

DRAFT NARU REVIEW PROGRESS REPORT
Prepared for the Northern Australia Taskforce
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There is always a dynamic interaction of knowledge traditions. Fresh water from the land, bubbling up in freshwater springs to make waterholes, and salt water from the sea are interacting with each other with the energy of the tide and the energy of the bubbling spring. When the tide is high the water rises to its full. When the tide goes out the water reduces its capacity. In the same way Milngurr ebbs and flows. In this way the Dhuwa and Yirritja sides of Yolngu life work together. And in this way Balanda and Yolngu traditions can work together.¹

Raymattja Marika-Mununggiritj et al (1990)

1 Introduction

This Report documents progress made in the first phase of this Review (Current State) against the Terms of Reference, Key Project Milestones and the Review Timeline. This framework was approved by the Northern Australia Taskforce 1 April 2022.

For reporting purposes, the following tasks have been completed against an agreed revised (Nov 2022) timeline (**Attachment 1**)²:

- 1) Finalisation of roles contracts (April 2022)
- 2) Contextual scan (April-August 2022)
- 3) Consultation with current and potential stakeholders within ANU and external (Oct-Nov 2022)
- 4) Progress Report to Northern Australia Taskforce (Dec 2022).

1.1 Definition

Northern Australia could perhaps be best defined as one of Australia's most contested landscapes. Indeed, there is often a very sharp contest between different visions and realities about the north that is so intense, that even defining northern Australia can be a contentious business. For the north's traditional owners, for example, there is not so much a place called northern Australia, but a series of Indigenous nation-states that share a similar culture, a long history of interaction, and regular international relationships with Indonesia, Timor and Papua New Guinea (PNG). Territorians would not see themselves as northern Queenslanders or northern West Australians³.

Dale et al (2014)

The definition of Northern Australia employed in this paper is consistent with earlier NARU reviews and strategies:

¹ Raymattja Marika-Mununggiritj et al, The History of the Yirrkala Community School: Yolngu Thinking about Education in the Laynha and Yirrkala Area, *Ngoonjook*, : 3, September 1990.

² The project has been impacted by COVID related delays, administrative delays including the establishment of the FNP Submissions Portal which was not operational until Sept 2022, and disrupted airline schedules that have impacted planned travel.

³ Dale et al, From Myth to Reality: New Pathways for Northern Development, *Background Paper, Northern Development Summit*, Townsville 26-28 June 2014.

Northern Australia is broadly defined as the parts of Australia north of the Tropic of Capricorn (26th parallel), spanning northern Western Australia, the Northern Territory and northern Queensland. Areas adjacent to, and south of, the Tropic that are integral to the north's development are viewed within the context of 'northern Australia', where relevant. Central Australian communities and organisations have significant common interests and links with the North and Alice Springs is an important regional centre servicing a number of surrounding communities and industries in northern Australia. Consistent with the above definition, research and education in Central Australia have been included in the scope of this Review, together with relevant partnerships.

Historically ANU research, in particular that which has been associated with NARU, has been concentrated in the Northern Territory with significant research, especially anthropology, archaeology, economics, community development, and environmental/biological research, spanning the northern jurisdictions, together with research focussed on links between northern Australia and our immediate region.

The reviewers avoid using the descriptor 'remote' with reference to NARU, its Darwin location, or ANU's northern research, as Northern Australia is not 'remote' to those communities in this part of Australia, and geographically it is the most proximate part of Australia to neighbouring countries, with a long, pre-colonisation history of engagement and trade. It should be noted, however, that many northern communities experience effective 'remoteness' through lack of digital connectivity, poor infrastructure, and sub-standard service delivery.

The nature and location of decision-making is an additional contributing factor to effective 'remoteness'. For example, while the Northern Territory Government exercises its powers within its jurisdiction, the Commonwealth also makes significant decisions from Canberra that impact on the citizens and Country comprising the Territory. Similarly, decisions relating to the Kimberley region are made from Perth and for Northern Queensland, decisions are made from Brisbane. Historically, a 'command and control' approach to management of these geographical areas has been relied on to exercise authority and direction rather than localised or place-based approaches.

1.2 Review Terms of Reference and Strategic Context

The Terms of Reference for this Review were established by the Northern Australia Taskforce chaired by Professors Peter Yu (Vice President, ANU First Nations) and Russell Gruen (Dean, ANU College of Health and Medicine):

Review Terms of Reference

Current State

- 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
 - Outline 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 ANU's national role
- 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.

Development of Future-State Scenario Options

Develop and analyse detailed future state scenario options, assessing the long-term viability and return-on- investment prospects for each with the goal of safeguarding NARU against potential future revenue or other crises. Future state scenarios to be analysed may include (but should not be limited to):

- Continuation of current state with optimised management and operations
 - Identify the strategies and resources required to make the operation of NARU under its current management plan a source of academic, cultural, and/or financial value for the ANU
- ANU retains full ownership of NARU with revised management and operations
 - Outline options for management of NARU that would create academic, cultural, and/or financial value for the ANU, and determine what facilities or other upgrades would be required, if any
 - Assess potential and feasibility for use of NARU as a base for ANU activity in the North Australia/South-East Asia and Pacific region
- Sale/long term lease/joint-ownership arrangements for all or part of the NARU facility to a Traditional Owner or other Indigenous corporation(s)
 - Determine interest from Larrakia, explore models for use e.g., consider Yawuru Cultural Centre and other examples, assess financial viability of Larakia purchase and management of NARU, factoring options to access capital from NAIF etc.
- Sale/long term lease/joint-ownership arrangements for all or part of the NARU facility to another institution/organisation/government or non-government body
 - Identify prospective stakeholders and assess potential with respect to ANU goals and Indigenous/Traditional Owner research and development priorities
- Consider whether and how expanded ANU research and/or teaching activities could be achieved under a joint-ownership agreement
- Alternative scenarios as agreed upon in consultation with the North Australia Taskforce.

