:*

- (a) finalise the Protected Zone Joint Authority annual reports for the 2015–16, 2016–17 and 2017–18 financial years and implement a process to ensure that future annual reports are published in a timely manner; and*
- (b) keep the Authority’s website up-to-date. (ANAO, 2019, p.11)*

Even supporters of the ANAO’s work could only describe this mediocre process as a waste of public funds and resources. It needs noting that the very recommendations that they had bequeathed upon the TSRA (e.g. implementing a community feedback process), were not enacted and there is a failure to articulate the reasons for this. At the very least an explanation touching on the limited or lack of engagement should have been worthy of mention.

As outlined in this thesis, a proper review needed to satisfy the expectations of: (1) having reliable and accurate statistical data which the existing assessments did not have; (2) clearly use participatory techniques to engage with the Indigenous communities which the assessments did not apply; and (3) aim at being useful to the communities themselves rather than to the evaluators in their pursuits. Without the existence of these aspects, the evaluation process becomes more representative of an ideology rather than of reliable evidence that can benefit both, the Indigenous peoples and the government authorities.

8.5.2 And yet another ANAO report!

Providing further impetus to claims that Indigenous policy, along with the accompanying evaluative agenda, is prone to ideology rather than evidence, and rhetoric as opposed to substance, is the release of the June 2019 performance audit *‘Evaluating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Programs’* (ANAO, 2019). Viewed even impartially, this report delivers evidence of another sub-standard performance by the Indigenous affairs portfolio of the DPM&C. The antecedents for this report were the inept attempts of the Government to implement its Indigenous Advancement Strategy (IAS). Being another of the Government’s flagship reforms since winning office in 2013, it was supposed to have effectively administered over \$4.8 billion in public funds over a four-year term, however a 2017 audit of the IAS undertaken by the ANAO had established that the Government had failed to administer their own policy strategy effectively.

Responding to this, in 2017, the then Minister Indigenous Affairs, announced an AU \$40 million-dollar Indigenous evaluation strategy with the supposed intention of strengthened delivery of the portfolio. Subsequently in 2018, the DPM&C made public the Government’s IAS ‘Evaluation Framework’ which was intended to deliver a commitment to comprehensive Indigenous policy and programs evaluations. Particularly important was that the stewardship that was to have been provided by the Department’s Indigenous Affairs Group (IAG), led by some of the most senior bureaucrats in the country. Thus, the objective of this 2019 ANAO report was not to audit the effectiveness of the actual, be it a few, Indigenous evaluations, but to examine “the effectiveness of the design and implementation of the departments *‘evaluation framework’* for the IAS” (ANAO, 2019, p.7).

One of the many reports, reviews, submissions and proclamations, this audit describes the dearth of performance (if not the integrity) of the most responsible department for implementing an improved Indigenous policy over a five-year period spanning 2014-18 (ANAO, 2019 p. 19). Once again, the ANAO provides evidence that even the government’s own strategy does not align with its stated higher level CtG objectives for improving Indigenous wellbeing (ANAO, 2019, p.25). This document identified misaligned government imperatives, inexorable delays to passing legislation (e.g. to appoint a productivity commissioner with oversight for ‘whole of government’ Indigenous evaluation policy), and poor specification

between short-term outputs, deliverables, outcomes and so on (see ANAO, 2019, pg. 30).

A list of criticisms of the DPM&C's (and by default the government's) handling of this relatively large amount of public funds is what follows, including in summary:

- Limited evidence senior management (IAG Executive) oversight of evaluation activity;
- Large numbers of un-published evaluations;
- Delay in establishing effective mechanisms to track evaluation recommendations and management responses;
- Limited evidence of procedures being developed to ensure evaluations conducted in adherence to the framework;
- Little ability for the department to know whether evaluation coverage was based on particular gap or need; (refer to Chapter Four)
- Lack of independence within evaluation teams (refer to Chapter Four)
- Less than approximately 60 per cent of planned evaluations on the departments' 2018/19 workplan even commencing; and, of those delays (or bottlenecks) in ministerial approval resulted in more than 50 per cent of the evaluations that were conducted not being publicly available.

It is not possible within the purview of this thesis to dissect the managerial responses to the findings from the accountable department, the DPM&C. It is worth repeating Dillion's (2019) commentary here "*These results appear to derive from policymaker's prioritisation of the perception of action over substantive action*", he wrote more scathingly that,

"it is difficult to explain the disjunction between the rhetoric of the Secretary in 2016 and the appalling delays in making substantive progress between 2014 and 2019 as anything but a process of bureaucratic game playing. In particular, the bureaucratic imperative appears to be to contrive circumstances where the department is always appearing to be moving forward, but never reaches a destination." (Dillon, 2019, n.p)

These findings and the associated negative commentary were also constantly on the periphery during the course of the research work undertaken as a part of this thesis in the Torres Strait. Obstacles that had to be constantly managed and counteracted included a general disdain for discussions on evaluation, perhaps premised on the notion of a lack of true independence (as with the Seawalls evaluation) and the general sense that any, even slightly negative, connotation or findings emerging from evaluations would result in a blame game and become politicised. This type of risk adverse sentiment had to be overcome by ensuring a level of rigour and transparency in data analysis, and the engagement of interlocutors and stakeholders at all stages of the evaluation design process consistent with participatory applied social research principles and approaches.

8.5.3 More evidence of systemic failure

An institution that regularly and consistently describes the work that it does as reviews or audits of performance without in fact addressing or effectively articulating aspects of poor, inefficient or often a complete lack of substantive performance among its key instruments of government is the ANAO. It has quite rightly earned Dillion's (2019) offer of a bleak commentary about the integrity and credibility of government action when posing valid queries, such as:

“Where are the robust recommendations on publishing evaluations undertaken with taxpayers' funds, and ensuring that evaluations are not subject to being diluted through political interference, second-guessing, concern about vested interests and the like?” (Dillion, 2019, n.p)⁵⁶.

What becomes manifestly apparent is the level of obvious disregard that the lead agency of the government has for evaluating any policy effort to improve outcomes for Australian First Nations descendants. According to Dillon (2019), the “deliberate blindness” of the lead state agency has been intentionally deployed to obfuscate its appalling lack of capability in relation to evaluating its major Indigenous programs. Rather than enunciating lacklustre conclusions labelling the department's efforts as ‘partially effective’, concrete recommendations focussed on scaling up resources and management accountability should have been decisively put (Dillon, 2019, n.p). Not

⁵⁶ In fact, Dillion described the lack of action as that akin to “marshmallow and fudge” (2019)

unsurprisingly, the paltry absence of accountability and performance not only by the DPM&C, but also by the key agency responsible for ensuring that Government is held to account has motivated Indigenous policy analysts such as Dillon to claim,

“In relation to the ANAO, it seems to me it is time for an independent evaluation of the ANAO’s performance audit capabilities and performance”
(Dillon, 2019, n.p)

Given the systemic political and policy characteristics of the key institutions of government, it is difficult to come to any other conclusions other than that the TSRA may be well placed to disregard and dismiss any audit findings of the ANAO, moreover it should overtly resist adopting any of the evaluation rhetoric of the federal government. Any contrary advice would have to surmount what is now apparent - that one of the key institutions of the government (i.e. the ANAO) is ineffective (if not somewhat inept).

8.6 Contribution to new knowledge

It is important at this juncture to reflect on some of the contributions that this research process has made to the evaluation of Indigenous programs with particular reference to the organisational and political context of services delivery in the Torres Strait Region, and more specifically a small-medium size Indigenous agency. One of the first and foremost observations pertain to those by White (2013) and others emphasising the importance of deep engagement with context (see Chapter 2). This is essential to ensuring any evaluative endeavour is able to effectively build support for the conduct of the evaluation, moreover to ensure the evaluation design and processes are quarantined to the extent possible from political and organisational obstructions.

8.6.1 Research insights into conceptual debates on IE

The discussion throughout this thesis considered systemic, political and ideological challenges that can beset the evaluation of Indigenous policy and more specifically how they influenced the conduct of this research. In terms of the heated (or raging) debates on methods e.g. randomisation (RCTs), discussed in Chapter 3 and throughout, it became clear very early in the process that establishing RCTs for TSRA’s policies and program activities, even for prospective programs, was not

palatable, either to the administration or political leadership. Some of the antecedents lay in the long history of Torres Strait Islanders regional solidarity and steadfast notions of difference concretely manifest in specific sections of ATSI Act as discussed in Chapter 2. Even the slightest mention of social policy benefits being distributed un-evenly across communities and families were met with general disdain.

