



NARU Review

Review of the ANU North Australia Research Unit

01 August 2022

The **North Australia Research Unit (NARU)**¹ has been an important part of the Australian National University (ANU) for many years, serving as a Darwin base for research and education activities undertaken by many parts of the ANU. NARU has provided an environment of intellectual exchange, and a base for field trips, since the early 1970s. Researchers have benefited from NARU to establish and sustain strong ongoing partnerships and continuity with local communities, Land Councils, and other groups in the region.

The NARU Campus, adjacent to Charles Darwin University Casuarina Campus, provides accommodation, office spaces, and a seminar room available for researchers working in North Australia and the surrounding region.²

Pre-pandemic, NARU supported over 1000 visitor-days per year, as well as providing equipment and facilities for field work. NARU is currently operated by ANU Facilities & Services.

The ANU is undertaking a periodic review of NARU to explore the potential to contribute in partnership to the changing context and significant issues and opportunities in Northern Australia and to put in place the leadership and governance required to ensure impact.

The ANU has conducted such reviews of NARU regularly since its establishment. Reviews were conducted in 1995 and 2000 and the most recent was conducted in 2012. Earlier reviews invariably found that ANU has national responsibilities in relation to the North, and that NARU was an important resource that enabled the ANU to address those responsibilities. Recommendations from these reviews also tended to focus on operational improvements ANU should undertake rather than addressing the fundamental question of the role and contemporary rationale for a national university research unit in Northern Australia.

Much has changed since the last review and we are very aware that significant NARU activities, including fieldwork and the ANU seminar series, have been disrupted by COVID. There have also been very positive developments over the past two years, including the University's recommitment to its

¹ ANU North Australia Research Unit (NARU): <http://naru.anu.edu.au/>

² ANU NARU Units: <https://services.anu.edu.au/campus-environment/accommodation/naru-units>

NARU has four accommodation options available on site: two 2-bedroom units, and two 3-bedroom units. All units are air-conditioned, self-contained cottages, with fully functioning kitchens and laundries. Accommodation can be booked per unit; however individual room bookings are not available. The office spaces on site are fully equipped with internet connection, telephone and quality furnishings, with ANU managed desktop computers available upon request. All offices are air-conditioned, with users able to utilise a common kitchenette area.

national role in the ANU by 2025 Strategic Plan³ and significant development of online and hybrid teaching, learning, research, and engagement capabilities.

The ANU welcomes and supports the federal government's commitment in full to the Uluru Statement from the Heart,⁴ particularly the enshrining of a First Nations Voice in the Australian Constitution, reforms to enable First Nations people to take a 'rightful place' in their own country and to ensure truth-telling about history. It is imperative that the University, through NARU, renews its commitment to North Australian place-based research, education and place-based policy development. It is also critical that this work reflect the principles of an engaged university, working in collaboration with the relevant key partners and local authorities to identify and address priorities reflective of public interest. Through NARU, the ANU has the potential to re-imagine not just how the University presence adds value in North Australia, but how we participate and contribute.

Background

The North Australia Research Unit (NARU) was established in 1973 to specialise in research in north Australia. This was pre-cyclone Tracy (December 1974) and the slow reconstruction process of Darwin that extended to the late 1970s. The current site opened in 1982, pre-dating the University College of the Northern Territory (1987-1981) and prior to the Territory having a university (NTU 1989-2003).

The ANU NARU facility was originally managed by the ANU Research School of Pacific & Asian Studies and has historically played an important role in Indigenous and environmental research and policy. NARU provided facilities and logistic support for Canberra-based members of the ANU and members of other Australian and overseas institutions undertaking research in North Australia. In 2005, the Arafura Timor Research Facility was founded as a joint venture between the Australian Institute of Marine Science (AIMS) and the ANU based on the NARU Campus.⁵

Since its inception, NARU has experienced varying and inconsistent levels of investment, attention, and use by ANU staff, students, stakeholders, and clients. It is important to note that ANU researchers have maintained their commitment to North Australia and the University's engagement with North Australia, such as through placements for medical students and law internships with the Northern Australia Aboriginal Justice Agency (NAAJA). These activities are important but have not exploited or otherwise benefited from the NARU facility.

Currently, NARU is tenanted by the North Australian Indigenous Land and Sea Management Alliance (NAILSMA) and Arnhem Land Fire Abatement (ALFA) NT Ltd and is accessed infrequently (even prior to the pandemic) by visiting researchers. Nevertheless, NARU has the potential to contribute to several key goals identified in the ANU by 2025 Strategic Plan:

- Strengthen our national mission and meet our unique responsibilities
- Conduct research that transforms society and creates national capability
- Engage with First Nations Peoples through academic work, convening key conversations, and the study of First Nations traditional knowledge
- Develop significant research infrastructure and make it accessible to all
- Focus on collaboration to create and inform beneficial solutions for society
- Translate and communicate our research and shape national and global debates.