The Terms of Reference are interpreted in the context of the Australian National University Act 1991, specifically that a legislated function of the ANU is:

- 5(b) encouraging and providing facilities for, research and postgraduate study, both generally and **in relation to subjects of national importance to Australia** (*emphasis added*)

and the reflection of this core function in the **University's Strategic Plan 2021-2025**, in particular to:

- Honour the nation-building purpose for which ANU was established, within a new world marked by new strategic and economic realities. ANU will develop and disseminate vibrant and beneficial ideas and research to the rest of the world. The partnerships we build with industry and government will increase innovation, understanding, democratic participation, and national prosperity.
- Promote better engagement with First Nations Peoples through our work on social equity, educational opportunity, economic development and legal and constitutional reform, including treaty making, compensation and reparation. ANU will promote debate around a reconciled, just, equitable and respectful Australia. We will support the study of First Nations traditional knowledge and demonstrate its social value to all.

Consistent with the above, the **Vision of the First Nations Portfolio** is to raise the University's position as a world leader on First Nations issues, and to contribute to the nation's relationship with Indigenous Australians in three important elements of the national agenda: Democratic Participation, Societal Equity and Economic Opportunity.

The Vision relies on the establishment of two core concepts:

1. ANU should be the national and international leader in First Nations issues teaching and research, and provide leadership on national policy discourse and decisions;
2. Indigenous equity and engagement are not the preserve of any one unit in the ANU but should be 'normal-business' throughout the University.

1.2.1 Contextual scan of university teaching and research in Northern Australia

ANU will continue to research and play a leading role in current public policy issues relevant to Northern Australia. Sustained partnerships that have been built up over many years and the establishment of the North Australia Research Unit (NARU) campus in Darwin in the early 1970s are core to our pre-eminent reputation in research with Indigenous peoples in the north, including disciplines such as archaeology and anthropology, Indigenous economics and development, linguistics and language revitalisation, as well as research related to land and water and biodiversity.

ANU Northern Australia Research Strategy, 2015

The contextual scan, including review of relevant background papers and the dissemination of a Discussion Paper (**Attachment 2**) was completed in May-August 2022. Key documents provided by the Office of Research informed the Discussion Paper and included:

- *Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies: Report of the Committee to review the future of the North Australia Research Unit facility (June 2000)*
- *ANU Northern Australia Research Strategy (April) 2015*
- *ANU Northern Australia Research Strategy (November 2015)*
- *MOUs ANU/CDU 2003-2005 and 2010*

The recurring themes that the above reviews identified were:

- Research on issues relevant to Indigenous peoples and on northern Australia are clearly issues of national importance
- NARU was established to fulfil a national remit and to reach across northern Australia
- Historically NARU has enabled academic research across a broad range of fields
- Researchers have benefited from NARU being able to establish and sustain strong ongoing partnerships and continuity with local communities, Land Councils and other groups in the region
- NARU has long been regarded as a special and 'safe' place for Indigenous people
- NARU has also enabled sustained links with Eastern Indonesia, Timor L'Este and Papua New Guinea
- With appropriate resources NARU could be the base for a useful research focus on northern questions, cultivating knowledge and understanding of northern perspectives
- For this to be achieved there needs to be research staff *in situ*. A sustainable multi-disciplinary research unit with the capacity to forge partnerships is considered to be 5-6 academic staff.

1.2.2 ANU role and responsibilities in Northern Australia

To make the most of their unique strengths and skills, universities and academics will have to think of themselves less as the source of knowledge and expertise, and more as curators or convenors of a diverse set of expertise and skills. This does not mean that deep expertise will no longer matter, but rather that universities can add significant benefits to society by both cultivating specialised knowledge and effectively bringing the range of expertise together to illuminate and tackle complex problems.

Ryan Young, Plans for a Thriving ANU: Conclusions from the Future University Scenario Project (2020)

To raise awareness and interest, and inform discussion on the role of ANU and NARU in Northern Australia, the Review Discussion Paper (Attachment 2) was circulated to ANU colleagues, identified Darwin-based Indigenous Organisations and to northern Western Australia organisations who attended a Roundtable hosted by the Nulungu Research Institute at the Broome campus of the University of Notre Dame Australia (UNDA). A First Nations Submission Portal was also opened in September and eight

submissions have been received to date⁴. Between August and December 2022, a total of 55 meetings/interviews have been held – 24 external to ANU and 28 internal.

To gain an understanding of the current role and contribution of ANU and NARU to Northern Australia meetings were held in Broome and in Darwin with representatives from Indigenous organisations connected with NARU and those who have an interest in ANU's northern Australia research⁵. These meetings were an important first step to ensure that Indigenous perspectives inform the Review. The major themes emerging from these Roundtables, on which we plan to build with further meetings early in 2023 are:

