Too much 'Dreaming': Evaluations of the Northern Territory National Emergency Response Intervention 2007–2012[1]

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Abstract

The Northern Territory National Emergency Response Intervention (the Intervention) of 2007 was a bold experiment by the Howard Government. The Intervention was developed quickly without comprehensive policy development based on evidence or consultation. During its five-year statutory life (ending August 2012), the absence of coherent policy logic has seen the Intervention fundamentally reframed by the Rudd and Gillard Governments. The unprecedented and controversial nature of the Intervention has seen extraordinary levels of monitoring, review and evaluation, but the absence of an overarching evaluation strategy has resulted in a fragmented and confused approach. In this article, we do not seek to critique the Intervention itself or to assess whether these multiple monitoring and evaluation exercises have been successes or failures. Indeed, our review illustrates that in highly contested policy areas, notions of success, failure and the evaluations themselves become politically charged. Instead we make a series of critical observations regarding this contradictory messiness of evaluations, using political science and anthropological frameworks to draw wider conclusions about the nature and logic of evaluation fetishism. We conclude that evaluations of the Intervention have not led to greater transparency, accountability and monitoring of outcomes and outputs. The Intervention evaluations instead are consistent with the view that they are both obfuscating mechanisms and techniques of governance designed to allay public concern and normalise the governance of marginalised Indigenous Australian spaces.

On 21 June 2007, the Howard-led Australian Government launched the Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER) Intervention.[2] From the beginning, the Intervention was emotive, highly political and controversial. The moral authority to intervene was garnered from a year's worth of intensifying media coverage of child abuse and neglect (Macoun 2012). The politics was linked to the declaration of a 'national emergency' in the run-up to a federal election.

The Rudd Opposition accepted the premise of a national emergency and supported the Intervention. Later in 2007, the incoming Rudd Government sought to reframe the Intervention by linking it to the 'Closing the Gap' strategy, while articulating a commitment to evidence-based policy making. This was especially the case in Indigenous affairs, where ideology was perceived as taking precedence over cogent

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[2] The Northern Territory National Emergency Response (NTNER) intervention is also referred to as the Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER) and the Intervention. We will generally use the forms 'the Intervention' and 'the NTER'.

argument and factual information (Evans 2006; Rudd 2008). In addition, because the Government was at once looking for cooperative federalism and State and Territory financial commitments, there was a call for a high degree of transparency and accountability for dollar inputs, program outputs and outcomes in Indigenous affairs.

Such commitments would appear to augur well for a critical evidence-based policy evaluation of the Intervention. As Maddison and Denniss (2009, 177) note, 'No policy should ever be implemented and then abandoned. Evaluation is a crucial element of good policy work, which produces specific advice about the future development – or abandonment – of a particular approach to solving a social problem'. Available evidence indicates that the links between policy development and evaluation in the case of the Intervention were problematic, in part as a consequence of the politically contested space. In any policy area that provokes controversy, there are usually two competing narratives: 'the conflict and the meta-conflict – the conflict about the nature of conflict itself' (Shore 2011, 180). In relation to evaluations of the Intervention there have been two competing narratives: conflict over the interpretation of evaluation findings (with the Australian Government mobilising a dominant narrative of implementation success), and the meta-conflict about the integrity and validity of such evaluation techniques.

Initially, we planned to systemically 'evaluate the evaluations' in order to examine how the Australian Government might assess whether the Intervention was working and when it might be time to 'exit' prescribed communities. This would have been a simple policy question of when the job of normalisation might be deemed complete and special Intervention measures might end. Yet this seemingly straightforward question became increasingly complex.

As we began our research in June 2011, the Australian Government announced that the Intervention would continue beyond June 2012 and released a discussion paper, *Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory* (Australian Government 2011a). Any notion that exit was a serious possibility was quashed. As such, we recalibrated our research question to ask how the Australian Government might know if the Intervention was a policy success. But the exercise of trying to determine whether or not the Intervention was successful raised the important first order issue: what is, or was, the Intervention? This is an important question to answer because it is difficult – arguably impossible – to evaluate a policy if it is constantly in flux on issues of content, target population and timeframe.

We thus begin this review by seeking to define the Intervention policy, and how it has been reconfigured (or in the Government's term 'redesigned') over time. We then use two frameworks to analyse the role of evaluation in the Intervention: Marsh and McConnell's (2010a) heuristic for measuring success (including process, programmatic and political dimensions), and an anthropological perspective on the logic and meaning of policy evaluation in the context of contemporary power relations (Shore and Wright 2011). Subsequently, we delineate what evaluative work has been done to assess this shifting policy and its numerous program components.

In attempting to classify and categorise what might constitute such an evaluation corpus, we found ourselves shadow-boxing with the state, for just as we established its parameters the Australian Government was completing the *Northern Territory Emergency Response Evaluation Report 2011* (Australian Government 2011b). As already noted, the limits of space and scope deter us from appraising all the evaluations. Instead we make a series of critical observations about the evidence base. We do so in part to highlight that the evaluation corpus has itself become co-opted into the policy arena, with a majority of evaluations undertaken by government

departments and paid consultants. We then return to our two analytic frameworks, applying them in tandem to the Intervention evaluations to allow us to address wider political questions. Our assessment concludes that it is impossible to say if the Intervention has been a success, a failure, or neither; results have been mixed, and questions about whether better or more sustainable outcomes might have been achieved have generally not been asked.[3]

What is perhaps even more significant is that in this case it appears evaluation itself is not a tool for objectively measuring success or failure but rather forms a part of the policy process. The sheer quantitative significance of evaluations undertaken has not led to greater clarity, but instead has obfuscated the effects and effectiveness of the Intervention. Our conclusion employs the idiom 'too much dreaming', and asks what all this evaluation has really achieved in relation to policy formation. This question brings into sharp relief a key point: that perhaps such a politically charged and culturally sensitive policy area as the Intervention cannot and should not be evaluated in conventional public policy terms. Key aspects of the Intervention have been locked in until 2022, without clear evidence for or understanding of the differences made from 2007–2012, what the Intervention has been for, or what it may become.

What is, or was, the Intervention: A carefully adapted policy frame

The Intervention, announced on 21 June 2007, was a set of measures aimed to protect children. It followed the release of *Ampe Akelyernemane Meke Mekarle – Little Children are Sacred*, a report chaired by Wild and Anderson and commissioned by the Northern Territory Government (Northern Territory Board of Inquiry 2007). At its outset the Intervention included controversial measures such as compulsory blanket quarantining of welfare income, which required suspension of the Racial Discrimination Act; the compulsory leasing of township precincts without the consent of land-owners; and the provision of unprecedented powers to the police and government-appointed business managers. The Intervention was to last five years, to 21 June 2012, and had the broad aim to stabilise, normalise and then exit 73 'prescribed communities' in the Northern Territory. Specific measures included (Hinkson 2007: 1–2):

- alcohol restrictions;
- welfare reforms (especially compulsory income management);
- enforcing school attendance;
- compulsory (quickly changed to voluntary) health checks for children;
- acquisition of 73 prescribed townships;
- increased policing;
- housing and tenancy reform;
- banning pornography;
- scrapping the permit system; and
- reforming governance with the appointment of managers of all government business in prescribed communities.

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3 For example, irrespective of the reported and case-specific benefits of income management, could more sustainable financial management skills or better nutrition have been achieved for the estimated $500 million (Buckmaster et al. 2012) to be spent on this measure by 2014?

With the passage of five new laws in August 2007, the Intervention consisted of seven measures, each with a number of sub-measures (totaling 36):

• welfare reform and employment;
• promoting law and order;
• enhancing education;
• supporting families;
• improving child and family health;
• housing and land reform; and
• coordination (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2010).