This sentiment was compounded by a general sense of distrust of the region being the subject of ‘research’ more generally, particularly of non-local researchers. Moreover, even discussions about more participative evaluation methodologies including SROI were met with a degree of disdain with one of the common concerns being that communities in the region were already over-burdened by consultation fatigue, thus limiting any discussions of conducting focus groups and surveys and using any other participative techniques.

Designing and obtaining stakeholder buy-in at all levels, both within the TSRA and across the State and Local Government, for the Seawalls Infrastructure Evaluation provides an important case in point. The design laid out in Chapter 7 explains how understanding context and designing the evaluation architecture in such a way to maximise the focus on transparent data collection and analysis while minimising the focus on individuals (or bias), has greater chance of optimising the evaluation processes and thus outcomes. In this case, the positive reception of the report structure and recommendations yielded a significant financial dividend for the region.

8.6.2 Conceptual and applied activities to mitigate definitional problems and concerns

It was essential very early after commencing the research activity to introduce a number of specific behavioural and practise measures to mitigate risks and keep the evaluative process on track as planned during the candidacy. These included;

- Adoption of a consistent nomenclature when describing proposed evaluation methods and practises – minimising any perception of ‘research’ for the sake of research;

- Pursuit of alternate data collection methods in an attempt to triangulate findings (including document analysis);
- Design of tools and methods couched firmly within the TSRA organisational imperatives (i.e. data benchmarking, grants and infrastructure project applied evaluation scopes and terms of reference); and,
- Producing written outputs in a format and style that could be quickly adopted by the organisation consistent with general political and cultural objectives (see media release on the TSRA/ABS Agreement in Appendix 10).

Building on this understanding of context also allowed for the design and resourcing of a key initiative aimed at generating a far more robust monitoring opportunity for both the TSRA and other regional service delivery organisations. The Torres Strait Regional Data and Statistics Library, and the statistical literacy activities articulated in a jointly agreed partnership between the ABS and TSRA, it is hoped, will build both a more rigorous evidence base in terms of regional social, economic, environmental and service delivery trends, along with the capacity to analyse, interpret and make evidence-based decision making.

Furthermore, at a broader level, the collation, analysis and discussion of the conceptual, theoretical and practical aspects pervading the field of evaluation in social development endeavours to make a contribution to new knowledge. In this sense the narrative constructed throughout has sought to assist those who might be considering either designing or conducting evaluations of complex social programs. It has brought together at least some of the key concepts, theories and arguments of the strengths and limitations of each, tacitly with the aim of providing a menu of options in order to guide future research.

8.7 Brief reflection on sustainable development

This research commenced at the same time as adoption of what was then the new fifteen-year global development agenda the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). Thus, this project has also coincided with the first five year ‘trimester’ of the global

SDG initiative. Therefore, to an extent, it would be remiss not to at least make some reference to this work within the context of that framework. It is clear based on the discussion of the Torres Strait Seawalls Projects evaluation for example, that the region is likely to disproportionately suffer the ill effects and impacts of factors associated with climate change.

Some of these pressures include sea-level rise, loss of habitat and sustainable access and use of natural and cultural resources (fresh potable water, habitable land, community assets etc). In this sense it is interesting to note that regional leaders agreed to a climate change resilience and adaptation plan covering the period 2014 – 2018. However, and what is of relevance to this research, was that there was no reference or mention as to when or how the plan or strategy would be evaluated. Although given the discussion over the course of the research thus far this might not come as a surprise, and with the benefit of hindsight, perhaps future regional strategies and programs might consider the incorporation of how evaluation might work at the design stage of new initiatives (e.g. ex-ante or formative planning for evaluation)

Touching again to the findings of the Western Australian Legislative Assembly Health and Education Standing Committee (WAHESC) findings on the ‘*Torres Strait model*’ of governance, this provides insight into some of the key factors that have sustained the existence of the TSRA. This includes continued direct Commonwealth funding even when Indigenous representative structures for the rest of the country under ATSIC were abolished. Among its findings, the WAHESC reported on observations that as ‘*one of the most exposed parts of Australia*’; the region was:

“of growing importance from the law enforcement perspective, not only in relation to cross border crime, but also the regulation of our immigration, quarantine, fisheries and other high priority national interests” (Mcfarlane, 1998, p.1)

Observations by the WAHESC also considered the acute nature of the ‘open border’ arrangements between the Torres Strait and PNG rendering it strategically significant

with elevated anxieties over “border control, quarantine and terrorism”. These concerns included,

- *“the dramatically disparate access to food, facilities and services in PNG compared to the Torres Strait communities;*
- *concerns about the effect of global warming and rising sea levels on large coastal populations in PNG;*
- *the prevalence of AIDS and other diseases amongst the PNG population;*
- *preservation of marine species; and*
- *unlawful immigrants.” (WHSEC, 2006, p.21)*

While it is clear that service capacities, infrastructure and local amenities are placed under considerable strain due to the frequency of PNG visits. For example, the ANAO in their review of Australian government entities reported that in 2017-18 alone there were in the vicinity of 27,300 visits to the region by PNG nationals under treaty provisions. This is starkly different in the rate of reverse visitation with only approximately 1000 of the treaty village inhabitants crossing the border north (ANAO, 2019, p.4).

However, and in terms of the Queensland Productivity Commission findings of improved outcomes for Torres Strait Islanders (see Figure 2.4), it is important to reflect on the existence of the international border as a key factor in the region’s sustained way of life. As the WHSEC pointed out, by virtue of its strategic geographical significance, this has had the result of:

“the services and institutions of government, ‘ the architecture of the State’, maintaining a strong and visible presence in the remote communities of the Torres Strait region, as opposed to what has occurred in other Indigenous communities throughout Australia” (WAHESC, 2006, p.21)

Given this circumstance, there would be a compelling claim that it has been the factors above that have led to somewhat improved social and economic outcomes as opposed to the governance and performance of any particular agency.

8.8 Research limitations and directions for further research

The following section discusses at first some of the limitations encountered during the course of this research. However, perhaps more importantly it outlines possible directions for future research which may benefit from some of the learning and guidance gleaned through this research process.

8.8.1 Summary of research limitations

It is hoped that the limitations of this research work are clearly apparent. Many have been outlined at various points by virtue of the discussion on the contextual, organisational and political sensitivities. The major research limitations most likely stemmed from increasingly restricted access to qualitative inputs, direct engagement and feedback from individuals either through survey, interviews or focus groups and the like. This significantly curtailed opportunity for triangulating other sources of quantitative data and effectively ruled out the adoption of the SROI methodology, which is fundamentally premised on ascribing a value to outcomes identified by stakeholders.

Of course, some of the biases derived through the researcher's previous professional roles and interactions with certain members of the local political cadre underpinned these considerations. Another important research limitation was largely due to the absence of established baselines and benchmarks vis-à-vis pre and post programme data for many of the indicators, although this limitation did lead to small but applied research outcome represented by the formal TSRA – ABS statistical library project agreement. Thus, the establishment of suitable social, economic and governance baselines and trends data would be a key area for future work.

Moreover, the relative inexperience of the researcher in the context of 'evaluation' designs and methods led an initial scope for data collection that was far too ambitious in terms of reach in scope and complexity. Therefore, one of the most significant learning outcomes for the researcher throughout has been to acknowledge the importance of clearly defining and ascertaining the evaluation scope and timeframe well in advance of compiling data. Obviously, for an organisation with such a complex range of initiatives as the TSRA, in retrospect a choice between a smaller number of projects, programmes and or indicators may have been more beneficial and prudent. That being said, the knowledge and writing skills learned

through the considering the breadth of evaluation discourse and literature did ultimately benefit the TSRA in relation to securing additional funds (i.e. AU\$25 million) obtained by the region following the conduct of the seawalls evaluation (despite the factors outlined in Section 7.6).

8.8.2 Directions for future research

Of course, there could be much more research work that could be undertaken, particularly in the context of developing suitably sensitive and applied economic research designs and tools that are adapted to the Torres Strait context etc. Given the increasing level of hyperbole that has surrounded the area of Indigenous program evaluation for more than a decade since the abolition of ATSIC, one interesting (yet likely to be contentious) aspect is in the area of political science, more specifically identifying the degree and characteristics related to ensuring evaluation independence and guarantees of the absence of political interference. However, given previous discussion, it is unlikely that this type of evaluative work stands a high chance of success in terms of either being available to the public or informing transparent policy debate.