Broome

- **Workforce Development** – Work with Registered Native Title Prescribed Bodies Corporate (PBC's) to build knowledge and capacity of organisation directors and Indigenous staff. This would involve training a network of Indigenous change managers in PBC's. It would also include developing and providing industry training to Traditional Owners and Native Title holders on Country in industries applicable to the people and prevailing circumstances on Country.
- **Building Community Research Capacity** – Training and growing local Indigenous research capacity in communities as well as creating research pathways for Indigenous researchers and communities.
- **Empowering First Nations Groups with Data** – Assist First Nations groups to develop the tools to analyse and document assets on their Country and use that data to examine new opportunities for economic and sustainable development.
- **Social and Environmental Impact** – The Thunderbird Social Impact Assessment (SIA) Project in the West Kimberley utilises decolonising methodologies that enables Native Title holders to co-create social impact research so that outcomes are beneficial to native title holders. The SIA is also an opportunity to inform practice to create new models for inclusive development with Indigenous people.
- **Research Brokerage and Facilitation** – NARU could become a research broker and facilitator identifying research opportunities across the north and then leveraging research capacity in Charles Darwin University (CDU), James Cook University (JCU), UNDA, and the University of Southern Queensland (USQ). NARU could be seen as a broker in the decolonising research agenda for the north.
- **Strategic Support for Indigenous Data Sovereignty** – Strategic policy and capacity building support on issues for Indigenous data sovereignty. Build a body of expertise for Indigenous organisations to store, manage, analyse, and utilise data. This includes creating toolkits for Indigenous use and also training for building capacity for Indigenous data collection, management, analysis and use.
- **Education and Learning** – New models of education for Indigenous children and young people are required especially linking education to Country and culture.
- **Business Innovation Hub** – Provide support and assistance to develop businesses and commercialisation of ideas, especially commercialisation of Indigenous knowledge.

⁴ The small number of submissions is consistent with the current lack of knowledge of NARU and the current absence of a 'community of practice' that generates institutional knowledge of ANU's northern Australia research. Interviews conducted suggest that there is sustained interest in NARU and ANU's contribution to the North.

⁵ The Broome meetings were held in October 2022 with representatives of the Nulungu Research Institute, Nyamba Buru Yawuru, Kimberley Land Council and Wilinggin Aboriginal Corporation. The Darwin workshop on 28 November 2022 was attended by representatives of APONT, Aboriginal Housing NT, Anindilyakwa Land Council, NAILSMA, the Central Land Council and Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance NT. In addition, discussions were held with representatives of the Larrakia Nation and the Northern Land Council in Darwin.

Darwin

There was considerable support for ANU and NARU continuing to play a role in Northern Territory, including:

- **Indigenous Knowledge and Responsibility:** ANU effectively has a ‘mega presence’ in the Northern Territory and therefore responsibility due to knowledge collected over a long time and the continuity of relationships and partnerships.
- **Negotiated/Community-led Research:** Grounded research that aligns with Traditional Owner objectives is required. Innovation must drive research. Research is important for informing Aboriginal people about genuine economic opportunities. Community led research requires building community research capacity.
- **Indigenous Estate:** The four Northern Territory Land Councils are faced with a shift in purpose from claims to land to considering economic priorities given the significant Aboriginal estate in the Northern Territory.⁶ The Aboriginal carbon economy and renewable energy sector has potential. Aboriginal Rangers have potential for economic development across the north and this includes technology transformation. The North Australian Indigenous Land and Sea Management Alliance (NAILSMA) are working with CDU on carbon infrastructure. Savannah burning is likely to be dwarfed by the blue carbon economy.
- **Data Sovereignty:** There is a real need for data that is relevant and responsive to Aboriginal needs and priorities. Aboriginal groups in regional areas need to have the capacity to build/create their own data; needs to occur ‘inside out’ to enable Land Councils to develop strategic plans.

The FNP study with Anindilyakwa Land Council is a population study recently concluded to enable Anindilyakwa people to collect and use data for their own development, and a final report will be published shortly.

The Commonwealth Data Hub is a platform for accessing government data sets and they are consulting Aboriginal people in the NT about this.

- **Indigenous Leadership in Northern Development:** ANU has the capacity to support long-term aspirations.
- **Central Australia:** ANU needs to focus its work in Central Australia not just northern Australia. Housing and water are issues in Central Australia that require research capability.
- **Education and Employment:** People are not equipped for local jobs in communities because of the low levels of literacy and numeracy. Education delivery needs to be addressed.

Similarly, the Discussion Paper was circulated and a range of interviews have been conducted with colleagues from northern Australian organisations to ensure that the review is informed by northern perspectives including: The Australian Institute of Marine Science (Darwin and Townsville) <https://www.aims.gov.au>, Batchelor Institute (Batchelor) <https://www.batchelor.edu.au>, Charles Darwin University (Darwin) <https://www.cdu.edu.au>, CRC for Developing Northern Australia (Townsville) <https://www.crcna.com.au>, James Cook University (Townsville) <https://www.jcu.edu.au>, and Menzies School of Health Research (Darwin) <https://www.menzies.edu.au>. Meetings have also been held with the Northern Territory Government Department of the Chief Minister and Territory Regional Growth and with the Lord Mayor of the City of Darwin.

The major themes emerging from these discussions are:

- **Re-imagining of NARU:** Requires academic presence with a remit for all of Northern Australia, Eastern Indonesia and Timor L’Este without replicating the 1980s NARU model.
The ANU focus through NARU should be to support high, quality, impactful work in partnership with communities. Deep knowledge and contextual understanding should be hallmarks of the research.

⁶ The NT Aboriginal Investment Corporation (NTAIC) aims to create jobs, businesses and wealth for Aboriginal Territorians, strengthen culture and support self-determination for Traditional Owners and Aboriginal people across the Northern Territory for generations to come. The Corporation’s Aboriginal-led Board will make decisions to invest \$680 million of Aboriginal Benefits Account (ABA) funding in projects that will support sustainable Aboriginal economies in the NT.

NARU has the potential to be a base for strengthening partnerships and for attracting collaboration.

There is significant potential to organise contributions from elders, Traditional Owners and Emeritus from 'deep learning' over decades of collaboration.

NARU could be a 'decolonisation' centre, as one participant commented 'away from white noise'.