In November 2007 there was a change of government but, surprisingly, the NTER was not fundamentally altered or abandoned. The set of Intervention programs, quickly devised as a policy package a few days prior to 21 June 2007, were caught up in a political process of continual adaptation and reframing. Under the Rudd Government, the NTER became entangled in the new national policy focus on a highly statistical 'Closing the Gap' strategy. The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) further enmeshed these programs in a series of National Partnership Agreements (NPAs) – a new institutional form – that were the foundation of an umbrella National Indigenous Reform Agreement.[4] Under the institutional umbrella of COAG, all governments agreed to six Closing the Gap targets, first announced as a part of the National Apology to the Stolen Generations in February 2008.[5]

The Intervention was transformed from late 2008, especially after an independent (government-appointed) Review Board endorsed its continuation. These reforms, which Altman (2008) termed 'the new "quiet revolution" in Indigenous affairs', saw the dissipation of certain Intervention measures. Housing was no longer a part of the Intervention, but instead a part of the NPA on Remote Indigenous Housing, while 15 of the largest prescribed communities in the Northern Territory became priority communities under the NPA for Remote Service Delivery.

There has been a concerted effort by the Australian Government to alter the discourse about the NTER and Closing the Gap in the Northern Territory, with an intergovernmental commitment to a major 'independent' evaluation during the 2011–2012 financial year. At the same time as Closing the Gap was launched and carefully monitored,[6] a process was underway to redesign the NTER. On 21 June 2010, perhaps symbolically on the anniversary of the Intervention, legislation was passed that removed suspension of the Racial Discrimination Act, provided exemption possibilities and extended income management to non-Indigenous welfare recipients. The Australian Government has since defined income management as a welfare reform measure, rather than as an Intervention measure.[7]

The summary narrative provided here is intended to demonstrate the adaptive changes in the Intervention from 2007–2012, even while most NTER laws remained unchanged. Its continuation, rebadged as Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory,

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[4] The Partnership Agreements focused on economic development, family and community safety, health, remote service delivery, and housing.

[5] The Closing the Gap targets were on life expectancy, child mortality, employment, and three on education. An NPA to Close the Gap in the Northern Territory was signed between the Australian and Northern Territory Governments for the period 1 July 2009 to 30 June 2012.

[6] Monitoring involved two-part six-monthly Closing the Gap Monitoring Reports. The latest and possibly last for the period July–December 2011 was released on 21 June 2012, the fifth anniversary of the Intervention.

[7] Although Closing the Gap monitoring reports continue to quantify those in the Northern Territory under the BasicsCard (income management) regime.

passed into law on 29 June 2012 and locked in a range of commitments by the Gillard Government for a ten-year period to 2022. Yet as Lovell (2012) has recently shown, while the Howard, Rudd and Gillard Governments have been committed to the Intervention, the major political discourses used by the Coalition and Labor governments to justify the Intervention have been very different. The Coalition Government used a discourse of failure and problematic culture to represent communities as dysfunctional and unsafe for children (also see Macoun 2012). In contrast, the Labor Government has shown a contradictory focus on human rights and maintenance of the Intervention on one hand, and on the other a narrow conception of 'development as mainstreaming' that devalues Aboriginal perspectives and privileges a single modernisation pathway to development. Altman (2009a) has argued that, from an Indigenous standpoint, the Closing the Gap framework at the core of current Indigenous policy is based on the assumption that the Indigenous population aspires to attain Western norms – an assumption that has not been discussed, let alone negotiated, with the subjects of the Intervention.[8]

We make three points illustrating the difficulty in defining and delimiting the Intervention on which evaluations are based. First, we note that over five years the Intervention has broadened its discursive framing considerably from an initial focus on children to a far broader focus on sustainable communities and progress in achieving Closing the Gap targets. Paradoxically, the definition of the Intervention has also been refined, so that key initial elements like housing and income management are no longer regarded as Intervention measures by the Government, while effectively remaining unchanged. Second, the population and communities targeted by the Intervention have altered from the initial 73 prescribed communities with a population of about 32,000 Indigenous people, to over 600 communities with an estimated population of 45,000. The major difference is that over 500 smaller outstation, homeland, pastoral, and town camp communities have now been included. In a statistical sense this change is important. Third, the timeframe for the Intervention is unclear. Most of the formal government evaluation was completed by November 2011, in preparation for the rapid development and passage of Stronger Futures laws. However, the last vestiges of the original Intervention laws did not end until August 2012, when compulsory township leasing arrangements expired, so arguably the final evaluation occurred too early.[9]

Political and anthropological perspectives on evaluation[10]

There are frequent government claims in the media that the Intervention has been a success. Selected data from evaluations have often been mobilised as the 'evidence' for such claims. Marsh and McConnell (2010a) argue that claims of policy success are commonplace in political life, but that few of these justifications are supported in a systematic way. They propose a framework for assessing success that focuses on three

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[8] For example, an outcome that may be deemed a policy success would be the retention of Indigenous children in schools, However, if this leads to loss of Indigenous languages, then from what standpoint is this measured as a success?

[9] Census data, collected in August 2011, was coincidentally first released on 21 June 2012, the fifth anniversary of the Intervention. These official statistics will hence provide the most comprehensive means to assess change between 2006 and 2011 (see Altman 2012b).

[10] We recognise that many other perspectives could also be used, including from the growing disciplinary fields of audit and evaluation studies and crisis management studies. However given that we seek to understand the political meaning of evaluation in the context of Intervention, we deem the political and anthropological frameworks we have chosen most appropriate for this type of analysis.

dimensions: programmatic, political and process. In later work (Marsh and McConnell 2010b), they illustrate how these three dimensions might overlap and be related.

This is a useful framework for determining what is meant by 'success', and for exploring the relationship between success and evaluation, in the context of the Intervention. Referring to Marsh and McConnell's (2010a) success 'trifecta' – programmatic, political and process – evaluations of the Intervention have focused on programmatic success, asking whether policy elements achieved intended outcomes, although rarely whether the program was an efficient use of resources. This is not unusual, as Marsh and McConnell (2010a: 565) note: 'Much of the evaluation literature is produced from within government, but rarely, if ever, moves beyond the assumption that success equate[s] with meeting policy objectives or producing "better" policy'.

Paradoxically, given the technocratic focus on outcomes and programmatic success, the evaluations have occurred in an environment devoid of overarching policy or program logic. The Australian Government published a comprehensive 400 page *Northern Territory Emergency Response Evaluation Report 2011*, which discusses the Australian Government's 'evaluation strategy' and refers to a program logic that was developed by specialist consultants 'to aid understanding of the whole-of-government evaluation of the NTER'. Upon attempting to track down the report detailing this program logic, we found reference to an unpublished report *Development of Program Logic Options for the NTER*, prepared by ARTD Consultants and WestWood Spice in 2010. Unfortunately, repeated requests to senior Commonwealth Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA) officials for a copy of this report proved fruitless at time of writing.[11] The preparation of this unsighted report in late 2009 reinforces our view that the initial 2007 Intervention had no policy or program logic. Hence our focus here will be on the political and process dimensions of success.[12]

This success heuristic proves particularly interesting in the Intervention policy arena. As Marsh and McConnell note: 'When we study policy success we are immediately faced with the classic political science issue of power, and contestation over interpretation of context and outcome'. We address such issues through an anthropological framework, drawing on a burgeoning literature regarding contemporary power and policy processes. In the context of the Intervention, where the Western values of a dominant group are being imposed on populations that might either oppose or contest them, anthropology seems ideally placed to provide perspectives from Indigenous communities on the effectiveness of such policies in a contested intercultural space. To date, there have been few holistic, community-based evaluations of the Intervention using anthropological methods such as participant observation with small populations.[13]

Shore's (2011a, 169–186) research on a form of 'intervention' – the British Secret Service and the War on Iraq – is instructive, and resonates with what has occurred in the Northern Territory since 2007. Shore (2011a: 169) explores:

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[11]   On 28 November 2012 this report was tabled in the Australian Senate in response to an order for the production of documents by the Australian Greens and endorsed by the Senate. See Postscript below.

[12]   Our observations make clear that there is little prospect that measurable programmatic outcomes from the Intervention will be evident within such a short timeframe; few questions have been asked about value for money; the parameters of the Intervention have changed; and the Intervention was initially established without any clear policy or program logic.