More specifically, there are a number of areas where further evaluative research would likely be of benefit to the TSRA and their constituent communities. Many of these have been canvassed throughout this thesis and include in summary (but not limited to):

- Effectiveness and integration of the PGPA Act reporting structures, requirements and processes as discussed in Section 5.7 of this thesis with particular reference on the effectiveness and operation of the Minister's Expectations for TSRA and the associated revised annual corporate planning and reporting mechanisms.
- Building on the analysis of the TSRA Community Grants as outlined in this research at Section 6.6. Future research directions might consider the extent to which grants have met desired objectives and outcomes including the analysis of qualitative data from recipients (to assist in triangulating financial data).

- Future research on key TSRA Portfolio Budget Statement KPIs as outlined in Chapter 6 (6.7). Given the financial allocations to each of the eight TSRA Programmes, consideration to establishing ex-ante (formative) evaluation designs in planning could be considered for each of the high level PBS KPIs highlighted including:
 - Factors, drivers and linkages between provision of business training and business loans as a precursor for an increase in to local Indigenous business ownership and economic benefit.
 - Effectiveness of support to the Fisheries sector including economic evaluation of TSRA’s financial and policy sector for Fisheries ownership.
 - Support for the Indigenous Arts and Culture sector notably the extent to which TSRA supports the transition from ‘emerging’ to professionally active arts and cultural practicioning.
 - Integration of community based management plans and desired behavioural change along with return on investment analysis for the working on country, landcare and rangers activities in communities.

In addition to the above suggestions, further research would also support and strengthen the policy architecture guiding governance, infrastructure and other programme initiatives.

8.9 Some (but by no means all) recommendations

While many of the recommendations have been touched upon previously throughout the discussion in the various Chapters and Sections of this thesis, there is benefit in reiterating them in a more condensed format. These more practical recommendations are identified to support areas of possible future research listed above with more specific guidance for applying a research proposal in context. This differs from the approach taken by the ANAO 2013/14 Audit whereby findings and discussions were aggregated into two summary recommendations. As this research suggests, by aggregating and positing recommendations as broad statements, the ANAO provided marginally tenuous links to then operationalise them (see Chapter 7, Section 7.3). Thus, the following are some (but by no means all) recommended approaches for

future evaluative work, noting that they are not listed in accordance with any particular priority:

i. Ensure written agency approvals are in place well in advance of undertaking any evaluative work.

As we have seen throughout this study, had written approvals from the TSRA leadership not been in place at all stages of this research project, there were real and ongoing risks that the TSRA may have overturned on its commitments thus placing significant risk in the hands of the researcher in terms of time, cost and reputation. Written approvals were in place prior to commencing the course of study, in advance of the brief research proposal being submitted, and prior to submission of the Doctoral Candidacy Proposal.

ii. Clearly define scope and timeframes (evaluability assessment)

As outlined in Chapter Seven, Section 7.4, significant time and resources could have been more effectively spent on conducting an early evaluability assessment as opposed to taking the initial approach as outlined in Chapter Six. Although the exploratory phase (inductive, deductive and abductive) did result in written inputs facilitating the development of the Torres Strait Regional Data and Statistics Library proposal, both narrowing and clarifying the timeframes for evaluation, ~~along with~~ a more refined focus on fewer program activities may have better suited ex-ante and cost-benefit designs for evaluation (e.g. TSRA Economic Development Program of TSRA Ranger Program).

iii. Identify key data sources and obtain approvals for data collection in advance

As discussed throughout this thesis, notably in Chapters Four (see 4.6) and Five, due to various personnel and political changes within the organisation over the course of study, opportunity to engage in survey or focus group work with stakeholders became restricted. Had clear approval been in place prior to commencing the research proper, this situation may have been avoided allowing for a more robust opportunity for data triangulation and implementation of other methods (rather than being predominantly content analysis as was ultimately the case).

iv. Clearly define stakeholders, organisational research interlocuters and a communication plan

Clearly stating the communication protocols at commencement of the research process in the research proposal and candidacy phase may have facilitated enhanced communication within the organisation on the study's objectives, processes and methods. The circumstance where the researcher reported directly to the CEO was over time less than optimal in building greater organisational engagement and rapport.

v. **Clearly document research timeframes, milestones and reporting formats**

Linking clearly documented milestones for providing updates to the political leadership of the TSRA at defined period (e.g. at TSRA Board Meetings) would likely to have increased the profile and support for both the research and raising the commitments to incorporate findings into planning cycles. Although this was achieved to a large extent with the Seawalls Evaluation and the TS Regional Data Library formal agreements, a clearer roadmap outlining timeframes and milestones may have yielded more systematic discussion of results.

The recommendations outlined above are not meant to be exhaustive as more substantive conclusions can be drawn from a reading of the various Chapters and Sections of this research thesis. It must be reiterated, that this entire research approach represented a new arrangement for the TSRA, therefore any interpretation of the discussion, findings and conclusions must be considered in that light.

8.10 Conclusion

The quote by Westbury and Dillon (2019) with which this chapter begins is to some extent is a small metaphor for how the TSRA is perceived more broadly across government and among its peers. It is arguably based on an ideological discourse rather than on claims that are premised on 'evidence' or notions of performance (Hudson, 2012; Sanders, 2010). Fortunately for the TSRA, perhaps it has been the ideological foundation that has assisted it in managing to sustain its operations throughout the tumultuous policy pulsing which is a perennial characteristic of the Indigenous affairs policy landscape.

Quotations such as that mentioned, represent a long list of examples whereby the TSRA governance model has been actively promoted as the realisation of Indigenous

regional autonomy, community control and self-determination (see QLD Productivity Commission, 2017). Despite the complexity associated with demonstrating and reporting on performance effectiveness, the TSRA model has been mooted as the fundamental factor in the region producing somewhat better social outcomes when compared to other First Nations communities in mainland Australia. Nevertheless, there are still some stark social gaps in comparison to non-Indigenous Australians in terms of indicators of social and economic well-being outcomes. However, as this thesis points out, there is a likelihood that factors more associated with geography, sovereignty and border control, such as those outlined by the WAHEC could have more significance in the regions' relative advantages by virtue of increased levels of funding and resources.

What was originally intended to be a mutually beneficial exercise whereby the research work was planned to assist the TSRA in refining and developing a unique and cutting-edge monitoring and evaluation framework, while significantly enhanced, may have been capitalised upon further. Originally conceived as a win-win process, whereby the researcher could apply the knowledge and experience based on an existing understanding of the region, its culture, and its people, this also did not technically evolve as planned. In fact, it is rather amazing given the level of political and personnel change within the organisation that the research journey continued without some major disruption or local controversy.

The possible reasons for this are numerous, with some of the fundamental concerns heralding back to the discussions put by Chaney (2013) that evaluations are either – or: a) self-serving and biased towards the agenda of those that commission them (or even the evaluators themselves; b) a euphemism for conducting an audit-punish process; and c) the view that evaluation is an unnecessary use of funds that could better be spent supporting direct project or service delivery.

However, despite the various limitations that became manifest, there were some notable achievements that have occurred as a result of this research. As outlined in Section 8.6 of this Chapter, this research did eventually make a significant contribution to new knowledge about the evaluation of development activities in the Torres Strait region. In this regard it has technically addressed the research objectives as outlined initially in Chapter 1, notably the primary research question which sought an examination of the ways in which the TSRA had made an impact on the wellbeing

of Torres Strait Indigenous residents, and how might these development impacts be effectively assessed. To this end, the evaluation design, structure and Terms of Reference for the evaluation of the Torres Strait Seawalls Project along with the outcome of the evaluation provide a robust template for future evaluations of complex remote infrastructure projects in the region. This can be aligned with meeting the study's Research Objectives two and three.

Moreover, the architecture and scope as articulated in the Torres Strait Regional Data and Statistics Library Project, which was approved and ratified by both the TSRA and the ABS at the end of 2018, provide a tangible and practical example (and template) which addresses again research objectives two and three while also providing by virtue of its scope and terms of reference, a design template or methodology suitable for transferability to other Indigenous place-based settings. Although the learning process has been immense, it is with a great degree of personal relief that this research has reached these conclusions.