- **Collaboration:** Shared positions between CDU/MSHR/ANU may help staff attraction/retention in the Territory.
- **Economic Development:** Northern Territory Government focus on Indigenous Business informed by the TERC Report https://ntrebound.nt.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0020/952301/terc-final-report.pdf
- **Priorities:** Water security, digital connectivity, and remote infrastructure deficits are also key issues for the Northern Territory.
- **Service Delivery:** The future Remote Aboriginal Investment Agreement (NTRAI) <https://federalfinancialrelations.gov.au/agreements/northern-territory-remote-aboriginal-investment-ntrai> (health, children and schooling, community safety) has been extended and discussions are underway in a co-design process for the new agreement, which aims to give life to the four reform priority areas of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.
 1. Formal Partnerships and Shared Decision Making
 2. Building the Community-Controlled Sector
 3. Transforming Government Organisations
 4. Shared Access to Data and Information at a Regional Level

APONT is being supported by the First Nations Portfolio in this process through an ANU consultancy.

The Northern Territory Government Local Decision-Making (LDM) agenda is facilitating a new working relationship on service delivery between Aboriginal communities and government agencies.

Northern Territory Government agencies are partnering with Aboriginal communities to assist the transition of government services and programs to community control. See Local Decision-Making website <https://ldm.nt.gov.au>

- **Central Australia:** ANU's primary presence is through linguists, anthropologists, and law and medical interns.
- **The Ramaciotti Regional and Remote Health Sciences Training Centre (Menzies-Ramaciotti Centre):** https://www.menzies.edu.au/page/Research/Centres_initiatives_and_projects/The_Ramaciotti_Regional_and_Remote_Health_Sciences_Training_Centre/ is developing a local, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workforce in the Northern Territory. Remarkable talent is being revealed.
- **Student Engagement:** Potential for ANU to use the CDU rural campus located in Katherine to prepare for on-country/field intensives with a light impact on partner Indigenous communities: <https://www.cdu.edu.au/locations/katherine-campus/katherine-accommodation>

1.2.3 ANU research interests, capabilities, and potential contribution to Northern Australia

My association with NARU took many forms throughout the 1990s. I was employed as a researcher in 1992-1993. NARU then administered a research grant on my behalf. I was then based at NARU for some years as a non-ANU PhD candidate.

During the 1990s NARU excelled as a research facility. Existing strengths were cultural geography, community development, demographics, archaeology and anthropology, geomorphology and climate change. This is reflected in its extensive publications list for that time.

NARU's ability to be a strong research facility within the Northern Territory was because of the large number of research staff based there. It was these researchers who attracted visiting researchers and stakeholders and made the place dynamic.

Staff based at NARU supported by research facilities had the ability to do fieldwork in remote regions and respond to the needs for research in those communities.

Submission to NARU Review, November 2022

Interviews with ANU colleagues and external partners confirm that NARU was an extremely productive research unit during the 1980s-1990s. NARU was described as an exciting meeting place for researchers and Indigenous collaborators. It was a vibrant and intellectually stimulating environment, hosting a 'permanent seminar' that facilitated inter-disciplinary research, and was a destination for overseas scholars at a time when the Northern Territory was also an exciting place experiencing dramatic change. Annual conferences would marshal interested parties to provide connections with a range of organisations. NARU seminars were well attended and highly valued⁷.

A preliminary search of the ANU Library Catalogue indicates that between 1979 and 2000 over 50 monographs were published under the NARU Press imprint. An overview of NARU research published in 1991⁸ is indicative of the wide range of issues being researched: remote area development, tourist development, mining and economic development, sustainable development, land tenure, coastal wetlands, political history, constitutional development and federalism. Many of the contributing authors, such as Elspeth Young, Ciaran O'Faircheallaigh, Colin Woodroffe, and Dean Jaensch went on to become leaders in their fields.

Although NARU was originally established under the Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, by the time of the 2000 Review, significant research interests in Northern Australia and on Indigenous issues were documented against the Research School of Biological Sciences (RSBS), the Centre for Resource and Environmental Studies (CRES) and the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research (CAEPR).

In 2015, in the *ANU Northern Australia Research Strategy* (November 2015:1) it was reported that: 'ANU is a recognised leader in research with Indigenous peoples in the north and while the list below illustrates the diversity of this disciplinary activity it cannot capture the depth of engagement between disciplines or with local and regional stakeholders. In **all disciplines, the focus is on Indigenous partnerships, skills transfer and leadership capacity** [*emphasis added*]:

- Health and wellbeing
- Social Anthropology
- Linguistics and language revitalisation
- History
- Archaeology, Heritage and rock art
- Political science and governance
- Demographic trends and regional economies

⁷ The NARU seminar series has been interrupted by the impact on travel of the COVID pandemic. The last seminar was held early in 2020.

⁸ Moffatt, I. and Webb, A. *North Australian Research: Some Past Themes and New Directions*, ANU North Australian Research Unit, Darwin, 1991.

- Education policy and literacy
- Hybrid economies and land management
- Cultural resource management and governance
- Criminal justice
- Welfare, Health and well-being

In addition, major research activities include

- Land & water (management, mapping, climate, geoscience, energy)
- Biodiversity (plants, fauna, invasives, marine, wildlife management)
- Economics, Policy, Politics and Social Development⁹.

Extracts from these reviews and CDU MOUs are included in **Attachment 3**.

Interviews with ANU colleagues, undertaken as an important component of the contextual scan, indicate that while research continues to be undertaken in Northern Australia in the above fields there is also now a growing range of fields that incorporate opportunities for undergraduate and/or post graduate student engagement in Northern Australian learning and research, including in: Indigenous Diplomacy (Bell School), Environmental Science, Land Management, and Physics (College of Science), Indigenous Studies (College of Arts and Social Sciences), Law and Criminal Justice (School of Law), Governance and Management (Research School of Management), Medicine and Population Health (MSHR), and in Cybersecurity (School of Cybersecurity).