[13]   For some partial analyses see some essays in Altman and Hinkson (2010a), and some of the 454 submissions to the Stronger Futures Senate Inquiry, such as Slotte's (2012) from Ramingining.

the idea of policy as a legal-rational tool of governance that simultaneously provides an instrument for the operation of state power … My concern is with how policy makers and politicians use policy to construct the public sphere, classify populations and define problems so that particular solutions appear natural and unavoidable, i.e., how policies are discursively managed in an attempt to control public debate and forge specific outcomes.

Shore (2011a, 2011b) theorises policy as both 'political technology' and 'statecraft'. As such, while policies are inherently political, their political nature is disguised by neutral legal-rational idioms. Thus, power is disguised by making a particular discourse appear so 'natural' that its ideological content comes to be regarded as common sense and beyond question. Policy legitimises a particular course of action framed in terms of universal and unchallengeable principles, such as the right of children to a peaceful existence and a productive future based on education, and the right of impoverished Indigenous Australians to share in the nation's wealth. Practices that are racialised and target particular groups in prescribed communities are justified by claims to such higher principles (like normalisation) or urgent policy priorities (like a 'national emergency' to eliminate child sexual abuse).

The evaluation corpus: When is an evaluation an evaluation?

Having located the evaluations literature within these analytic frames, we now turn to an exploration of the 'evaluation corpus'. One of the methodological challenges that this review faced was the formidable task of classifying and listing the corpus of evaluations of the Intervention policy and its program elements. When Altman co-presented the David Hunter Memorial Lecture in Canberra on 17 November 2011, he took along the eight evaluative reports released on the Intervention in the previous month. He physically stacked them up on the podium, a half metre in height, to give the audience a visual sense of the volume of material that is being made publicly available, and the challenge that this presents to proper analysis. When we began compiling our evaluation corpus we were aware that there was considerable Intervention auditing, bordering on what Sullivan (2011: 80) has termed 'audit fetishism'. This is not surprising, given the political contestation over the Intervention[14] and the high level of commitment to accountability for Intervention expenditure.

In compiling the evaluations of the Intervention we realised that we would face a significant challenge, not just in locating all the reports, but also in reading them. In late 2011 we liaised with FaHCSIA and verified that our emerging database of evaluations not only matched theirs but seemed to be more inclusive. In the Appendix we list our evaluation corpus, including non-government sponsored evaluations that might be termed 'independent'. There are also other reports listed that deal with the NPAs for Remote Service Delivery[15] and Remote Indigenous Housing in the Northern Territory (Australian National Audit Office 2011), even though the Australian Government defines these reports as outside the remit of the Intervention. However,

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[14] Contestation has occurred between the major political parties and some Aboriginal communities and spokespeople, the Australian Greens, some NGOs, sections of the academy, domestic advocacy and activist groups, and global human rights agencies like the Office of the High Commission for Human Rights

[15] This report series is by the Commonwealth and Northern Territory Coordinator-Generals for Remote Service Delivery that only deal with 16 and 21 Northern Territory communities respectively. The position of the Northern Territory Coordinator-General for Remote Services was abolished by the incoming Mills Country Liberal Government on 6 October 2012.

our information remains far from complete. For example, we would like to know what these reports cost and why a number are not publicly available. Reasons we have been given include purported or negotiated confidentiality. In this context, new Freedom of Information laws and Senate Estimate protocols suggest that more and more information will become publicly available over time.[16]

Demarcations of what should be included and excluded are difficult to make, especially in the area of income management, which has been such a central concern of the Intervention and its redesign. As such, we include reports on income management in our evaluations list, even though the Australian Government now recommends its exclusion as an Intervention measure. We do not include numerous reports that review Indigenous policy nationally, such as standard outputs from the Australian Bureau of Statistics, which cannot be disaggregated to the Northern Territory level,[17] or that are statistically unreliable at that level.[18] Nor do we include the Prime Minister's annual report since 2009 to the Australian Parliament on progress in Closing the Gap, the Productivity Commission's biennial *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage* reports for 2007, 2009 and 2011, or the massive *Strategic Review of Indigenous Expenditure February 2010* report released under a Freedom of Information application in August 2011. In addition, while we do list seven reports from Senate Inquiries into the NTER, we do not list the literally hundreds of submissions received by them, with the Stronger Futures Senate Inquiry receiving over 500, nor do we list the over 200 submissions received by the Review of the Intervention (Yu, Ella-Duncan and Gray 2008).

In seeking to compile our evaluation corpus, we have hence focused on government and independent reports that might be defined as monitoring, auditing or reporting the Intervention. In the space available here we cannot provide an analysis of all these evaluations. However, the sheer number of reports that we list in the Appendix is staggering and has escalated: one in 2007; 17 in 2008; 18 in 2009; 22 in 2010; 29 in 2011; and 11 to October 2012 – a total of 98 reports. Note that this is more than double the 41 items listed by the online Closing the Gap Clearing House being developed by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare and the Australian Institute of Family Studies.

Observations about the evaluation corpus

It has become clear to us that attempting a systematic review of unsystematic policy development and review processes would be counterproductive. Hence our aim is not to systematically review the evaluation corpus or assess the relative value of different categories of report, whether classified by authorship, independence from government, size, cost or any other variable. Instead, we make critical observations about the evaluation corpus as a whole in the hope of drawing wider evidence-based conclusions about the nature and logic of evaluation in the context of a highly politicised area of policy.[19]

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[16] For example, a report by ARTD and WestwoodSpice (2010) only made publicly available on 28 November 2012.

[17] For example, the *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey* undertaken by the Australian Bureau of Statistics in 1994, 2002 and 2008.

[18] For example, the annual *Labour Force Characteristics of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians* survey undertaken by the Australian Bureau of Statistics.

[19] Our references are coded in the following two sections of the article to allow easy cross-reference to the list in the Appendix.

A quick scan of the evaluations listed shows that there is extraordinary diversity in the range of issues covered, populations surveyed, jurisdictions targeted, and timeframes of the assessments. The most comprehensive coverage is presented in a series of *Closing the Gap in the Northern Territory Monitoring Reports* that are defined as 'whole-of-government' (see A2009b; A2010a; A2010b; A2011a; A2011b; A2012g). The problem with these reports is that they mainly focus on outputs and provide information for different populations. Other reports are very specific, focusing, for example, on the child health check initiative (A2008k; A2009k) or the school nutrition program (A2009m). Timelines and repetitions are ad hoc. Some reports are repeated, such as the six-monthly monitoring reports or those of Commonwealth (A2009c; A2010c; A2011c; A2011d; A2012h) or Northern Territory Coordinators-General (A2009d; A2010d; A2010e; A2011e; A2012i). These provide some prospects for tracking absolute changes over time, even if only in outputs. Other evaluations are one-offs, such as the review of the Alcohol Management Plan in Tennant Creek (A2010s), although there is nothing precluding repeat evaluations that might treat an apparent one-off evaluation as a baseline.

Observation 1: Evaluation fetishism replacing logic

Roughley (2009, 7) defines program logic in the following way:

> Program logic is an approach to program planning. It captures the rationale behind a program, probing and outlining the anticipated cause-and-effect relationships between program activities, outputs, intermediate outcomes and longer term desired outcomes. Program logic is usually represented as a diagram or matrix that shows a series of expected consequences, not just a sequence of events. Program logic expresses how change is expected to occur.

It is widely acknowledged in the evaluations literature that a well-articulated program logic is essential if a program or policy is to be effectively evaluated. Ideally, a program logic is developed in the development and planning stage, so that the subsequent implementation and effects of the program can be evaluated against it. In other words, it should be an *ex ante* exercise that sets the basis for future evaluations (Funnell and Rogers 2011).

The absence of program logic for the NTER has been obscured through the sheer quantity of evaluations, a move we term 'evaluation fetishism'. This has allowed the Australian Government 'flexibility' in the framing of evaluations. For example, the NTER redesign consultations undertaken in July and August 2009 framed important discussions around income management, without considering the possibility that the program might be abolished. Later, when the Discussion Paper *Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory* was released in 2011, a senior government official revealed in Senate Estimates (Hansard, Supplementary Budget Estimates 2011–2012, Cross Portfolio Indigenous Matters, 22–23) that departmental officials had drafted it

> based on a scan of the issues that we expect would need to be addressed, bearing in mind the fact that over four years there has been a report chaired by Peter Yu, a series of consultations on the 2009 reforms to the NTER legislation, and then this 2011 consultation. In a sense, the issues selected themselves, but the strict answer to your question is that the department prepared the discussion paper.