³ ANU by 2025 Strategic Plan: <https://www.anu.edu.au/about/strategic-planning/anu-strategic-plan-2021-2025>

⁴ Uluru Statement from the Heart: <https://ulurustatement.org/the-statement/view-the-statement/>

⁵ Australian Institute of Marine Science (AIMS): <https://www.aims.gov.au/partnerships/research-partnerships/atrf>

Scope of Review

The current review is under the auspices of the Vice President (First Nations) Professor Peter Yu AM, with the oversight of the ANU Northern Australia Taskforce chaired by Professor Yu and Professor Russell Gruen, Dean of the ANU College of Health and Medicine. The Taskforce approved the framing, terms of reference and schedule for the review on 1 April 2022. The terms of reference include analysis of the current situation, examining existing concerns, emerging issues, and future opportunities (including, but not limited to):

- Contextual scan of university teaching and research in Northern Australia
- ANU role and responsibilities in Northern Australia
- ANU research interests, capabilities, and potential contribution to Northern Australia
- ANU relationships with Traditional Owners and Indigenous communities
 - Outlining measures that would help to strengthen and extend these relationships
- Current and potential roles for a research unit in Northern Australia
- Current use of NARU, including its benefits to Northern Australia and contribution to the University's national role and responsibilities
- Value of NARU (including its assets), its current income and operating costs.
- Case for a new/revitalised research unit in Darwin
 - Determine if there is a clear role and contemporary rationale for a research unit in Darwin among Indigenous and other stakeholders.
- Examine how NARU is and could be better linked to ANU and related research communities, including through virtual infrastructure and innovative mechanisms for collaboration.

Review Process

The review will be undertaken by Dr Darryl Cronin, a local Northern Territorian based in Darwin with many years of experience working with Traditional Owner and Indigenous organisations in North Australia, and Professor Sharon Bell AM who has significant relevant experience in the Northern Territory as Deputy Vice-Chancellor at Charles Darwin University (2011-2016), and through her leadership and governance role in the Northern Futures Collaborative Research Network, which included the ANU, Charles Darwin University, James Cook University, and the Australian Institute of Marine Science (2011-2016).

In addition to consultation with the ANU community, we hope to work with traditional owners the Larrakia Nation, the Aboriginal land councils, federal, Territory and local governments and communities to assess our contribution through NARU and in particular to engage with those with whom we share the NARU precinct, the Australian Institute of Marine Science (AIMS), the North Australian Indigenous Land and Sea Management Alliance (NAISMA) and Arnhem Land Fire Abatement, (ATLFA) NT Ltd, to ensure that we strengthen our relationship with north Australian researchers, First Nations People and with Charles Darwin University and relevant research units such as the Northern Institute, the Menzies School of Health Research, and the Nulungu Research Institute, Notre Dame University .

The initial consultation process is scheduled for the period August 2022 during which submissions will be invited, with follow-up consultation on future state scenarios during September-October to inform a final report to ANU senior management and governing Council before the end of the year.

Key Discussion Questions

The focus of this Review is on future possibilities, new forms of collaboration and governance and the potential for NARU to play a very different role to that of the past. As noted above there is much that has changed since the last review and there are now well-known and emergent national priorities in Northern Australia to which ANU has the capacity to contribute. In this context key questions to be considered are:

- Given the changing national policy environment and recognition of the importance of indigenous perspectives, what role might ANU play to make a significant contribution?
- Is there the opportunity to extend and strengthen our relationships with Traditional Owners and Indigenous Communities through NARU?
- How can the ANU better understand and incorporate Indigenous knowledge and cultural ways of learning, and how can this be of benefit to both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students, academics, and researchers?
- Are there new opportunities for student engagement that have not been previously explored?
- How might we contribute to the changing economic environment and the opportunities for increasing participation of Indigenous people and communities?
- What is the appropriate governance structure to ensure inclusiveness and effectiveness?
- What opportunities do virtual infrastructure, and the widespread adoption and availability of online technologies offer for innovative forms of interaction and collaboration?
- How should we frame, monitor, and evaluate our contribution to Northern Australia?
- Overall, what is the role and contemporary rationale for the National University to sustain a research unit in Northern Australia and how might this address future priorities?

Participating in the Review

Stakeholder organisations, groups, and individuals are invited to comment on the current NARU Review, particularly in relation to the questions posed above, but more general comments will also be welcomed and considered.

Submissions can be made via email to firstnations@anu.edu.au using the subject line, "**NARU Review Submission.**" We invite those who would prefer their comments to remain unattributed in any reports or publications arising from this review to use the subject line, "**CONFIDENTIAL: NARU Review Submission.**"

Alternatively, stakeholders may request a consultation via video conference or in person, where possible, with Dr Darryl Cronin and/or Professor Sharon Bell AM. In such cases, stakeholders are asked to email First Nations Portfolio Administrative Assistant, Camila León (camila.leon@anu.edu.au), to arrange an appointment.