POSTSCRIPT

It seems that 2019 has not been an outlier in terms of the policy pulsing and churn that besets the Indigenous affairs portfolio of government in Australia. In April 2019, the Australian Treasurer directed the federal Productivity Commission to “*develop a whole of Government Evaluation Strategy for policies and programs affecting Indigenous Australians*” (PC, 2019, p. 45). Then, following the federal election in May 2019, in June 2019, the second term Prime Minister, announced that the previous Indigenous Affairs Group (IAG) (i.e. those with stewardship of the Indigenous Evaluation Strategy, outlined in the concluding Chapter of the thesis), would become a stand-alone executive agency within the DPMC, the National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA). These two developments are worthy subjects of further comment.

Firstly, according to the Treasurer’s letter of transmission to the PC, the scope of the ‘whole-of-government’ Indigenous evaluation strategy is to be founded on a principles based framework for policies and programs affecting Indigenous Australians, and a subsequent discussion paper seeks to identify priorities for the said evaluations along with clarifying the PC’s approach to them. There is little mention of the previous work undertaken on the framework by the DPMC and no mention of the ANAO’s scorecard on the less than effective implementation of it. Therefore, there is significant potential for work under that framework (including presumably the evaluations that were commissioned) to be if not duplicated, then to an extent replicated. Besides clarification on the PC’s remit, would this new IES mooted for introduction by 2020 subsume or set aside the DPMC’s IAS evaluation framework?

Secondly the PC’s June 2019 Indigenous Evaluation Issues paper is littered with much of the rhetoric explained in detail in Chapter 8. It is unclear at the time of writing how the PC intends to ensure that political interference and bias will be eliminated when evaluating the Indigenous services provided by larger mainstream agencies. Moreover, the issues paper does not make substantial reference to the establishment of an executive branch within the DPMC i.e. the NIAA. More cynical observers take the view that many policies and programs designed and funded to close the gap in wellbeing outcomes for First Nations communities, particularly in the remotest regions of the country have been shambolic and an embarrassment at

Postscript

best, and an utter failure at worst. A plethora of audits and reports have failed to ensure promised outcomes are realised. It is therefore perhaps fitting to conclude this thesis with the question of whether these two announcements are further examples of a calculated game of smoke and mirrors designed to ensure policy rhetoric continues to mask what transpires in reality?

APPENDICES

Appendix 1.

Research Approvals

----- Forwarded message -----

From: **SEE KEE Wayne** <Wayne.SFEKEE@tsra.gov.au>
 Date: Mon, Aug 15, 2016 at 4:50 PM
 Subject: RE: Brian Riley - Doctoral presentation and seeking endorsement of Draft research candidacy proposal - Measuring Social Impact [UNCLASSIFIED] [SEC=UNCLASSIFIED]
 To: Brian Riley <briley.tsconsult@gmail.com>
 Cc: BANI Mary <Mary.BANI@tsra.gov.au>

Hi Brian,

Sorry for the delay in getting back to you. I've spoken to the Chair and am happy to support this proposal for submission. Let me know if you need any further information.

Thanks.

Wayne.

Unclassified Email

This transmission is intended only for the use of the addressee and may contain confidential or legally privileged information. If you are not the intended recipient, you are notified that any use or dissemination of this communication is strictly prohibited. If you have received this transmission in error, please notify us immediately by telephone on 01-7-4269700 and delete all copies of this transmission together with any attachments.

----- Forwarded message -----

From: **SEE KEE Wayne** <Wayne.SFEKEE@tsra.gov.au>
 Date: Mon, Jun 20, 2016 at 10:36 AM
 Subject: RE: Brian Riley - Doctoral presentation and seeking endorsement of Draft research candidacy proposal - Measuring Social Impact [UNCLASSIFIED]
 To: Brian Riley <briley.tsconsult@gmail.com>, BANI Mary <Mary.BANI@tsra.gov.au>

Hi Brian,

Thanks for the email and for the catch up on Friday 10/6/16.

1. I will get feedback to you later this week - have dedicated time to get this done. FYI - I am on leave from next Monday 27/6 - Tuesday 5/7/16;
2. I will also run this past the TSRA Chair in particular the additional information on Ethical issues;
3. I will send an email to Adrian to contact you.

Speak to you soon.

Cheers.

Wayne.

Appendix 2 – Torres Governance Timeline of events - Torres Strait Islands Regional Council (TSIRC).

Governance history

Governance History, listed chronologically

When	What	Who
Pre-1872	People of the Torres Strait govern themselves as entirely sovereign peoples.	Torres Strait Islanders
1871	Christian missionaries land on Erub. The date, 1 July, is now celebrated annually across the Torres Strait as "The Coming of the Light".	Missionary/Church
1872	Queensland Government annexes all Torres Strait islands within a 60 nautical mile radius of the coast of Queensland.	State & Federal Government
1879	Queensland Coast Islands Act (Qld) annexes the remaining islands of Boigu, Erub, Mer and Saibai.	State & Federal Government
1885	Resident Magistrate the Hon. John Douglas appointed to the Torres Strait. Serves from 1885 until his death in 1904.	State & Federal Government
1897	Douglas firmly and successfully opposes Torres Strait Islanders becoming subject to the Queensland <i>Aboriginals Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Acts</i> .	State & Federal Government
1899	Protector appointed to Thursday Island, principally engaged in overseeing the employment of mainland Aboriginal people in the fisheries.	State & Federal Government
1899	John Douglas instituted a system of island councils to replace the previous system of "vamooses" (island leaders). Torres Strait Islanders were responsible for their own councils, police and courts and empowered to deal with minor crimes through imprisonment or fines. A court house and a gaol were built in every community, along with a church, school and store.	State & Federal Government

Appendices

1904	Reverend Frederick Walker of the London Missionary Society establishes Pacific Industries Ltd (PIL) to assist Torres Strait Islanders become boat owners, skippers and crews in the fishing industry.	Missionary/Church
1904	Resident Magistrate the Hon. John Douglas passes away.	State & Federal Government
1904	Queensland government uses the death of John Douglas as an opportunity to put Torres Strait Islanders under the <i>Aboriginals Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Acts</i> , known as "the dog act".	State & Federal Government
1912 - 1926	Island "reserves" gazetted by the Queensland government. Superintendent / teachers appointed, curfew and pass systems imposed on people, wages placed under Protector's control. Thus, although Island Councils continued their authority was greatly restricted.	State & Federal Government
1930 - 1934	PIL taken over by the Queensland Government and renamed Aboriginal Industries Board.	State & Federal Government
1936	Major strike to protest the Protector and his agent's rule over the Torres Strait	Torres Strait Islanders
August 1937	First conference of Torres Strait Islander Councillors. Demands on the Queensland Government included improved services, an end to unpopular regulations and the transfer of power from superintendent-teachers to local councils.	Torres Strait Islanders
1939	Second conference of Torres Strait Islander Councillors held. After this conference a new Act is developed based around some of the key changes requested by Councillors.	Torres Strait Islanders
1939	Queensland Government repealed its previous Protection legislation and passed the <i>Torres Strait Islanders Act</i> , for the first time legally recognising Islanders as a separate people. Many restrictions remain.	State & Federal Government
1941	Torres Strait Islander Infantry formed.	State & Federal Government
1947	The first small group of Torres Strait Islanders were officially permitted to travel to the mainland to work.	State & Federal Government
1962	Torres Strait Islanders obtain the right to vote in Federal elections.	State & Federal Government
1964	Torres Strait Islanders obtain the right to vote in State elections.	State & Federal Government
1965	The <i>Torres Strait Islander Act</i> of 1939 is repealed and replaced by the <i>Aborigines and Torres Strait Islander Affairs Act</i> . Almost all the restrictive clauses under the previous Act were removed, including the old restrictions on the right to travel to the mainland.	State & Federal Government
December 1978	Torres Strait Treaty signed by the Australian and Papua New Guinea governments, defining the boundaries between the two countries and the use of the sea by both parties.	State & Federal Government
May 1982	The Mabo Native Title claim commenced, lodged by Eddie Mabo and four other claimants.	Torres Strait Islanders
1984	<i>Community Services (Torres Strait) Act 1984</i>	State & Federal Government
February 1985	Torres Strait Treaty came into operation.	State & Federal Government
1988	Torres Strait Leaders Forum calls for greater self-determination	Torres Strait Islanders
1992	Mabo Native Title determination.	State & Federal Government
1994	TSRA established.	State & Federal Government
1997	<i>Torres Strait Islanders: A new deal – A Report on Greater Autonomy for Torres Strait Islanders</i> report to House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs.	State & Federal Government
2001	TSRA Greater Autonomy Task Force <i>Bamaga Accord</i> .	Torres Strait Islanders & State & Federal Government
2008	TSIRC and NPARC formed.	State & Federal Government
2009	TSNPA Regional Plan 2009-2029 created in collaboration between TSRA, TSIRC, TSC and NPARC.	Torres Strait Islanders & Federal Government
October 2011	Queensland Premier calls for the Prime Minister to support the move to greater regional autonomy in the Torres Strait.	State & Federal Government
May 2013	Deputation to Prime Minister Abbott regarding territorial status for the Torres Strait region.	Torres Strait Islanders