The absence of transparent and readily available program logic has meant that much Intervention monitoring and evaluation has focused on outputs rather than outcomes, and at times conflated outputs and outcomes. For example, much of the

reporting on income management has quantified the numbers on BasicsCard or the total amount of income quarantined as outputs (A2009b; A2010a; A2010b; A2011a, A2011b; A2012g), but there has been almost no attempt to provide information on outcomes (healthier people). According to the *Magenta Book* (2011, 11) published by the UK Treasury, 'A logic model describes the theory, assumptions and evidence underlying the rationale for a policy. It does this by linking the intended outcomes (both short and long term) with the policy inputs, activities, processes and theoretical assumptions'. The confusion and conflation in Intervention evaluations between outputs and outcomes distorts any clear logic model.

As noted in the *NTER Evaluation Report 2011* (A2011y), the possibility of observing sustainable outcomes after just four years of Intervention would be limited. We find almost no evaluation that clearly specifies a logic model for evaluation; A2010n outlining a framework for evaluating income management is the only exception. A key area where evaluation logic is missing is in any attempt to assess whether the Intervention is actually effective in Closing the Gap in the Northern Territory.[20] Most of the evaluation reports are properly and heavily qualified with caveats that warn that it is unlikely that short-term socioeconomic change will be observed in situations of deeply entrenched disadvantage (A2011y).

However, the acknowledgement of these short-term limitations on monitoring change raises the important question of why monitoring has been undertaken and publicised on a six-monthly basis. This is a process of 'evaluation fetishism'. Part of the reason for evaluation fetishism can be linked to the highly political nature of the Intervention and a need for governments to show that progress is being made. This has especially been the case in areas like housing, where changing the institutional architecture (from community to public ownership and management of housing) has been expensive and protracted (A2011j). Yet evaluation fetishism as a substitute for policy logic is a double-edged sword. Regular reporting has had a political purpose, but has also carried political risk. Apparent short-term improvements, lauded as evidence that the Intervention is working, have been followed by plunging reversals, for example in fluctuating school attendance figures (A2009b; A2010a; A2010b; A2011a, A2011b; A2012g).

Observation 2: Evaluating evidence and outcomes

A close reading of evaluation and monitoring reports reveals two types of conflicting evidence.

First, there can be conflicting evidence in quantitative outputs. For example, six-monthly monitoring reports show increases in employment as, simultaneously, there is an increase in the number of welfare dependents (A2012g). The latter might reflect population growth or better welfare coverage, but such possibilities are not explored. Similarly, six-monthly reports provide information on increased investments in education that sit alongside information of stagnant, fluctuating or declining school attendance.

Second, the absence of baseline or control data (see below) means that there is a high reliance on qualitative or self-assessment data. There is a well-documented potential for qualitative assessments to contradict quantitative measures among

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[20] This terminology was possibly borrowed from the Northern Territory Government's *Closing the Gap of Indigenous Disadvantage: A Generation Plan of Action* (the Martin Government's comprehensive responses to the *Little Children are Sacred* report in August 2007) that was superseded by the Commonwealth-inspired COAG Closing the Gap framework in 2008.

Indigenous peoples. Anderson and Sibthorpe (1996) provide an early example: self-assessment of health status as 'high' can be in marked variance to clinical data on morbidity and disease prevalence. Similarly, in the comprehensive *Community Safety and Wellbeing Research Study* (A2011aa), respondents were of the view that school attendance was rising, whereas quantitative school attendance figures from schools suggested stagnating or declining rates of attendance at the same time (A2011b). In the same vein, respondents might indicate that the lack of availability of police is a major problem, when data on number of police suggests a growing presence (A2011aa).

It is well known in the evaluations literature that it is extremely difficult to assess whether an observed outcome was caused by a particular intervention, known as the 'attribution problem' (McDavid 2009). This is especially the case when an intervention is holistic, as is the case with the NTER, and when both quantitative and qualitative measurements are used to indicate outputs or outcomes (they become conflated). Some might argue that it does not matter as long as the outcome is positive, but what if it is ambiguous or negative? There is considerable evidence of increased expenditure on the provision of health services and policing but, simultaneously, there is quantitative evidence of higher rates of hospitalisation for children, and there are more reports of violence (A2010b; A2011a, A2011b; A2012g). It is unclear whether the aim of more health checks and more policing is to increase or reduce hospitalisation and reported domestic violence. There are clearly major problems in making a strong link between interventions and outcomes. Such ambiguities are not surprising given poor outcomes reporting frameworks and also the complexity of the circumstances relating to the NTER.

In the recently published *Australian Government Coordination Arrangements for Indigenous Programs* report, the ANAO (2012, 95) is highly critical in a general sense of the absence of what it refers to as 'contribution analysis' in Indigenous programs. It highlights that methods have been developed in Canada as long ago as 1999 to use performance measures rigorously to assess contributions.

Observation 3: Controlling evaluations

One of the dangers of a high level of monitoring and evaluation is the risk of adverse or unwelcome findings. When these have occurred in the government's own reports or commissioned consultancies they have either been ignored or hidden. One example of this is the major area of Safe Communities. The latest report for the period July–December 2011 indicates that attempted suicide and self-harm reports increased from 57 in 2007 to 261 in 2011 (A2012g). This is a particularly worrying statistic, but there are many other areas of personal harm, assaults, restraining orders, reports of child abuse, and trends in child protection indicators where trends appear to be negative. One response from the Australian Government is that it reflects better policing and reporting, without due acknowledgment that the Intervention is about improving community safety, not increasing incarceration. Another example is the *Community Safety and Wellbeing Research Project* (A2011aa), which reported that, on aspects of community safety and community functioning, there was a statistically significant 'inverse linear relationship between the proportion who perceived an improvement and population size'. This finding was buried because so much policy is focusing on the larger 'priority communities' and Territory Growth Towns.

When Altman (2009b) published an opinion editorial in November 2009 highlighting this deterioration in the government's own monitoring report, he received

an email from Minister Macklin's office asking: 'Did you consider that the increased reporting of violence could be a result of substantially increased police presence on the ground? Many of these places did not have a proper police presence before. The headline should read reported violence is up, not violence is up'. Semantic niceties aside, it is genuinely difficult to tell what is happening in the area of community safety: the absence of any 'contribution analysis' makes it hard to know what proportion of the increase might be due to increased policing. Under such circumstances, it is impossible to measure the validity of output statistics.

The Australian Government's releases to the media are carefully crafted to emphasise the positive. The most recent *Closing the Gap in the Northern Territory Monitoring Report* (A2012g) was accompanied by a media release titled 'Delivering more jobs and job opportunities for Aboriginal people' (Macklin 2012a), which highlighted a set of random outputs delivered in the previous six months (actually July to December 2011), including 3,183 breakfasts and 4,511 lunches across 73 communities through the School Nutrition Program, rather than reporting on other relevant data such as escalating attempted suicide and self-harm.

Another way to control public reception of evaluation reports is to control the evaluations themselves. A high proportion of evaluations are either undertaken by government departments or by consultants to terms of reference developed by the Australian Government. While the evaluations literature indicates that this is not an unusual practice, it does raise questions about the independence of research, especially when the word 'independent' is used. For example, the two most comprehensive reviews that book-ended the Intervention were completed in October 2008 (A2008c) and November 2011 (A2011y). The membership of both review groups was selected by the government, funded by the government and had secretariat support provided by the government. In the former case, there was a view articulated in the media that the original report had been amended, compromising its independence (Toohey 2008). In the latter case, an email from a senior official dated 26 October 2011 noted that: 'a comprehensive and independent evaluation of the NTER including the funding measures in the NPA is underway and led by the Performance and Evaluation Branch in FaHCSIA'.

