

# **MEDIA RELEASE**

**NEWS FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF TASMANIA**

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ATTENTION: Chiefs of Staff, News Directors

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## **UTAS to play leadership role in new national Indigenous researchers' hub**

The University of Tasmania will be the first of eight collaborating universities to host a node of a new national Indigenous researchers' network.

The Science and Research Minister, Senator Chris Evans, has announced funding of \$3.2 million from the Australian Research Council for the National Indigenous Research and Knowledges Network (NIRAKN).

NIRAKN will be directed by Professor Aileen Moreton-Robinson from the Queensland University of Technology, with Associate Professor Maggie Walter (School of Sociology and Social Work, UTAS) serving as Deputy Director.

Assoc Prof Walter will with Professor Steve Larkin (Charles Darwin University) lead the Indigenous Sociology and Knowledges node.

NIRAKN will comprise 44 Indigenous academic network participants from 21 universities and the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies and five Indigenous partner organisations. It will be a hub-and-spokes virtual network model, with QUT as the hub.

“The major aims of NIRAKN are to deliver a program of capacity-building initiatives to support postgraduate, early and mid-career Indigenous researchers to form a skilled qualified research community; to connect Indigenous researchers across disciplines nationally and internationally; and initiate the Indigenous research agenda by applying Indigenous knowledge and expertise to collaborative projects,” explains UTAS' Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research), Professor Paddy Nixon.

“Senior scholars will lead an integrated program of research skills, training and knowledge workshops as well as engage network and partner participants at all levels in direct capacity-building across a range of research projects in the areas of Indigenous sociology, law, health and history, politics and culture. Our objective is to build a critical mass of qualified skilled Indigenous researchers.”

The need for an Indigenous researchers' network is a pressing one, according to Assoc Prof Walter.

“There are currently only low numbers of Indigenous postgraduate enrolments and completions. In 2010 only .4 per cent of PhD completions were Indigenous and completions will need to increase by 600 per cent to reach non-Indigenous population parity.

“The relatively few established Indigenous researchers are widely dispersed throughout the sector meaning emerging and talented Indigenous postgraduates face obstacles in articulating how Indigenous priorities and interests can be met or how research can be aligned with Indigenous cultural protocols,” she said.

NIRAKN will have an Advisory Board made up of 10 eminent Indigenous members and will also access research expertise through a senior mentors' group of Non-Indigenous scholars.

It will also work in collaboration, sharing knowledge and expertise with the five partner organisations, which include the National Congress of Australia's First Peoples, the United Nations University - Institute of Advanced Studies' Traditional Knowledge initiative, Ninti One Limited, Waminda South Coast Women's Health and Welfare Corporation and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Healing Foundation.

**Please note Assoc Prof Walter is currently in London.**

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