May 2014	Joint Leaders' Forum Coalition Executive meeting calls for a new governance model.	Torres Strait Islanders
June 2014	Deputation to Prime Minister Abbott.	Torres Strait Islanders
June 2015	Deputation to Mr Warren Entsch MP and Senator the Hon Nigel Scullion regarding governance reform.	Torres Strait Islanders
August 2015	Deputation to Prime Minister Abbott.	Torres Strait Islanders
May 2016	Deputations to Federal Government Ministers, Shadow Ministers and cross-bench members of Parliament.	Torres Strait Islanders
July 2016	Deputation to Premier of Queensland, Hon. Anastacia Palaszczuk	Torres Strait Islanders
October 2016	Deputations to Queensland Government Ministers	Torres Strait Islanders

<http://www.tsirc.qld.gov.au/changing-region/governance-history>

Source: Torres Strait Islands Regional Council (TSIRC)

APPENDIX 3.

Apologise

Herron under fire over comments

Aboriginal leaders have remarked an apology after Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs Minister John Herron claimed there was a rift between traditional Aboriginals and 'mixed blood' people. The comments, reported in a national newspaper, have worsened even further relations between the Aboriginal leadership and Senator Herron.

The minister sparked more anger earlier last month when he dismissed calls for a formal apology over the stolen generations as 'blackmail', and attacked 'veteran' Aboriginal leaders, saying they should stand aside for younger blood.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commissioner (ATSIC), which earlier this year passed a no-confidence motion in Senator Herron, condemned his 'mixed blood' comments, saying they were offensive and calculated to divide indigenous people.

Commissioners called for a public apology. ATSIC has also raised new fears that the Federal Government is set to 'gut' funding for indigenous affairs.

● Full reports - Page 2
● Eastwood's comment - Page 8

Australian Football stars feature in special calendar - Page 11

Herron a friend - TSRA

Torres Strait Regional Authority (TSRA) chairman John Abednego has warmly congratulated Senator John Herron for being reappointed Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs.

"I am pleased to see that the Prime Minister has reappointed Senator Herron to this most important portfolio as he has proved himself a true friend of the TSRA and Torres Strait Islanders," he said.

"Senator Herron's commitment to improvements in basic health infrastructure and economic development is fully supported by the TSRA.

"Over the last two years the TSRA has been able to build an effective working relationship with Senator Herron and the Coalition Government based on a mutual commitment of accountability and lifting the living standards of Torres Strait Islanders and Aboriginal people living in the region.

"Senator Herron's commitment to furthering autonomy in the Torres Strait proves that not only is he interested in lifting the living standards and economic opportunities for the Torres Strait region, but he is also keen to engage and participate in the debate of further self-determination

People 'winning' over Herron

Senior Queensland indigenous leader and ATSIC commissioner Terry O'Shane says Australians are now 'winning' at almost every statement Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs Minister John Herron makes. Commenting on the minister's attack on 'veteran' indigenous leaders, Mr O'Shane said Senator Herron, who is 66, looks a bit silly slinging off at the longevity of senior Aboriginal leaders.

Senator Herron had called for 'veteran' Aboriginal people to stand aside and make way for younger blood in the leadership.

"This is a case the 'pot calling the kettle black,'" he said. "Senator Herron continues to leave himself wide open to ridicule, so much so, that many people now 'win' when they hear John Herron make statements like this on indigenous affairs.

"He looks even more foolish when you note that leaders such as (Kimberley Land Council director) Peter Yu is one of the 'new generation' of Aboriginal leaders. The Dodson brothers, Mick and Patrick, would be considered 'young blood' if they were elected to parliament.

"And as indigenous are highly intelligent in this country senior leadership leaders are the best of their kind contribute indigenous

Statement sparks new ATSIC fears

The Howard Government has no mandate to 'gut' the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission by stripping it of its major programs, the ATSIC Board of Commissioners says. Commissioners are deeply concerned by a statement from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs Minister John Herron that the Government has a plan to further attack ATSIC.

Senator Herron was quoted in an interview that the Government had intended to announce substantial changes to ATSIC during the Federal election campaign but decided against it for fear of promoting the One Nation agenda

outcome for indigenous people.

"The Prime Minister has acknowledged that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are the most disadvantaged section of our community," he said.

"The ATSIC board has consistently sought the best possible working relationship with the Government and they should seek to do the same with us, although we accept there will be sharp policy differences on a range of issues including native title, heritage, the GST and the Government response to the recent review of the NT Land Rights Act."

Mr Djernkura said the board was particularly looking forward to developing a constructive relationship with the Minister

JOHN HERRON
about politics, rather than good

APPENDIX 4.

VI. Selected IER Websites: Individual features and limitations

The following section includes a brief overview of the 22 websites searched, the particular strategies employed, and the number of records returned for later screening. The websites were searched and strategies finalized between April and May of 2013. The current total number of records obtained from website resources (before removing duplicates) is 20,971. Again, because websites are frequently updated with new search functionalities and thesaurus terms, many of the strategies outlined below are likely to be amended in future rounds of searching.

Table 2. Website search results (round 1)

Websites	Result Types	Hits by Type	Total Hits	Date
Bureau for Research and Economic Analysis of Development (BREAD)	Working Papers	274	314	4/12/2013
	Policy Papers	40		
Centre for Global Development (CGD)	Working Papers	317	401	4/12/2013
	Policy Papers	17		
	Reports	67		
International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI)	Resources	309	1,014	4/12/2013
	Publications Repository	705		
Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab (JPAL)	Evaluations	371	652	4/12/2013
	Academic Publications	281		
	Focus: Research	149		
Innovations for Poverty Action (IPA)	Focus: Policy and Practice	20	189	4/22/2013
	Focus: Methodology	20		
	Working Papers (WP)	4,497		
The World Bank	Policy Research WP's	3,261	9,298	4/22/2013
	WP Numbered Series	1,426		
	Journal Articles	114		
World Bank Development Impact Evaluation Initiative (DIME)	Working Papers	84	257	4/12/2013
	Database	173		
IE ² Impact Evaluations in Education, beta version (World Bank)	Developing Countries and Multi-country search only	149	149	4/23/2013
Rural Education Action Project (REAP)	Journal Articles	45	196	4/12/2013
	Academic Publications	98		
	Reports	16		
	Working Papers	37		
The Inter-American Development Bank	Working Papers	69	87	4/12/2013
(IDB)	Discussion Papers	18	2,454	4/12/2013
Department for International Development (DFID)	Journal Articles / Research Papers	970		
	Reports	1,484		
Overseas Development Institute (ODI)	Research Reports and Studies (General)	853	1,582	4/12/2013
	Discussion Papers	729		
Chronic Poverty Research Centre (CPRC)	All Working Papers	214	303	4/12/2013
	India WPs	53		
	West Africa WPs	6		
	Bangladesh WPs	17		
	Journal Articles	13		
Governance and Social Development Resource Centre (GSDRC)	Document Library Search	222	222	4/12/2013
The National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER)	Publications, Working Papers, and Tabular Results	983	983	4/12/2013
University of California: Center for Effective Global Action (CEGA)	All studies	65	109	4/22/2013
	Working Paper Series	44		
	Impact Evaluation Studies	28		
Asian Development Bank (ADB): Evaluation Resources	Search: "impact"	284	824	4/19/2013
	Search: "effectiveness"	508		
	Search: "random"	4		
	Abstract Search: "impact"	66		
Poverty and Economic Policy Research Network (PEP)	Abstract Search: "effect"	60	132	4/19/2013
	Abstract Search: "random"	6		
	Boolean Search Strategy	260		
USAID Development Experience Clearinghouse	Boolean Search Strategy	260	260	4/23/2013
OECD Development Assistance Committee Evaluation Resource Center (DEReC)	All Publications & Documents	1098	1098	4/19/2013
African Development Bank (AfDB) Evaluation Reports	Evaluation Working Paper	18	438	4/19/2013
	Evaluation Report Summary	10		
	Working Paper Series	138		
	Project Evaluations	272		
Millennium Challenge Corporation	"Completed" Studies	9	9	4/23/2013
Total Search Results			20,971	4/23/2013

APPENDIX 5.