The controversial nature of the Intervention has meant that the government has been keen to retain a firm hand on the evaluations tiller. It is not clear if evaluations undertaken by government or paid consultants are peer reviewed in any way. Very few evaluations have been independent from government, with resourcing clearly an issue. Such reports, especially those by academic researchers at Jumbunna Indigenous House of Learning at the University of Technology, Sydney (A2008p; A2009i; A2010m; A2011cc; A2012e), and advocacy groups such as Concerned Australians (A2011x; A2011z) or the Equality Rights Alliance (A2011f), have produced very different results from those by government or its consultants – an issue returned to below.

It is possible that the large number of official evaluations has crowded out other forms of community-controlled evaluations. At times there has been such heightened political sensitivity, especially around consultation-based evaluation, that the Australian Government has commissioned consultants CIRCA (A2008g; A2009h; A2011w) and O'Brien Rich (A2011v) to undertake qualitative and quantitative evaluations of the evaluation/consultation processes. Some agencies are independent, including the Australian National Audit Office (ANAO) (A2009q; A2010j; A2011g; A2011l), the Commonwealth Ombudsman and the Parliamentary Library, but either make limited public criticism (ANAO) or – as with the Commonwealth Ombudsman

(A2010j; A2011g; A2011l) – provide hard-hitting critique that is focused on administrative issues and Aboriginal client complaint.

Observation 4: Discrediting evaluations

A somewhat different approach is taken with independent research that delivers unwelcome findings: the Government appears to discredit it. The most extreme example of such an approach has been thoroughly documented by Cox (2011) in the *Journal of Indigenous Policy*. Peer reviewed research by Brimblecombe et al. (2010), published in the *Medical Journal of Australia*, questioned the efficacy of income management using the only before and after (longitudinal) study undertaken to date. It concluded that in 10 community stores, income management failed to reduce sales of tobacco, cigarettes and soft drinks or increase sales of fresh fruit and vegetables. This was an extremely unpopular finding, and the Australian Government quickly commissioned work to counter these claims. Its response did not gather additional evidence, but sought to discredit Brimblecombe et al.'s peer reviewed research. Although the government-commissioned report critiquing this study was cited in the final evaluation of the Intervention (Australian Government 2011b, 342), the report itself is not available to the public (A2010s).

The Commonwealth Ombudsman's office has also experienced what could be interpreted as the Government's displeased response to criticism. The Office was allocated additional resources to be able to respond to Intervention-linked complaints from residents of remote communities, where English literacy levels are low and communications can be difficult. Its Indigenous Unit regularly contributed to six-monthly monitoring reports. The Office also recently published two major reports (A2012b; A2012d) on income management decisions and remote housing reform, which are highly critical of Australian and Northern Territory Government agencies, including FaHCSIA. On 30 June 2012, when the NPA to Close the Gap in the Northern Territory concluded, the Indigenous Unit found itself unfunded, with the implication made that the special needs of Indigenous clients could now be 'normalised' through mainstreaming of this previously specialised service.

Observation 5: Evaluating change

As a general rule, monitoring and evaluation reports are highly descriptive and make few recommendations (at least publicly) for change, especially if undertaken by government agencies or hired consultants (see for example A2011y). There are exceptions here; those with statutory roles at arm's length from government are more likely to make recommendations for change, especially in program implementation, rather than policy-framing. This has been evident in reports from the Commonwealth Coordinator-General for Remote Service Delivery (A2009c; A2010c; A2011c; A2011d; A2012h), who made recommendations echoed by Al-Yaman and Higgins (2011) that emphasise the need for community involvement and engagement. The Commonwealth Ombudsman's Indigenous Unit has highlighted problems with income management and housing tenancy arrangements (A2012b; A2012d). Finally, the ANAO always makes recommendations for change, even if only at the administrative margins.

Yet in order to evaluate whether positive change is occurring from a significantly increased expenditure on targeted Intervention programs, it is essential to establish a baseline against which to measure change. The 'national emergency' nature of the Intervention and its ad hoc policy development origins not only subverted democratic

accountability, but also set in train an unusual set of repercussions, including hyper-auditing by the new government. It is hard to recapture today the high drama of 21 June 2007, including the decision to deploy military forces to remote communities as part of 'Operation Outreach'. From the outset in 2007, Boyd Hunter was already warning that evaluation without either a baseline or control communities would make objective evaluation extremely difficult. The NTER Review Board (2008) made similar observations when it handed down its report. Datasets that extend back before the NTER, for example on child hospitalisation rates (A2012g), do provide some comparative information that shows no discernible change before and after 2007. The absence of quantitative baseline data has resulted in far too much reliance on outputs as a crude proxy for outcomes, and on responses heavily influenced by the framing of questions.[21]

One important source of official information is 2011 Census data, which will be comparable with pre-Intervention 2006 Census data at the individual community level. As this article is being completed, we await third release (28 March 2013) data that will allow community-by-community analysis of changes between 2006 and 2011. Such analysis will allow measurement of absolute change in Indigenous well-being, as well as comparative change following the Intervention, in accord with COAG's normative Closing the Gap criteria. An early example of such analysis using official statistics at the Northern Territory level (Altman 2012b) shows little closing of statistical 'gaps' between 2006 and 2011.

Discussion

> Governments regularly adopt and sustain policies for political reasons that have little to do with the stated evidence. In such cases, government-provided evidence becomes the official rationale for decisions rather than part of their actual justification ... Governments are often looking for evidence that will best support their predetermined policies rather than the best evidence on which to ground their yet-to-be-determined policies (Mulgan 2006, 6).

Our task in this review has not been to assess the success (or failure) of the Intervention, but to examine the role that evaluation and evidence play in its political framing. As Marsh and McConnell (2010a, 581) note, whatever dimension of success is being considered, there are significant complexities in the assessment process. We have demonstrated these in our observations about the NTER evaluations. These observations raise important questions about the purpose of auditing and evaluation given that the Government appears unwilling to countenance any change in the fundamentals of the Intervention, and that its own hefty evaluation report (Australian Government 2011b) notes that it is unlikely to discern any sustainable change in outcomes in the short-term.

It is not that such evaluation comes cheap: at a seminar held at the Australian National University in December 2011 to present an earlier version of this article, a senior government official in attendance volunteered off-the-cuff that evaluation might represent a standard rule-of-thumb 3-5 per cent of the $2 billion spend, possibly $60-100 million over the five year period of the Intervention. In the context of the Intervention and its aftermath, where $500 million is to be spent on income management, up to $500 million on changing the architecture for remote Indigenous housing administration in the Northern Territory, and $200 million on the institution

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[21] This is evident in conflicting views about the integrity of consultations over Intervention redesign in 2009 (A2009i) and Stronger Futures in 2011 (A2011v; A2012e).

of the Government Business Manager, this may not seem like a particularly significant amount. However, it is still reasonable to ask what all the evaluation has achieved and why it has been undertaken.

To answer this question, we return to our analytic frames. Referring back to Marsh and McConnell (2010a), the political dimension of Intervention 'success' raises important questions about the diverse and contradictory political reference points by which success is measured, and the role of evaluation in determining this success. As noted earlier, though there is a difference between the initial Coalition approach and that of the Australian Labor Party, the Rudd and Gillard Governments have been eager to maintain Intervention bipartisanship. From the Gillard Government's perspective, the Intervention has been a political success because the Government has managed to transform it to incorporate discourses of human rights and Closing the Gap development. At the same time, that transformation has seen the successful negotiation of the continuation of Intervention elements for a further 10 years, with a legislated funding commitment of $3.4 billion. It could be argued that the 'official' evaluation strategy has facilitated a transformation of the Intervention from Closing the Gap in the Northern Territory to Stronger Futures. However, this political success has its ambiguities, both domestically and globally. In August 2012 there was a change in government in the Northern Territory, the first since 2001. The dissatisfaction of rural electorates with aspects of the Intervention may have been one explanation of the wholesale transfer of elected Indigenous members to the conservative Country Liberal Party, although others interpret the election result as support for continued income management (Langton 2012). The impact of this change of government on the national political landscape will become clearer in 2013.