In February 2022, the ANU Academic Board set an agenda to realise the vision for education set out in the ANU 2025 Strategic Plan, recommending a curriculum framework be designed for a whole-of-university approach to implement the ANU Graduate Attributes. Three distinctive ANU Graduate Attributes were approved:

- Insight into Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' Knowledges and Indigenous Peoples' Perspectives (IP GA)
- Capability to Employ Discipline-based Knowledge in Transdisciplinary Problem Solving (TD GA)
- Expertise for Critical Thinking (CT GA)

The Graduate Attribute 'Insight into Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' Knowledges and Indigenous Peoples' Perspectives' is elaborated as:

To know the true nature of things, ANU graduates acknowledge and understand our history. At ANU, we are committed to knowing our country and learning its rich history. To do this, we recognise and incorporate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island peoples' diverse languages and knowledges into the fabric of our University and our curriculum. ANU graduates continue to learn from and respect the knowledges and cultures that Indigenous peoples have been developing and nurturing on their lands across the world for millennia⁹.

The approval of an ANU Curriculum Framework (AB6 2022) incorporating this Graduate Attribute is already generating interest in the design/co-design of a new set of undergraduate units, and at least one collaborative appointment with CDU has been advertised.

The College of Business and Economics (CBE) in 2021 also launched a pilot program with the National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA) <https://www.niaa.gov.au/who-we-are/the-agency> through which the NIAA supports up to 25 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff each year to undertake an ANU Management Program. The first cohort completed their studies in December 2021 and received a Graduate Certificate of Management. The ANU Management Program is helping to improve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment outcomes both within the NIAA and across the Australian Public Service.

⁹ ANU Undergraduate Curriculum Framework: Report to Academic Board from the Curriculum Working Group, November 2022, Appendix A: ANU Graduate Attributes, p.12

In addition to the large number of continuing northern Australia research projects¹⁰ ANU researchers, in particular CAEPR researchers, have undertaken extensive research and analysis on the Indigenous Estate, identifying significant opportunities for environmental stewardship and a foundation for economic development. For example, in 2007 a study was completed by CAEPR researchers on the environmental significance of the Indigenous estate: Natural resource management as economic development in remote Australia: <https://caepr.cass.anu.edu.au/research/publications/environmental-significance-indigenous-estate-natural-resource-management>

In 2018, CAEPR staff contributed to a successful bid to the [ANU Grand Challenges Scheme](#). The bid was led by the [Energy Change Institute](#) and is entitled [Zero Carbon Energy for the Asia Pacific](#). The Zero Carbon Energy project has been funded from 2019 to 2023. The 'Indigenous engagement with renewable energy industries' sub-project aims to generate understanding of whether and how Indigenous people can benefit from renewable energy generation in northwest Australia.

In 2019 the University's Grand Challenges priority was to identify research that would have a positive impact on *Indigenous Health and Wellbeing*, in recognition that ANU has a particular responsibility towards addressing the disproportionate and unacceptable burden of illness and disability experienced by Indigenous Australians. Addressing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and wellbeing, requires inclusive collaboration across diverse disciplines, with communities and Indigenous organisations. *Beyond Reconciliation* is part of the ANU Indigenous Health and Wellbeing Grand Challenge that will see Indigenous-led research conducted across Australia from 2021–2025. Beyond Reconciliation is cross-disciplinary and includes institutional partners and leading Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars <https://history.cass.anu.edu.au/centres/acih/highlights/beyond-reconciliation-grand-challenge>. The team aims to be Indigenous-led, inclusive, critical and collaborative. The project is motivated by the idea that lasting solutions to Indigenous health will not be found in medical breakthroughs or individualised interventions alone.

The National Centre for Indigenous Genomics (NCIG) <https://ncig.anu.edu.au> is building its reference genome from the samples of geographically dispersed Indigenous Australians. As a statutory body under Indigenous governance, NCIG now provides a safe, permanent, national keeping place for biological samples and for genomic and related data obtained from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The NCIG Collection, which includes historical documents as well as biological material and data, is under the custodianship of an Indigenous-majority Board.

In 2022, [the First Nations Portfolio](#) and Fenner School of Environment & Society completed a landmark baseline study that is a preliminary examination and delineation of the agricultural capacity of the Indigenous Estate. The purpose of the study is to attain a better understanding of the relationship between First Nations primary production enterprises and larger Australian primary industries, focusing primarily on agriculture: <https://fennerschool.anu.edu.au/research/projects/activating-indigenous-estate—baseline-study-agricultural-capacity>

ANU is one of five universities comprising the recently funded ARC Centre of Excellence for Indigenous Environmental Histories and Futures, administered by James Cook University in partnership with eight Indigenous Organisations.¹¹ The CRC aims to generate a new direction in knowledge creation based on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander led approaches to managing Land and Sea Country: <https://www.arc.gov.au/funding-research/discovery-linkage/linkage-program/arc-centres-excellence/arc-centre-excellence-indigenous-and-environmental-histories-and-futures>

¹⁰ The most recent data collection on Indigenous research at ANU was undertaken through a researcher self-reporting system in 2019. The 2019 decadal data indicates that over 75% of ANU's Indigenous research continues to be undertaken in partnership with communities and organisations in the Northern Territory (approx. 40) and North-Western Australia (approx 20) with a smaller number of partnerships with Queensland (approx 7) and Torres Strait Island (2) communities/organisations. This data does not indicate the significance, longevity or impact of the research partnerships

¹¹ Dawul Wuru Aboriginal Corporation, Murujuga Aboriginal Corporation, Gunditj Mirring Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation RNTBC, Ngarrindjeri Aboriginal Corporation RNTBC, Gujaga Foundation Limited, Butchulla Aboriginal Corporation RNTBC, Gur A Baradharaw Kod Torres Strait Sea and Land Council Torres Strait Islander Corporation, and Taungurung Land and Waters Council.