3ie criteria

Studies may exist anywhere on the continuum of effectiveness vs. efficacy. Typically, efficacy studies examine treatment outcomes under highly controlled conditions. Effectiveness studies go beyond laboratory trials and examine interventions in real world settings. Note that RCTs that only address the biomedical efficacy of a drug or treatment should be excluded. The following are screening guidelines to help make this judgment:

If any of these conditions are met in addition to methodological criteria in #6 above, select "Yes":

1. The intervention under study promotes a social, economic, or behavioural change either as one of the final measured outcomes or as a mechanism within the theory of change (beyond the self-administration of a drug). For example, the study may include health / behavioural messaging, training, provision of information, or screening / surveillance for specific disease conditions.
2. The study measures any other outcomes in addition to or beyond purely biomedical indicators (such as returns to education, economic productivity, quality of life, disability adjusted life years, or spillover effects)
3. The study measures the cost-effectiveness or cost-benefit of the treatment(s).
4. The study records any additional formative information that could guide the design or execution of future studies. For example, an RCT that also measures acceptability of a particular treatment (measuring respondent satisfaction with treatment not merely a rate of compliance or uptake) would be included.
5. The treatment is both prepared and delivered by a community health worker, or trained layperson (such as a parent, teacher, or community member and not merely one of the program or study enumeration team).
6. The program or outcomes measured answer, or attempt to answer, a question relevant to the roll-out of international development policies or interventions.

APPENDIX 6.

Part 3A—Torres Strait Regional Authority

Division 1—Torres Strait Regional Authority

142 Torres Strait Regional Authority

- (1) A Torres Strait Regional Authority is established.
- (2) The TSRA:
 - (a) is a body corporate, with perpetual succession; and
 - (b) is to have a common seal; and

- (c) may acquire, hold and dispose of real and personal property; and
- (d) may sue and be sued in its corporate name.

Note: The *Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013* applies to the TSRA. That Act deals with matters relating to corporate Commonwealth entities, including reporting and the use and management of public resources.

- (3) The common seal of the TSRA is to be kept in such custody as the TSRA directs and must not be used except as authorised by the TSRA.
- (4) All courts, judges and persons acting judicially must:
 - (a) take judicial notice of the imprint of the common seal of the TSRA appearing on a document; and
 - (b) presume that the imprint was duly affixed.

Division 2—Functions of TSRA

142A Functions of TSRA

Functions

- (1) The TSRA has the following functions:
 - (a) to recognise and maintain the special and unique Ailan Kastom of Torres Strait Islanders living in the Torres Strait area;
 - (b) to formulate and implement programs for Torres Strait Islanders, and Aboriginal persons, living in the Torres Strait area;
 - (c) to monitor the effectiveness of programs for Torres Strait Islanders, and Aboriginal persons, living in the Torres Strait area, including programs conducted by other bodies;
 - (d) to develop policy proposals to meet national, State and regional needs and priorities of Torres Strait Islanders, and Aboriginal persons, living in the Torres Strait area;
 - (e) to assist, advise and co-operate with Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal communities, organisations and individuals at national, State, Territory and regional levels;
 - (f) to advise the Minister on:
 - (i) matters relating to Torres Strait Islander affairs, and Aboriginal affairs, in the Torres Strait area, including the administration of legislation;
 - (ii) the co-ordination of the activities of other Commonwealth bodies that affect Torres Strait Islanders, or Aboriginal persons, living in the Torres Strait area;
 - (g) when requested by the Minister, to provide information or advice to the Minister on any matter specified by the Minister;
 - (h) to take such reasonable action as it considers necessary to protect Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal cultural material and information relating to the Torres Strait area if the material or information is considered sacred or otherwise significant by Torres Strait Islanders or Aboriginal persons;
 - (i) at the request of, or with the agreement of, the Australian Bureau of Statistics but not otherwise, to collect and publish statistical information relating to Torres Strait Islanders, and Aboriginal persons, living in the Torres Strait area;
 - (j) such other functions as are conferred on the TSRA by this Act or any other Act;
 - (k) such other functions as are expressly conferred on the TSRA by a law of a State or of an internal Territory and in respect of which there is in force written approval by the Minister under section 142B;

Appendices

- (l) to undertake such research as is necessary to enable the TSRA to perform any of its other functions;
- (m) to do anything else that is incidental or conducive to the performance of any of the preceding functions.

TSRA not to disregard Aboriginal tradition and custom

- (2) The express mention in paragraph (1)(a) of the Ailan Kastom of Torres Strait Islanders living in the Torres Strait area does not imply that the TSRA may disregard Aboriginal tradition and custom.

Minister may require information about expenditure

- (3) The information that may be required by the Minister under paragraph (1)(g) includes, but is not limited to, information about the TSRA's expenditure.

Minister must not specify content of information

- (4) When requesting information under paragraph (1)(g), the Minister must not specify the content of the information that is to be provided.

TSRA must not disclose certain material or information

- (5) In performing its function under paragraph (1)(h), the TSRA must ensure that the material or information covered by that paragraph is not disclosed by the TSRA if that disclosure would be inconsistent with the views or sensitivities of relevant Torres Strait Islanders or Aboriginal persons.

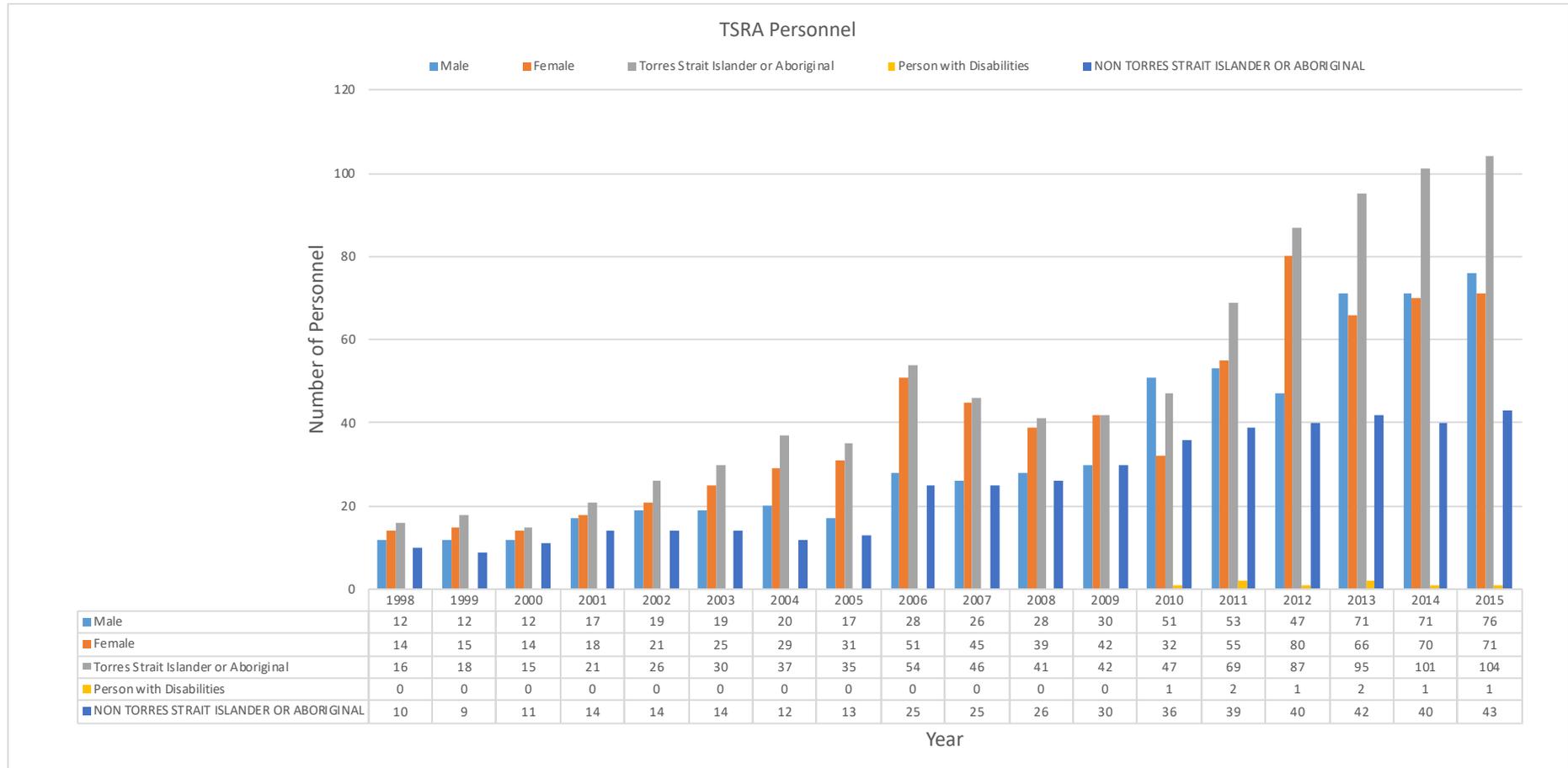
TSRA must ensure that privacy is not infringed

- (6) In performing its function under paragraph (1)(i), the TSRA must ensure that the collection and publication of statistical information covered by that paragraph does not infringe the privacy of any individual.