At the level of 'process success' the Australian Government sought process transparency through an apparently high level of community consultation for NTER redesign in 2009, and then for the NTER transition to Stronger Futures in 2011. In both cases, the Government undertook extensive but rushed consultations, eager to find evidence of policy approval that could be reframed as success to support policy positions outlined in consultation discussion papers (see A2009i). This has been possible, as already noted, because the Government framed consultation processes within tight parameters. This apparent process success, however, is strongly contested by counter-narratives emerging from consultations that were not tightly controlled. Hence, academic researchers (mainly from Jumbunna Indigenous House of Learning) and activist organisations (Stop the Intervention Collective, Sydney) were able to provide very different, sometimes diametrically opposed, community perspectives when shadowing government consultation. This has especially been the case on contentious issues such as income management and linking welfare payments to school attendance (A2012e).

Two Senate Inquiries generated evidence of process problems that cannot be easily dismissed. The first was in relation to legislation that sought to continue income management in compliance with the Racial Discrimination Act (Community Affairs Legislation Committee 2010; A2010v); the second in relation to the continuation of the Intervention in its 'Stronger Futures' manifestation (Community Affairs Legislation Committee 2012; A2012k). Both Inquiries made it clear that the Australian Government was not interested in evidence-based policy making, if views from a range of stakeholders made in written submission and by expert witnesses could be deemed evidence. As Cox (A2011c; 2012) has demonstrated, in both cases, almost all the written and oral evidence opposed the Government and Opposition positions. Even more significant was the verbal evidence taken by the Senate

committee in the Northern Territory that contradicted the views the Government had gleaned from its consultation processes.

These examples demonstrate that attempting to assess or measure political and process success in the context of the Intervention is controversial, fraught and open to multiple interpretations. Moreover, as the absence of any initial overarching policy logic has indicated, the overall purpose and motive of the Intervention has been unclear. Using an anthropological perspective on power and policy processes (exemplified through the work of Shore (2011a) and Hyatt (2011), as well as Lattas and Morris (2010) in Australia), we interpret the broad goal of Intervention policy as rapidly transitioning residents of remote communities in the Northern Territory to normalisation, now metaphorically captured by the goal to Close the Gap. However, this political goal has been obscured. Shore (2011a) notes that, as policies are inherently political, so the role of the state in creating and reproducing poverty and politico-structural causes of inequality is hidden, while press releases and media coverage do the work of normalising the ideological content of Intervention issues. In the case of the NTER, the following rhetorical questions have been constantly repeated: Shouldn't Aboriginal kids live safely? And go to school? Shouldn't welfare provided by the state be spent sensibly? Shouldn't Aboriginal populations be properly policed like other citizens? Shouldn't Aboriginal people be educated and trained to work like other Australians? Such rhetorical devices enshrine Intervention ideologies in the everyday, rendering them a matter of common sense and indeed of basic human rights and needs.

What our focus on policy framing seeks to highlight is its fundamental connections to subsequent monitoring, auditing and evaluation. What is different about the latest in a series of Indigenous interventions is that today, new technologies of surveillance allow the state to monitor many aspects of everyday life: work, schooling, child health, public housing occupancy, access to welfare, and household expenditure. These are linked to new policies, like income management, school attendance measures and new housing tenancy arrangements, and generate an extraordinary quantum of data (of varying quality) for evaluation.

At the same time, this technocratic approach and deployment of state power is neither uniform nor monolithic. As Shore (2011b) notes, the modern state is rarely a unified, coherent or homogenous actor. Both hyper-reporting and diversity are features of the detailed six-monthly *Closing the Gap in the Northern Territory Monitoring Report*. It provides information across seven broad measures by a combination of four lead Commonwealth portfolios, and different areas within them, as well as the Ombudsman's Office. This diversity provides space for some agencies to 'call it as it is' but then allow the political leadership to do the interpreting for the media, which has the overall effect of minimising diversity and dissent.

And yet factual reporting by government agencies can reveal fractures and failures, destabilising and calling into question the link between evaluation and success. Importantly it can often act to obscure the issues at hand. The last six-monthly monitoring report released on 20 June 2012 (A2012g) exposes such conflict in much reporting. Bearing in mind that the focus of the Intervention is on only 45,000 Indigenous people, the report tells us that 22,729 adults are on some form of income support (oddly reported in a section on Economic Participation) and, of these, 17,215 (76 per cent) are income managed. This represents an extraordinary level of scrutiny. Information on how much income has been managed ($654.3 million since 2007, with $631.5 million spent) is of no relevance to the supposedly targeted underlying issues of the wellbeing of children. In addition, as noted earlier, the focus of the media spin

about this report quite intentionally obfuscates and deflects attention from any negatives, focusing instead on 'Delivering more jobs and job opportunities for Aboriginal people', with Minister Macklin (2012a) emphasising that since 2007, 2,241 real jobs have been created in government service delivery positions. Not only has the sustainability of these jobs already been questioned by the ANAO (A2011o), but such media statements depoliticise what are clearly important issues of performance accountability.

Perhaps most importantly, as the Australian Government has deployed its power to make policy and to invest heavily in a new institutional architecture, it has sought to evaluate this framework on its own terms. This does several things. First, it serves to further naturalise a dominant narrative of policy as 'the' framework, as outlined for all Indigenous Australians by the Productivity Commission (Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision 2011, 13). This framework focuses on the six COAG targets matching six headline indicators that are linked to seven strategic areas for action to be measured and monitored by 37 sets of indicators. This sits alongside the Intervention's seven measures and 36 sub-measures, all devised unilaterally by the Australian Government. This renders a deeply-entrenched development problem into a hyper-technical monitoring exercise. What is more, this framing has penetrated policy discourse down to the local level, so that what are termed Local Implementation Plans in priority communities in the Northern Territory are all based on abstract Closing the Gap targets, without any concrete reference to what baseline evidence is to be used.

Second, the plethora of quantitative statistics generated by these new monitoring tools means that there is little focus on more qualitative and locally relevant measures of performance. There is a growing emphasis in a number of monitoring and evaluation reports that the form of Intervention matters, not just the quantum. The need to engage and empower local communities has been increasingly emphasised by what may be termed semi-autonomous agencies – the Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision (2011), the AIHA/AIFS Closing the Gap Clearing House (2011), and the reports of Commonwealth and Northern Territory Coordinators-General.[22] But these broad issues of governance and self-management, what might be termed 'intangibles' in the context of quantitative evaluation, have no place in the overarching framing of Intervention evaluation.

Finally, evaluation leaves some critically important issues unanswered. Through our assessment of evaluations it becomes increasingly obvious that 'success' is impossible to measure in such contested political spaces. Indeed the very legitimacy of the goals of the Intervention is questionable in such intercultural and diverse domains of what were termed, until recently, 'prescribed communities'. We cannot know if the quantum allocated to the Intervention's normalisation and Closing the Gap projects is adequate, given no objective needs assessment has been undertaken. And considering the latest (and last) report of the Northern Territory Coordinator-General (2012) has questioned how much of the overall expenditure is actually reaching people in need, it would appear that the infrastructure and mode of delivery, with its heavy bureaucratic emphasis, is ineffective. The overall logic of the NTER and its evaluation seem fraught: the link between evidence and policy formation is weak. If measures are working effectively at the programmatic level, are there policy grounds for maintaining the Intervention? Conversely, if evidence shows that measures are ineffective, are there grounds for fundamentally changing its form? Or

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[22] Their mandates in the Northern Territory only require a focus on 15 priority communities and 21 Territory Growth Towns respectively.

perhaps, as Waterford (2011) asks with respect to Stronger Futures laws, if the medicine is not working is it time to double the dose?

