Steering Committee

The Steering Committee held its fifteenth meeting over two dates - 16 July and 16 August 2021.

The Steering Committee

The Steering Committee has had a change of Chair with the resignation of Wendy Jarvie this year. We wish to acknowledge the leadership shown by Wendy and the wonderful work she has done to support the *OCHRE* Committee in its monitoring and support of the research being carried out for the betterment of the *OCHRE* strategy in Community-Led decision making. The Committee would like to welcome Associate Professor Lynette Riley as its new Chair. Lynette is a Wiradjuri and Gamilaroi person from Dubbo and Moree, she has a background in Aboriginal Education and currently works at the University of Sydney.

In this first communique as Chair, Lynette wishes to acknowledge the devastating effects of COVID for Aboriginal communities, particularly in rural and remote NSW. COVID has also created restrictions for the researchers, CAEPR, engaged in carrying out the review of *OCHRE* and Local Decision Making. All research contact with community has been changed as required by each community. This will have impact on the collection of the research required to ensure Aboriginal voices are available and heard throughout the research project. The Steering Committee is working with CAEPR to ensure appropriate research and timeliness of the Evaluation through this and the next stages of the research. We do this to honour and support First Nation people's needs in their communities during this COVID epidemic.

Evaluation of *OCHRE* - Local Decision Making

The Committee noted that the lead investigator at CAEPR for the evaluation, Dr Tony Dreise, has accepted a new post as inaugural Pro Vice Chancellor First Nations at the University of Southern Queensland. Tony will also be taking up an Honorary Professorship at the Australian National University's Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research (CAEPR). Members congratulate Tony on his new role, and thank him for his significant contributions to *OCHRE*.

The Committee noted that COVID-19 continues to have an impact on the evaluation. Nevertheless, the evaluation team have progressed, adapting the methodology to suit participants while adhering to COVID restrictions, in particular the need to avoid travelling to Aboriginal communities.

The Committee was pleased to note that the NSW Coalition of Aboriginal Regional Alliances (NCARA) has endorsed a plan for the evaluation of the NCARA Local Decision Making (LDM) State Accord process. Also that a Working paper on aligning regional First Nations representation with emerging national structures will be published. This will be an important document, given that LDM will be pivotal in achieving the objectives of Closing the Gap, as well as work led by the Commonwealth on an Indigenous Voice.

***OCHRE* and new National Agreement on Closing the Gap**

The Committee welcomed a presentation from the Closing the Gap team, Aboriginal Affairs NSW, which discussed the new National Agreement on Closing the Gap, signed in 2020, and how it intersects with *OCHRE*. The Committee noted from discussion on Closing the Gap's Priority Reform One (Formal Partnerships and Shared Decision Making) that the elements of what makes a good partnership is strongly aligned with LDM principles. The Committee will engage with Closing the Gap work, noting that LDM will be important for achieving Closing the Gap reforms and outcomes.

Activities of the NSW Deputy Ombudsman (Aboriginal Affairs)

The Committee welcomed a presentation by the Deputy Ombudsman (Aboriginal Programs) Danny Lester, and Katherine Emerton from his team. The Committee noted the Ombudsman's office has attended workshops on

implementation of the recommendations of the *OCHRE* Policy Refresh, and that the Ombudsman's Special Report on Local Decision Making, Solution Brokerage and Opportunity Hubs is on track.

Wishing everyone all the best,

Associate Professor Lynette Riley

Chair, *OCHRE* Steering Committee.