



Yamatji Marlpa
ABORIGINAL CORPORATION



Our Ref:
Your Ref:
Office:
Date: 16 July 2021

To: Professor A Davies
School of Social Sciences
University of Western Australia
Nedlands WA 6009

Dear Professor Davies,

RE: UWA SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES PROPOSAL FOR CHANGE

Yamatji Marlpa Aboriginal Corporation (YMAC) has deep concerns regarding the proposal for the University of Western Australia to discontinue the Anthropology and Sociology major and associated units. Aboriginal organisations such as YMAC require highly trained and experienced anthropologists to provide expert advice in native title, Aboriginal heritage and other forms of advocacy for the legal recognition and protection of Aboriginal culture, country, and heritage.

YMAC is a not-for-profit Aboriginal corporation and Native Title Representative Body (NTRB), delivering native title and other services across the Pilbara, Mid West, Murchison and Gascoyne regions of Western Australia. YMAC is run by an Aboriginal Board of Directors, representing several native title groups, each of whom have their own language, culture, traditions, and protocols. YMAC's services include the legal advice and representation of Aboriginal groups in their native title claims, as well as services for Aboriginal corporations following the recognition of native title by the Federal Court. YMAC also has a strong focus on providing heritage services, advice, and advocacy to protect Traditional Owners' cultural heritage, and well as offering executive office support, community and economic development assistance, and natural resource management support.

YMAC currently employs 10 anthropologists, and regularly contracts consultant anthropologists for research, advice, heritage services, and training. YMAC in-house anthropologists, past and present, hold Honours degrees in anthropology, with some also holding Masters degrees or with Postgraduate qualifications. A number of these anthropologists have trained through the Anthropology and Sociology Department at UWA.

Anthropologists play an essential role in contextualising the evidence of Aboriginal peoples' connections to their land and sea country under their system of traditional law and custom, which is required for the recognition of native title by the Federal Court. This evidence is obtained through ethnographic fieldwork, genealogical research, cultural mapping, and the production of anthropological reports to address the requirements of the *Native Title Act (1993)* and the *Guidelines for the Provision of Connection Material in Native Title (WA)*.

Anthropologists' training and experience provide them with the skills to perform this role that no other discipline can. In this role, anthropologists may be

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recognised as expert witnesses and be required to give evidence to the Federal Court.

YMAC acknowledges that there is already a shortage of suitably qualified anthropologists to perform the necessary anthropological research for ongoing and future native title work both within the state and nationally. There are often considerable delays for native title claim progress due to this, which is highlighted by pressures from the Federal Court. In the view of YMAC, the cessation of offering undergraduate majors in anthropology and sociology and the limitation of post graduate studies in the disciplines at UWA would exacerbate these issues and be detrimental for Traditional Owners seeking recognition and protection of their country.

Whilst YMAC acknowledges and supports the expansion of Indigenous Studies at UWA, including the major in Indigenous knowledge, history and heritage, we believe that this offering does not take the place of other anthropological units of study, specifically those that teach anthropological theory and methods in a broader context. Understanding anthropological theory, is the key foundation to having qualified and reputable anthropologists working in native title, and beyond. It is also YMAC's view that the Indigenous Studies major is not able to adequately replace training in sociological methods.

In addition to native title research, YMAC anthropologists and other suitably qualified anthropologists who are contracted through YMAC are involved in conducting heritage surveys, providing advice on heritage agreements, advocating for law reform in relation to stronger heritage protection, and assisting and advising Aboriginal corporations in their decision-making and management of their own cultural heritage. Anthropologists have a highly qualified skill set that allows them to work effectively with Traditional Owners to record the cultural values of and advocate for, the protection of cultural heritage.

We note that UWA is proposing to concentrate its research in Australian archaeology. YMAC employs five qualified archaeologists and contracts consultant archaeologists who work closely with anthropologists in all aspects of their work. These two disciplines each have their own unique skills, complementing each other to provide strong advocacy for Aboriginal heritage. As has been done in many other leading universities, UWA could perhaps consider joining these disciplines to both strengthen and broaden the student offering.

Anthropologists working for native title representative bodies such as YMAC, or for other Aboriginal corporations including Prescribed Bodies Corporate (an increasing area of employment), and in the private heritage sector provide a pivotal interface between Traditional Owners and proponents. The *Aboriginal Heritage Act 1972 (WA)* is currently being revised and will require the ongoing involvement of qualified anthropologists for ethnographic research and the preparation of research reports. Following the destruction of Juukan Gorge in 2020, governments and industry are increasingly seeking better outcomes for the protection of such important cultural sites. The reduction of available skilled graduates with anthropological expertise within Western Australia would be detrimental to this, and to the broader provision of quality heritage protection services to Traditional Owners - particularly in a state so reliant on the mining industry.

YMAC urges you to consider the impacts that the proposed changes will have as outlined above and to consider ways to retain the Anthropology and Sociology major at UWA.

Yours sincerely,



Simon Hawkins

Chief Executive Officer