1.2.4 ANU relationships with Traditional Owners and Indigenous communities and measures that would help to strengthen and extend these relationships

As noted above a number of external contributors and submissions emphasised that NARU needs to be staffed to maximise opportunities for partnership and collaboration.

At the Darwin Roundtable on 28 November 2022, the question of how ANU could strengthen and extend relationships was explored. Representatives from the Aboriginal Peak Organisations Northern Territory (APONT) <https://apont.org.au> alliance provided feedback on this important question:

- APONT has undertaken a lot of research and policy work in the last 10 years. There is a lot of work going on but there is not a lot of connection with institutions in the research area.
- Communities know their issues/problems but they don't have the evidence to take to government. Data sovereignty is important for Aboriginal communities.
- Research must be community-led and must involve community. This requires building structures for community led research and building community research capacity.
- Partnerships with communities are critical but need to be mindful that multiple organisations doing their own thing can place huge demands on Indigenous communities.
- NARU is in a good place to develop partnership models that work.

A meeting with representatives of the Northern Land Council (NLC) emphasised that:

- There are some areas of research, learning/education that are relevant to the work of the NLC such as Anthropology, evaluation especially policy evaluation, intellectual property, bio-cultural diversity, resource management, Indigenous knowledge, carbon markets and water. Water security is a major issue for Indigenous people.
- There has been talk about an Indigenous evaluation centre but nothing has eventuated.
- Biodiversity, resource management and carbon markets need to be led by Aboriginal groups not by non-Indigenous organisations. There is a need for best practice knowledge and frameworks around these issues and universities need to be more involved in bio-cultural management.
- NARU should be stakeholder-led to inform research and education priorities. Having buy-in from the Land Councils could leverage expertise from universities.
- The protection of Indigenous intellectual property and Indigenous data sovereignty are important. Governments mine data from Indigenous communities and it is difficult to get local and regional data from the various government instrumentalities. What can universities do to access government data, analyse it and package it for Indigenous community use?
- Examples of research considered relevant was research that looked at the economic cost benefit of ranger programs and how Aboriginal people travel for cultural reasons or travel to service centres.
- It would be great to get a PhD student to work with Land Councils undertaking economic analysis or to undertake research in other areas of priority for the council.
- The NLC is currently focussing on where it goes post-land claim era. The land and sea estate in the Northern Territory is significant. Hence what do opportunities look like and how do Traditional Owners leverage their rights and interests? There are major development projects happening in the north but how can opportunities be leveraged for Indigenous people?
- There is a lot of research being generated on Indigenous issues but much of that research does not go to those who actually need the knowledge. There needs to be a way for knowledge to be beneficial to Traditional Owners. A possible research forum in the north to disseminate information and knowledge.

Discussion with representatives of the Larrakia Nation indicated that:

- The Larrakia Nation <https://larrakia.com> welcomes strategic partnerships for mutual benefit with ANU and other universities, such as Charles Darwin University (CDU). Larrakia Nation is interested in research for economic development.
- Colonialism had a significant impact on Larrakia people. The development of the town of Darwin has brought benefits to the broader population, yet colonisation of Larrakia lands and people has meant no benefits or minimal benefits to Larrakia People.
- Other Traditional Owner groups, who have been able to win back land under the Aboriginal Land Rights Act (NT) have benefited socially and economically; however Larrakia people in Darwin have not been able to win back their land. The Kenbi Land Claim <https://database.atns.net.au/agreement.asp?EntityID=8914> has not benefitted Larrakia in Darwin. Currently there is a review of traditional ownership for Kenbi.
- The Larrakia Nation Board is refocussing its strategic plan and research would help drive the strategic direction of the nation (the Larrakia people). Strategic partnerships with ANU and other universities need to be developed.
- A key focus of Larrakia Nation is to bring the nine Larrakia family groups together and research could support such an initiative.

There are some practical things that ANU could do to acknowledge and support Larrakia people such as contracting Larrakia Nation to provide facilities management at NARU and offering scholarships to Larrakia people to study.

1.2.5 Current and potential roles for a research unit in Northern Australia

NARU is an essential base for ANU First Nations researchers conducting NTRO (Non-Traditional Research Outcomes) in the NT like myself. The NTRO field of research that has grown exponentially over the past decade and will continue to expand.

Although mainly working from a self-directed standpoint I am continuing long-standing personal and professional research relationships with my patrilineal and associated communities throughout the term of the interlinked projects.

My ARC funded research will include a significant component of cultural consultancy engagement and First Nations CI inclusion within the Victoria River region, Darwin, regional NT. The revived ANU CDU MoU enables profoundly significant engagement for First Nations creative-led researchers, particularly academics with cultural and professional connections to both the ACT and the NT.

Additionally, my role as 2023 – 24 Gough Whitlam & Malcolm Fraser Chair of Australian Studies at Harvard University, USA, will deepen existing professional engagement with international First Nations academic colleagues.

As part of my tenure, I am in preliminary discussions to establish a scholarship for Australian and North American First Nations early career researchers to undertake post-doctoral research at ANU and Harvard. I would propose that NARU and CDU be included as a venue or base for innovative research projects. ‘

Professor Brenda Croft, Submission to NARU Review, November 2022

Given the limited levels of activity over recent years it is not surprising that external contributors to the Review reported little or no contact with NARU, or knowledge of the role of NARU. Some had participated in the NARU seminar series, and many valued the NARU Library which has now been dispersed. It is also apparent that when communities/organisations have contact with ANU through individual researchers, little weight is placed on specific university affiliation.