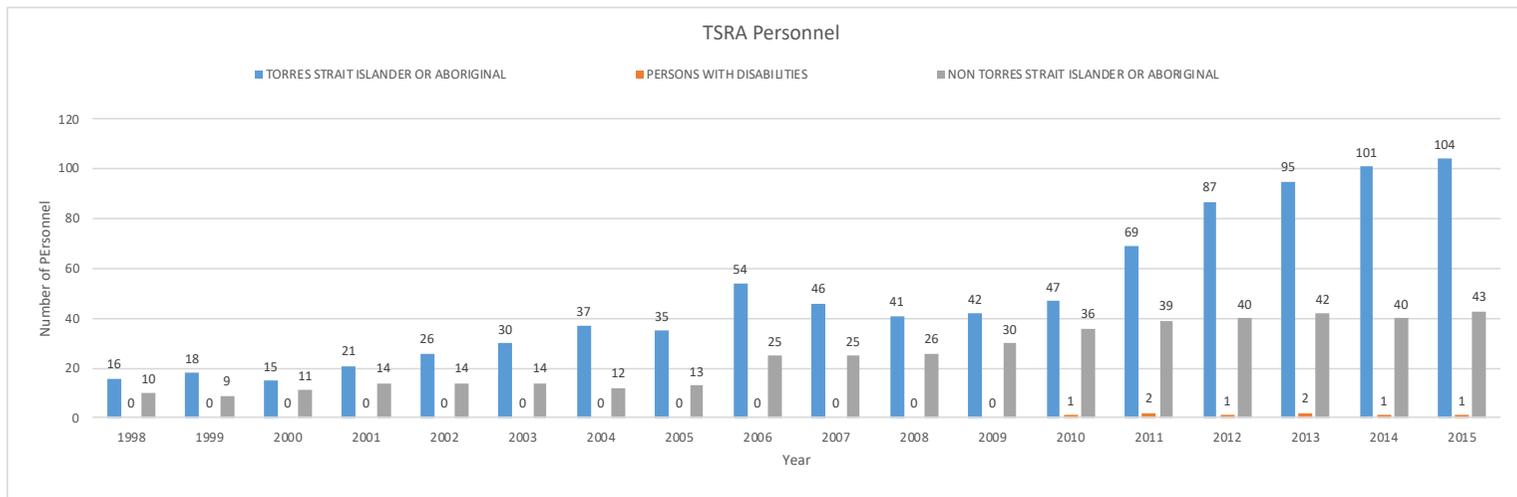
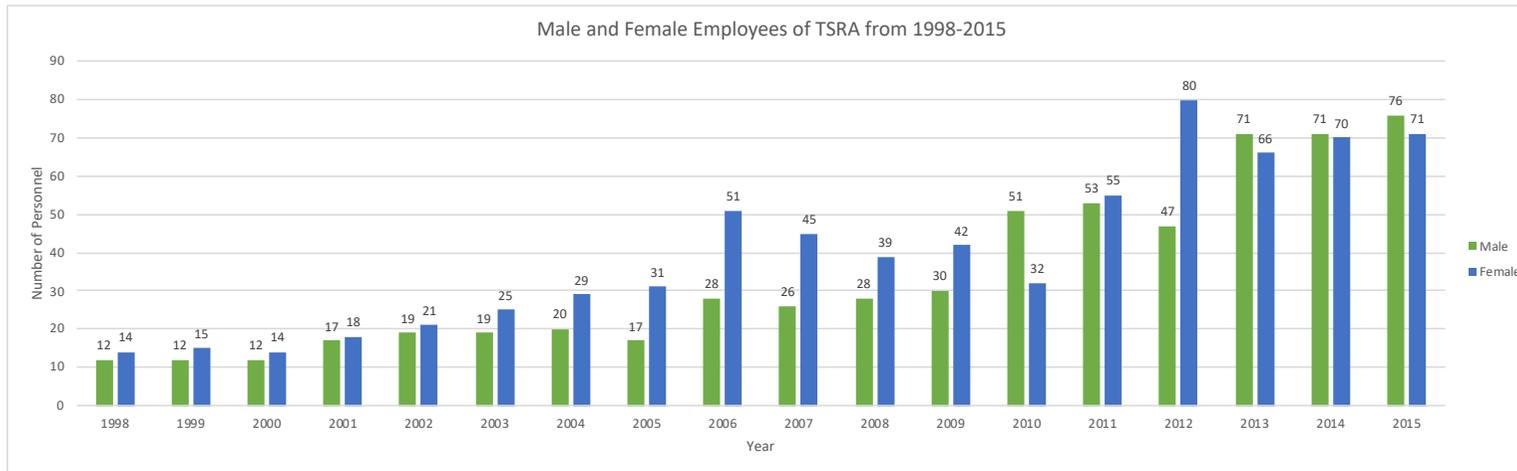
Limitations on TSRA's function to acquire land

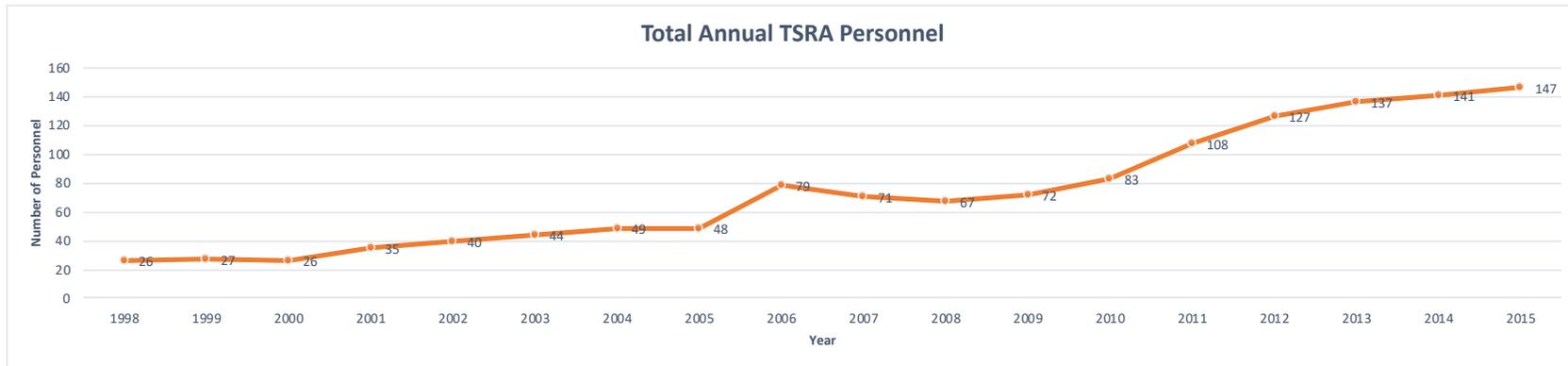
- (7) This Act does not confer on the TSRA a function of acquiring land except:
 - (a) for its administrative purposes; or
 - (b) for the purpose of the performance of functions expressly conferred on it by this Act.