Conclusion: Too much Dreaming

We conclude our review by deploying the idiom of 'Too Much Dreaming'. In an earlier essay on the Intervention and risk society, it was noted that Aboriginal people do not necessarily behave like other Australians and may not be motivated by the same aspirations (Altman and Hinkson 2010b, 188–189). The ideology of the Dreaming, the body of social law that explains the creation of the universe and people's relationships within it, is still vitally important for many Aboriginal people in remote Australia; it is the embodiment of creation that gives meaning to everything. In the Northern Territory, most of the 45,000 people who are the subject of the Intervention still speak Aboriginal languages (Biddle 2012), and almost all live on Aboriginal-owned land, claimed on the basis that people retain primary spiritual responsibility for sacred Dreaming sites, embedded in the landscape. The Dreaming encapsulates reference to customary norms that the Intervention in its original form sought to rapidly replace with Western norms – there was, according to the Government, just too much Dreaming for late modernity. While the form that the Intervention has taken might have altered nominally, there is an abiding sense in which its overall framing is cast in very mainstream Closing the Gap developmental aspirations. In all the evaluations to date, there has been too little attention paid to the ethnocentric nature of the Intervention and to the cross-cultural tensions inherent in defining its goals and evaluating its outcomes.

It appears that too much evaluation has been undertaken in a very short time. The Australian Government, the driver of both the Intervention and the national Indigenous reform process, does too much dreaming, hopeful that progress is being made – despite the fact that the Intervention had no foundational, evidence-based policy logic, and no baseline against which to measure improvements. Early analysis of 2011 Census data (so far the only relatively objective data to measure progress according to the normative parameters dictated by the Australian Government) indicates next to no change across the Northern Territory between 2006 and 2011 (Altman 2012b). With time and further detailed analysis these official statistics will reveal just what has been achieved between 2006 and 2011, an inter-census period that roughly approximates the five years of the Intervention (2007–2012).

All this raises important questions about what purpose evaluation fetishism in the context of the Intervention might have served, beyond the political sphere where there is broad consensus between the two major parties. In such circumstances, the hyper-evaluation is not about accountability. In *The Audit Society: Rituals of Verification*, Power (1999) sees the explosion in the audit industry at the turn of the 21st century as an institutional means of societal comfort production. Our review suggests that the unprecedented evaluation associated with the national emergency Intervention in the Northern Territory accords to some extent with this observation. In this sense, the Intervention is just as much about mainstream Australians as Indigenous Australians, used as a means of persuading and comforting them that something productive is being done by the Australian Government with unprecedented financial commitments to address acute problems in remote Indigenous Australia. It is also about the exercise of power to impose a particular type of highly experimental policy and an associated paternalistic set of programs to naturalise the ideological intent of governing remote

Indigenous subjects. This governance is undertaken through normalising Indigenous Australians in accord with an idealised neoliberal authoritarian 'law and order society' trope (Hyatt 2011).

Given such a political impetus behind the Intervention, evaluation becomes another technique of governmentality and an obfuscating tool. Evaluation in the context of the Intervention then has been effectively divorced from the issues it seeks to assess. This has consequences for public policy surrounding the next ten years of Intervention policies. As we have determined in our review, the Intervention has undergone many phases, faces and transformations, infusing it with cross-cutting objectives. For political elites who are rhetorically committed to 'evidence-based policy making' and 'evaluation', this will only increase the reliance on evaluation and monitoring to legitimate changes in policy. However, this creates a self-perpetuating cycle – for example, the consequences of the recent 'law and order' trope being less than well-received by Indigenous communities may trigger another onslaught of monitoring and evaluation. As we have argued in this review, this evaluation will likely have no correlation with 'success', improvement, or positive change for Indigenous Australians.

Postscript

Just as this article was completed, two events occurred worthy of brief documentation, owing to their deep resonance with the issues discussed here.

First, after our numerous attempts to gain access to the *Program Logic Options Report* (ARTD Consultants and WestWood Spice 2010) over a six month period, it was finally made public on 28 November 2012. The process for this release occurred via a formal motion for the production of documents initiated by Senator Siewert. It was fulfilled by the Minister representing the Minister for Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs in the Senate.

One can only speculate on why the Australian Government has been so sensitive about the release of this report two and a half years after its completion. What is clear, as noted earlier, is that it was prepared mainly in response to the NTER Review Board (2008) to try and develop some *ex post facto* program logic for the Intervention. This document was prepared with reference to the literature and consultations with Australian and Northern Territory Government stakeholders in late 2009, but with no consultation with, or direct observation of, prescribed community members. In the final *NTER Evaluation Report 2011* (Australian Government 2011b), where the report is only referred to once, it is unclear whether it was made available to the numerous consultants who contributed to the final evaluation. There is certainly no evidence that the program logic for six themes proposed by ARTD Consultants and WestWood Spice was applied in any of the seven reports prepared for the final evaluation, despite its preparation to aid the whole-of-government evaluation of the NTER (Australian Government 2011b, 70). There is even an absence of direct correlation between the program logics prepared in 2009 and the evaluations conducted in 2011: as ARTD Consultants and WestWood Spice (2010, 5) note, both the NTER measures and the program logics will likely continue to evolve, an issue that we identified at the outset of our article. This invites the question of why the *Program Logic Options Report* was prepared in the first place, and raises the very serious issue of the disconnect between logic and evaluation outlined in our review.

Second, the *Evaluating New Income Management in the Northern Territory: First Evaluation Report* (Bray et al. 2012) was released by the Australian Government on 29 November 2012, the last sitting day of parliament. This report had been with FaHCSIA since July 2012 and the reason for its release four months after its completion is not clear. This report is notable because FaHCSIA commissioned it from a consortium including academics from the University of New South Wales and the Australian National University, in marked contrast to almost all previous evaluations that had been commissioned from private sector consultants.

This is not the place to seriously review this evaluation except to note, as we have throughout, that its aims and approach were very clearly framed by the Australian Government. The report itself is massive (350 pages) and extremely thorough. Again in concert with much that we have said earlier, there is very little correlation between the heavily qualified and guarded findings of the report, and the Media Release 'Income Management in the Northern Territory' (Macklin 2012b). The release picks just a few apparently positive findings, such as a statistically significant perception of an improvement in the ability of income managed Indigenous people in the Northern Territory to afford food. No mention is made of the report's overall conclusion that a) New Income Management (NIM) has had a diverse set of impacts (with some communities and many individuals feeling disempowered); b) it is not possible to make overarching conclusions about the impact of NIM as both positive and negative aspects need to be considered; and c) ultimately that any judgments about overall effectiveness need to take into account the program costs (Bray et al. 2012, xxiii, 249). Here again evaluations are controlled and promoted as political successes while evidence is obfuscated.

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Appendix 1. Evaluations of the NTER Intervention

Code	Evaluation/report (link embedded)
A2007	Social Security and Other Legislation Amendment (Welfare Payment Reform) Bill 2007 and four related bills concerning the Northern Territory National Emergency Response
A2008a	NTER Monitoring Report August 2007 – June 2008
A2008b	Draft ABS report on outcome indicators, potential data sources, and possible data redevelopment of NTER (mentioned in Monitoring Report above) *
A2008c	NTER Review Board Report (FaHCSIA)
A2008d	Final Report on the NTER Taskforce (FaHCSIA)
A2008e	First Report - Senate Select Committee on Regional and Remote Indigenous Communities
A2008f	Inquiry into provisions of the Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs and Other Legislation Amendment (Emergency Response Consolidation) Bill 2008
A2008g	CIRCA – Community feedback on the NTER (FaHCSIA)
A2008h	Survey of Government Business Managers (Oct 2008) (FaHCSIA-TNS Social Research)
A2008i	Alcohol and Other Drug Service Components of NTER (DoHA)
A2008j	Progress of the NTER Child Health Check Initiative: Health Conditions and Referrals (First Progress Report) (AIHW and DoHA) *
A2008k	Progress of the NTER Child Health Check Initiative: Preliminary Results from the Child Health Check and Follow-up Data Collections (Second Progress Report) (AIHW and DoHA)
A2008l	Review of the First Phase of the Petrol Sniffing Strategy. Primarily concerned with the period July 2006 to December 2007 and focuses in particular on the Northern Territory (Prepared by Urbis for FaHCSIA)
A2008m	Northern Territory Emergency Response: Perspectives from Six Communities (Central Land Council)
A2008n	A Community-Based Review of the NTER (Uni of Newcastle)
A2008o	Intervention: Experiences and Opinions of Alice Springs Town Camp Residents of the NTER (Tangentyere Council)
A2008p	'Welfare Payments and School Attendance' (UTS/Jumbunna)
A2008q	Review of issues related to the acquisition and management of container accommodation in the Northern Territory and the management of ACMS on prescribed communities (FaHCSIA)
A2009a	NTER Monitoring Report July–December 2008
A2009b	Closing the Gap in the Northern Territory Monitoring Report January–June 2009 (FaHCSIA)
A2009c	Six Monthly Report July–November 2009 (Commonwealth Coordinator General for Remote Indigenous Services)
A2009d	Report #1 May–November 2009 (NT Coordinator-General for Remote Services)
A2009e	Second Report – Senate Select Committee on Regional and Remote Indigenous Communities
A2009f	Third Report - Senate Select Committee on Regional and Remote Indigenous Communities
A2009g	NTER Redesign Consultations Report (FaHCSIA)