Interviews with ANU colleagues, identified through a snowball technique, reveal long, deep and highly valued engagement with Northern Australia, many through NARU. Observations that were made frequently were:

- **A crowded research space:** ANU is now just one university in a very crowded northern Australia space. It has been suggested that the hierarchy of Australian universities actively

engaged with Northern Australia is now: 1. CDU/MSHR, 2. Melbourne, 3. Flinders, 4. JCU/AIMS, 5. UWA/Curtin, 6. ANU. ANU has the biggest footprint of the interstate universities. This needs to be activated, reset, and repackaged to become visible. NARU is a visual symbol of ANU's presence even if it is a facility that has lost its purpose – an 'empty house', a 'hospital without patients', 'a facility without a soul', 'a costly parking lot'. There is an opportunity cost to not having NARU but it needs to be re-activated and amplified.

- **'Decolonised' centre:** Elite research universities are deeply rooted in colonial history and culture and colonial exploitation. This permeates all aspects of history, governance and the capacity to envisage a different future. The First Nations space is relational. Researchers have to build trust, on the ground over time to undertake ethical research for the benefit of communities. NARU could offer time and space for 'two-way' exchange.
- **Institutional collaboration:** CDU/ANU is a critical partnership with potential to address disciplinary gaps in the NT: anthropology, archaeology, linguistics, cultural heritage, music and visual art. Presence of ANU in the capital is a resource for CDU, a conduit for north-south influence, the *raison d'être* for NARU from the time of Nugget Coombs.
- **A Cohesive strategy to achieve presence and program:** Impact through a broad programmatic strategy focussing on governance, economic development, education and security, including bio-security.
- **Leadership and governance:** Investment in the NARU facility needs to be matched with appropriate investment in a small, research team of senior and emerging researchers – a Director (academic facilitator who can engage in tactful engagement with CDU), a senior researcher, PhDs/post-doctoral fellows; and support for an appropriate governance structure/structures that pull us together – Advisory Committee/reference group; Academic Committee and community of northern Australia research practice (North Australia Research Forum).
- **A teaching and learning hub and bridging space:** Open to people who are passing through to participate – a rich convergence of people.
- **An On-Country Field School Base:** A landing and briefing base is an emerging need as 'on-country/intensive field' undergraduate/postgraduate units are further developed. NARU is a perfect scale of up to 30 students (using CDU accommodation).
- **A base for creative collaboration with CDU:** Indigenous music and art¹².

1.2.6 Current use of NARU including its benefits to Northern Australia and contribution to ANU's national role

NARU is a well-maintained facility in a beautiful tropical setting managed by ANU Facilities and Services: <https://services.anu.edu.au/campus-environment/accommodation/naru-units>

Currently there is no apparent academic or strategic oversight of the facility, although this was in place in different forms until recently¹³.

As many have commented, NARU is currently not a research unit or even a landing or staging base. It is a facility that provides rental space to a small number of individual, independent non-ANU researchers and to several organisations: to the Australian Institute of Marine Science through a previous joint venture to establish the Arafura-Timor Research Facility (ATRF) <https://www.aims.gov.au/partnerships/research-partnerships/atrf>; North Australian Indigenous Sea Management Alliance (NAILSMA) <https://nailsma.org.au> through a long term lease but few links to ANU; and the Arnhem Land Fire Abatement (ALFA NT) <https://www.alfant.com.au> through a lease agreement.

¹² The ANU School of Music is in discussion with Charles Darwin University to partner in a second iteration of the First Nations *Yil Lull* studio, *Yil Lull Darwin*, considering the potential for this to be housed at the CDU music campus, with accommodation at the ANU NARU campus (Correspondence Professor Kim Cunio, October 2022) .

¹³ RSPAS had a NARU Committee of Management that was active until 2005; there was also a university North Australia Research Forum (to 2017?)

It might be argued that providing office space to Indigenous organisations is consistent with ANU's national role, but in terms of research collaboration these facility and leasing agreements have not been substantive or enduring, even with the ATRF¹⁴.

ANU and CDU have signed a recent (third) MOU, (**see Attachment 3**) which may generate new collaborative initiatives but there is presently nothing that specifically links this collaboration to NARU.

1.2.7 Value of NARU (including its assets), its current income and operating costs.

ANU Facilities and Services have completed a recent review of the NARU Facility. Their report (**Attachment 4**) provides an overview of NARU as an 'asset'.

2 Case for a new/revitalised research unit in Darwin

NARU should be a platform for Indigenous engagement in the North...We can't continue colonising the North – capacity building and institution building should be seen as critical legacies indicative of ANU's national role.

Professor Ian Anderson, Interview December 2022

2.1.1 Determine if there is a clear role and contemporary rationale for a research unit in Darwin among Indigenous and other stakeholders.

The NARU Review Discussion Paper (**Attachment 1**) noted that 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. There are also very different expectations of Traditional Owners and Indigenous organisations. In this context key questions for consideration 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, practice 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 the ANU's 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?

It is notable, and consistent with earlier reviews, that there has been no significant negative commentary regarding NARU¹⁵, or indeed the ANU presence in the northern Australia, even though there is a clear recognition that a very different future is being mapped under the federal government's commitment in full to the Uluru Statement from the Heart, 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

¹⁴ In 2005 the Arafura Timor Research Facility was founded as a joint venture between The Australian Institute of Marine Science (AIMS) and the Australian National University based on the NARU Campus <https://www.aims.gov.au/partnerships/research-partnerships/atrf>

¹⁵ Although great unhappiness about the swimming pool being 'closed'.

country, and to ensure truth-telling about the settler history of Northern Australia. It is imperative that the University, through NARU, reviews and 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.