Appendix 7. Analysis of TSRA Staffing (1998 - 2015)



Appendix 8. Analysis of Staffing by Gender and Physically challenged





Appendix 9. TSRA Programme Indicators 2014-2018

TSRA Programs	Projects and activities listed in 2014-18 TSDP	Stated Outcomes
4. Economic Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - concessional home loans - concessional business loans - business training - business support services. 	<p>[ED-1] Increased capability of Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal People in the region to manage commercially viable businesses. [ED-2] Improved access to capital and other opportunities to finance commercially viable businesses.[ED-3] Increased number of commercially viable businesses owned and or operated by Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal people in the region. [ED-4] Improved wealth of Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal people in the region.</p>
5. Fisheries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - engaging in the PZJA and supporting engagement of Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal people in PZJA decision-making - providing opportunities to develop the capability and capacity of Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal people to benefit from fisheries in the region - assisting communities to engage in program activities - managing access to fisheries resources held in trust for Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal people of the region. 	<p>[FI-1] A commercially viable fishing industry which is 100 per cent owned by Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal people.</p> <p>[FI-2] Improved wealth of Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal people of the region.</p> <p>[FI-3] Sustainable management of fisheries resources.</p>
6. Native Title	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - progress and successfully negotiate ILUAs - progress and successfully negotiate Native Title claims - perform the functions of a Native 	<p>[NT-1] Changes to Native Title and Fisheries legislation which recognise the commercial rights as part of the Native Title rights of Traditional Owners under the Torres Strait Sea Claim Part A determination. [NT-2] Successfully negotiated Future Acts and Indigenous Land Use</p>

List of tables

	<p>Title Representative Body under the Native Title Act</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - develop proposals regarding legislation that impacts on Native Title. 	<p>Agreements. [NT-3] Native Title claims are successfully determined. [NT-4] PBCs understand and meet their responsibilities under the Native Title Act.</p>
<p>7. Environmental Management</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Biodiversity planning and management - Invasive species - Sustainable horticulture - Turtle and dugong planning and management - Marine biodiversity - Water quality - State of the environment report card - Ranger project - Indigenous protected areas project - Traditional ecological knowledge project - Traditional Owner engagement - Climate change adaptation and resilience - Renewable energy - Number of actions in the Climate Change Strategy and associated action plans implemented. - Number of agreements in place with energy providers to reduce reliance on non-renewable diesel fuel usage for electricity production. - Number of inhabited islands with active food producing community gardens in place. 	<p>[EM-1] Strengthened sustainable use, protection and management of natural and cultural resources.</p> <p>[EM-2] Improved community adaptation to climate change impacts, including sea level rise.</p> <p>[EM-3] Increased uptake of renewable energy for Torres Strait.</p> <p>[EM-4] Support community sustainable horticulture.</p>
<p>8. Governance and Leadership</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - governance capacity building - leadership capacity building - PBC capacity building 	<p>[G&L-1] Implementation of the National Indigenous Reform Agreement service delivery principles. [G&L-2] Appropriate Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal participation in</p>

List of tables

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Integrated Service Delivery (ISD) coordination - community engagement - women’s leadership program - youth leadership program - tertiary education assistance - regional broadcasting support 	<p>decision-making. [G&L-3] Improved communication, cultural competence and service delivery within a community development framework across governments. [G&L-4] Strong Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal organisational leadership and governance. [G&L-5] Strong Prescribed Bodies Corporate leadership and governance.</p>
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Appendix 10: TSRA KPIs 2017-18 Portfolio Budget Statements

Year	Performance criteria	Targets
2017-18	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • increase in the number of Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal owned commercially viable businesses • increased availability of approved business training • increases in catches by Torres Strait and Aboriginal Fishers relative to total allowable catch, strengthening claims for increased ownership • increase in the number of emerging and professionally active artists and cultural practitioners that have access to information and support to ensure copyright and intellectual property rights • number of Native Title claims successfully determined • number of Indigenous Land Use Agreements (ILUA) that have compensation or other benefits as part of ILUA terms • number of endorsed community based management plans for the natural and cultural resources of the region being actively implemented • increase the level of engagement of elected Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal leaders in policy development and decision-making • number of PBCs that achieve Office of the Registrar of Indigenous Corporations (ORIC) compliance as at 31 December each year • increased investment into new and existing regional environmental health infrastructure. <p>In addition to the criteria above:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the percentage ownership of Torres Strait Commercial Fisheries by Torres Strait Islanders and Aboriginal People in the region • improve regional environmental health, telecommunication and marine infrastructure. 	<p>The Benefits and Targets for each of the TSRA’s eight activity areas are set out in the TSRA’s (2014-2018) Development Plan.</p>
2018-19 and beyond	As per 2017-18.	As per 2017-18.
Purposes	The TSRA’s Purpose Statement, in the Corporate plan – is the same as the TSRA’s Outcome Statement above.	

Source: (DPM&C, 2017, p. 305)

Appendix 10: TSRA/ABS Media Release Regional Data



Appendix 11: TSRA/ABS Regional Statistics Library project Scope

RSDSL Stage 1 Data Output Delivery Schedule: Project Planning & Information Gathering

Task
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Demography of the Torres Strait region <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Population size (incl. age and gender composition) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Age by indigenous status ○ Age by sex ○ Sex / age / indigenous status ▪ Family size <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Counts of persons in family ○ Family composition ▪ Mobility and service populations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Household mobility indicators - 1 and 5 years ○ Place of usual residence – 1 and 5 years ▪ Age ratios <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Within other tables ▪ Population projections <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ For review (data set too small)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Housing and infrastructure <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Housing (tenure, land release) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Home ownership as a whole (by indigenous if possible) ○ Home ownership as a whole ▪ Environmental health infrastructure (not captured in census)

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Estimates of future housing needs (review internally based on the demographic data)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Social and support services <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ For families, older persons, youth, children etc ▪ Disability services
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Health status <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Estimations of mortality ▪ Cause of death ▪ Hospital separations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ AH&W collection (need to confirm) ▪ Hospitalisation diagnoses <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ AH&W collection (need to confirm) ▪ Primary health status (incl. chronic & long term health conditions) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Social survey from 2002 ▪ Smoking ▪ Alcohol ▪ Chronic child health? ▪ Child health <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Nutrition ▪ BMI ▪ Long term health ▪ Involvement in sport and rec ▪ Nutrition <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Fruit and veg intake / all age groups where possible ▪ Health-related quality of life assessment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Self-assessed health status (from 2002) ▪ Overall life satisfaction (only 14/15 data) – future stage / separate from time series data ▪ Primary health care services <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Patient experience ▪ Visited casualty, emergency hospital - TI & Bamaga (if possible) ▪ Level of trust (from 2008 & 2014/15) ▪ Access to services (from 2008 & 2014/15) ▪ Patient experience (from 2008 & 2014/15) (some data need to investigate comparability) ▪ Sport and recreation participation/activities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Sporting, social or community activities in Last 12 month (some data 2008) ▪ Participated in sport, number and type (from 2008, 14/15). ▪ Child sports <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ How many days in last week child physical active (2008, 14/15) ▪ Whether child played organised sport in the last 12 month (2008, 14/15)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Education and training

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Participation in schooling <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Type of institution attending ○ Attendance (ABS need to check availability, reported by parent / may not be accurate – review inclusion) ▪ Educational Outcomes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Educational outcomes (year completed) ○ Highest educational level achieved (group by age & sex) ▪ Participation in vocational education and training <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Level ○ Course <p>Limited ability to separate people living in TS region from broader TS population.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Regional involvement in the criminal justice system <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Legal services (criminal, civil, family; advice, casework, lawyer etc) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Whether used in last 12 months (2002, 2008, 14/15) ○ Type of legal service (2002, 2008, 14/15) <p>TBA - ABS to review crime and justice section (mainly state data).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Data sources ▪ Reported offences ▪ Correctional services ▪ Custodial sentences ▪ Juvenile diversion
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The regional labour market <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Regional labour force status <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Census ▪ Dependency ratios <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ TBC (Jason) ▪ Industry and occupation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Industry, Sector, occupation, public or private ▪ Estimates future labour force status <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ TSRA job
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Other programs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Environmental (sea & land) ▪ Small business investment/start-ups/programs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Income from employment and welfare <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Employment and non-employment income <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Total personal income ○ Total family income ○ Total household income ○ Equalised household income (balancing household sizes to facilitate comparisons of income levels of different sizes)

<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Welfare income<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ TBC by ABS▪ Cost of living<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ 30% of income spent on rent○ 30% of income spent mortgage (low numbers may make this not reportable).
<p>Culture, Art and heritage</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Visits to homelands• Languages• ABS to review• Check with Anna (http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/4714.02014-15?OpenDocument)
<p>Fisheries</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Employment data – TBA

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