A2009h	Report on the NTER Redesign Engagement Strategy and Implementation: Final Report (FaHCSIA and CIRCA)
A2009i	'Will They be Heard?' a Response to NTER Consultations June to August 2009 (Jumbunna)
A2009j	Police's Taskforce Themis (NAAJA)
A2009k	Child Health Check Initiative – Final Progress Report (DoHA)
A2009l	Final Stores Post Licensing Monitoring Report (FaHCSIA)
A2009m	Findings of the School Nutrition Stakeholder Survey (DEEWR)
A2009n	Review of the Central Australian Petrol Sniffing Strategy Unit (Urbis for FaHCSIA and OIPC)
A2009o	Let's Start: Exploring Together – An early intervention program for NT children and families – Final Evaluation Report
A2009p	NTER – FaHCSIA Asbestos Surveys: Communication Issues (Commonwealth Ombudsman)
A2009q	Final Evaluation Report for Safe Places (CDU) *
A2009r	Performance Audit of the School Nutrition Program (ANAO)
A2010a	Closing the Gap in the Northern Territory Monitoring Report July–December 2009 (FaHCSIA)
A2010b	Closing the Gap in the Northern Territory Monitoring Report January-–June 2010 (FaHCSIA)
A2010c	Six Monthly Report December 2009–August 2010 (Commonwealth Coordinator General for Remote Indigenous Services)
A2010d	Report #2 December 2009–May 2010 (NT Coordinator-General for Remote Services)
A2010e	Report #3 May–November 2010 (NT Coordinator-General for Remote Services)
A2010f	Fourth Report – Senate Select Committee on Regional and Remote Indigenous Communities
A2010g	Final Report – Senate Select Committee on Regional and Remote Indigenous Communities
A2010h	Development of program logic options for the NTER (ARTD Consultants and WestWood Spice) **
A2010i	Report on the Evaluation of Income Management in the NT (FaHCSIA)
A2010j	Survey of Government Business Managers (2009) (FaHCSIA-TNS Social Research)
A2010k	Audit Report on GBMs (ANAO)
A2010l	Review Rights for Income Managed People in the Northern Territory (Commonwealth Ombudsman)
A2010m	CDEP case studies report (Jumbunna)
A2010n	Evaluation Framework for New IM (SPRC, ANU and AIFS)
A2010o	Independent Review of Policing in Remote Indigenous Communities in the NT (FaHCSIA)
A2010p	Impact of Income Management on Store Sales in the Northern Territory (Brimblecombe et al)
A2010q	Critique of the published statistical analysis in a study by the Menzies School of Medical Research (DSI Consulting) *
A2010r	Moving Beyond the Restrictions: The Evaluation of the Alice Springs Alcohol Management Plan (Menzies School of Health Research and Monash University)
A2010s	Managing alcohol in Tennant Creek, Northern Territory: an evaluation of the Tennant Creek Alcohol Management Plan and related measures to reduce alcohol-related problems (Menzies School of Health Research)

A2010t	"Growing Them Strong, Together" Inquiry into Child Protection System
A2010u	SEAM Evaluation Report (DEEWR)
A2010v	Inquiry into Social Security and Other Legislation Amendment (Welfare Reform and Reinstatement of Racial Discrimination Act) Bill 2009 and the Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs and Other Legislation Amendment (2009 Measures) Bill 2009 along with the Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs and Other Legislation Amendment (Restoration of Racial Discrimination Act) Bill 2009 (Standing Committees on Community Affairs)
A2011a	Closing the Gap in the Northern Territory Monitoring Report July-December 2010 (FaHCSIA)
A2011b	Closing the Gap in the Northern Territory Monitoring Report January-June 2011
A2011c	Six Monthly Report September 2010–March 2011 (Commonwealth Coordinator General for Remote Indigenous Services)
A2011d	Six Monthly Report April 2011–September 2011 (Commonwealth Coordinator General for Remote Indigenous Services)
A2011e	Report #4 December 2010–May 2011 (NT Coordinator General for Remote Services)
A2011f	Women's Experience of Income Management in the Northern Territory (ERA)
A2011g	Dental Health of Indigenous Children in the Northern Territory – Findings from Closing the Gap Program (DoHA)
A2011h	Review of the Alcohol and Other Drug Service Components of the Northern Territory Emergency Response (DoHA-Origin and Bowchung)
A2011i	Northern Territory Night Patrols (ANAO)
A2011j	Implementation of the National Partnership Agreement on Remote Indigenous Housing in the Northern Territory (ANAO)
A2011k	Talking in Language: Indigenous Interpreters and Government Communication (Commonwealth Ombudsman)
A2011l	Evaluation of Community Stores Licensing Program (FaHCSIA)
A2011m	ORIC report on stores (nation-wide)
A2011n	Evaluation of the Child Health Check Initiative and Expanding Health Services delivery Initiative (DoHA)
A2011o	Indigenous Employment in Government Service Delivery (ANAO)
A2011p	A Review of certain FaHCSIA-funded youth services (FaHCSIA-URBIS)
A2011q	Youth in Communities Interim Evaluation Report (FaHCSIA)
A2011r	Review of the Substance Intelligence Desk and Dog Operations Unit
A2011s	Evaluation of the Family Support Package: A Community Perspective (Batchelor Institute) * but requests for copies can be made here eprints.batchelor.edu.au/278/
A2011t	Mobile Child Protection Team Final Evaluation Report (Menzies School of Health Research) *
A2011u	Stronger Futures in the NT Report on Consultations (FaHCSIA)
A2011v	Stronger Futures Quantitative Analysis Report (O'Brien Rich)
A2011w	Report on Stronger Futures Consultation (CIRCA)
A2011x	'Cuts to Welfare Payments for School non-attendance: Requested or Imposed?' (concerned Australians)
A2011y	NTER Evaluation Report (FaHCSIA, other bodies and consultants)
A2011z	Opinion: NTER Evaluation 2011 (concerned Australians)

A2011aa Community Safety and Wellbeing Research Study (FaHCSIA)

A2011bb Community Safety: results from the service provider survey in the Northern Territory (FaHCSIA)

A2011cc Eva Cox 'Evidence Free policy making, the case of income management' in *The Journal of Indigenous Policy* Issue 12

A2012a Improving School Enrolment and Attendance through Welfare Reform Measure (SEAM) Evaluation Report for 2010

A2012b Review of Centrelink Income Management Decisions in the NT (Ombudsman)

A2012c Is income management working? (Parliamentary Library)

A2012d Remote housing reform in the NT (Ombudsman)

A2012e 'Listening but not Hearing' (Jumbunna Indigenous House of Learning)

A2012f Dental health of Indigenous children in the Northern Territory: Progress of the Closing the Gap Child Oral Health Program up to December 2011 (AIHW)

A2012g Closing the Gap in the Northern Territory Monitoring Report July–December 2011

A2012h Six Monthly Report October 2011–March 2012 (Commonwealth Coordinator General for Remote Indigenous Services)

A2012i Thalia Anthony/Harry Blagg report on crime

A2012j Office of the Northern Territory Coordinator-General for Remote Services report: June 2011 to August 2012

A2012k Senate Inquiry: Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory Bill 2011 [Provisions], Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory (Consequential and Transitional Provisions) Bill 2011 [Provisions], Social Security Legislation Amendment Bill 2011 [Provisions] (Senate Standing Committees on Community Affairs)

*Reports marked in this way are either unavailable or were never publicly available.

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