There is no doubt that ANU collaborative research continues to contribute significantly in many fields of research to our understanding of northern Australia and we are increasingly drawing on this research to develop intensive field experiences and internships for students in the North. There is potential for such opportunities to be extended, in partnership with CDU, to international study abroad students with NARU providing a base and staging-post and debriefing centre for students.

The question is not so much, could ANU do this without NARU, but rather, what would the consequences be of not re-imagining and re-invigorating a research unit in Darwin? Failure to maintain NARU would undoubtedly have symbolic significance to our own scholarly community, to our long-term Indigenous and non-Indigenous collaborators, to governments, and to the organisations who share the NARU footprint with ANU. It would be likely to generate reputational damage for the University, especially at this historic moment of significant change and opportunity. It is important to note however that the same or similar consequences attach to maintenance of the status quo with ANU as an absentee landlord and our researchers as 'FIFOs'.

The critical question is, does ANU have the imagination, appetite and capacity to invest in creating a very different NARU that is a genuine vehicle for contribution to the University's national role? To enable an expanded, more collaborative and impactful role for ANU in Northern Australia this needs to be much more than addressing outstanding operational, housekeeping, or internal governance issues, even though these are important and can now be aligned with the outcomes of the review of the Kioloa Campus in NSW: <https://science.anu.edu.au/research/facilities/kioloa-coastal-campus>.

It is proposed that further consideration of the role of NARU be informed by the following assumptions:

- That an ANU 'presence' in Northern Australia continues to be relevant, in keeping with the University's national mission.
- That ANU researchers continue to engage in significant research in Northern Australia (primarily the NT) even though not all need the NARU facility.
- That there is a need for a network or community of practice at ANU that provides linkages between individual researchers/research projects and centres.
- That future developments will be in collaboration with CDU, MSHR and/or Batchelor, UNDA and James Cook University and, as appropriate, with Traditional Owners and Indigenous organisations.
- That ANU's priority, in research and/or education, will be to contribute to Northern Australia; not to extract (data, knowledge, expertise) from Northern Australia.
- To meet external needs and expectations NARU as a research/education entity should be porous and agile.
- That building Northern Australian capability, institutional capacity and contributing to generational change will be a priority.
- That Indigenous and 'northern' perspectives will be respected and inform ANU's national role and remit.
- Historically NARU was perceived to be distant from ANU but with online technology this is no longer the case, resulting in many new opportunities for online or 'hybrid' engagement.
- NARU was also perceived to be 'remote' but this is a 'southern' perspective reflecting non-Indigenous axes of power and knowledge.

- 2.1.2 Examine how NARU is, and could be better linked, to ANU and related research communities, including through virtual infrastructure and innovative mechanisms for collaboration.

The following summary is a work-in-progress drawn from information and perspectives available to date. It is intended to stimulate discussion in the second phase of the Review Development of Future-State Scenario Options.

Options For Discussion (not mutually exclusive)

1. NARU currently operates as a facility; a facility that provides accommodation, office space, a landing/transition space that enables research and/or educational initiatives (status quo).
Resources: Continued investment in property and facility (approx. \$0.5m per annum).
Impact: Symbolic ANU presence and (low level) visibility; does not currently foster collaboration, even with proximate or tenant institutions.
2. Re-create and re-badge a conventional but nuanced research/education unit in partnership with CDU, consistent with the changed academic ecology, and the productive experience of collaboration under the *Northern Research Futures CRN*.
Resources: In situ ANU/CDU staff – Director, appropriate staff to facilitate/enable engagement; post-graduate and post-doctoral Fellows; academic event funding; improved technology to enable links with hybrid events. Estimated \$2m/annum.
Impact: Reinvigorated presence, visibility and program; channel (front door) for CDU/ANU collaboration; re-activated academic and outreach program through seminars and conferences.
3. Clearing house/translation/engagement centre. Focus on ‘how’ not just ‘what’.
ANU/CDU collaborative centre documenting/evolving methodologies, ethical engagement, negotiated research and educational programs.
Resources: As per point 2 above.
Impact: Facilitates a step change in the relationship between universities, communities, Traditional Owners and organisations. Fosters engagement with, and respect for, traditional knowledge. Antidote to chronopolitics. Enables the formation of a community of practice with the capacity to foster knowledge of, and respect for, appropriate protocols for engagement and to inform research and educational design processes with communities.
An essential base for ANU First Nations researchers conducting research, including those focussing on NTRO (Non-Traditional Research Outcomes) in the Northern Territory¹⁶.
4. Indigenous-led Innovation Centre as per Gandywarra <https://anufirstnations.com.au/gandywarra/>.
Non-academic unit in partnership with CDU and Indigenous Partner Organisations
Resources: Deputy Director, appropriate facilitating/enabling staff (Indigenous/First Nations); specialised technology. Costs are yet to be determined.
Impact: Competitive space in the Northern Territory (NTIBN, CSIRO, Darwin Innovation Hub); impact dependent on formation of partnerships and complementarity with existing CDU initiatives.
5. Socio-economic Innovation Broker. An arrangement between ANU/FNP and Indigenous organisations and/or representative Indigenous governing body that brokers and facilitates research, policy, expertise and advice with Indigenous organisations and communities to create new models of sustainable Indigenous development for transformational and strategic change in Indigenous communities. This would also include an innovation and business hub as per Gandywarra.

¹⁶ The above, together with ANU’s track-record of deep collaborative research, and institutional and community networks, potentially represent the foundations for an Indigenous-led ARC Centre of Excellence bid.

Resources: Deputy Director. Appropriate research, policy analysis, project facilitation and change management staff.

Impact: Collaboration between ANU, CDU, UNDA and JCU and other research bodies to leverage research and capacity building across northern Australia to support a First Nations sustainable development agenda.