

Supporting a community of professional practice for native title anthropologists: Lessons from a short history of the 'professionalisation' of Australian anthropology

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During a recent workshop exploring strategies to support a community of practice among native title anthropologists held as part of the 2011 AIATSIS National Native Title Conference in Brisbane, considerable discussion was generated about the current state of Australian applied anthropology and the need for a professional body to support native title practitioners. Among the many ideas raised in this forum was a proposal to establish a formal network of native title anthropologists. More ambitiously, the establishment of a national accrediting organisation for native title and heritage anthropologists was also mooted. These are not new ideas, but given the influence of a dynamic operating environment and critical skills shortage on the practice of native title anthropology in Australia, they are increasingly appealing ones. Over the past 25 years great effort has been expended on the part of many individuals and organisations towards the strengthening what these days we refer to as a "community of practice" for applied anthropologists. And yet there have been few enduring successes to show for it all. In particular, the idea of creating a professional organisation dedicated to applied anthropology has often been raised but never successfully implemented. The reasons for this are both pragmatic and ideological, and resonate in ongoing debates among anthropologists about the relationship between anthropological practice and public policy.

This paper explores the history of the 'professionalisation' agenda pursued by some factions of Australian anthropology since the early 1980s, with a view to understanding of the value and possible challenges facing native title practitioners as we once again attempt to organise ourselves new ways. My account of these efforts is derived primarily from written sources such as minutes of meetings, newsletters and journal articles. Given the usual gap between what is said and what is written down, it therefore likely has some inadequacies. The history that emerges is nevertheless sufficiently comprehensive to demonstrate the most significant problems and passions influencing past events. Many individuals who continue to practice as anthropologists are implicated in this history, and the revival of these old debates may seem unnecessary to the point of tedium. But for newer generations of anthropologists, who

are increasingly presented with professional opportunities that take them out of academia and into complex commercial and legal realms, the need for reliable organisational and collegial support is an attractive idea worth pursuing.

The earliest attempt at formal organisation for applied anthropologists dates back to the early 1980s, although 'applied' or 'practical' anthropology has arguably been a part the discipline of anthropology since its inception. (See Berndt 1983c for a discussion about 'practical' anthropology in Australia.) The earliest action occurred through the forum of the Australian Anthropological Society (AAS), when in 1981 it formed a 'Working Group on Consultative Anthropology'. Much of the impetus for this national effort, however, seems to have been driven by applied anthropologists based in Western Australia and Queensland, who isolated from larger academic communities in the eastern states began to organise on their own terms. As the account below demonstrates, these local state-based forums appear to have been more responsive and better equipped to deal with many of the issues facing their members, but they nevertheless were not enduring.

PAAAS and QAAPA

In 1982, the Anthropological Society of Western Australia (ASWA) sponsored an informal meeting of applied anthropologists in Perth to discuss a range of issues related to professional ethics and consultancy. According to Western Australian anthropologists Greg Acciaoli and Edward McDonald who have recently written a detailed history of ASWA, discussions held over a series of meetings led to general agreement that existing Australian anthropological organisations lacked the structure and charter to adequately represent the needs of a growing number of anthropologists working in applied fields. (Forthcoming, p.8) And so they decided to create their own, and at a meeting of fifteen interested anthropologists held at the University of Western Australia – attended among others Ron Berndt, Mike Robinson, Katrin Wilson, and Eddie MacDonald – the Professional Association for Applied Anthropology and Sociology (PAAAS) was born.

The Western Australian Aboriginal Sites Department was involved in this push to establish a professional organisation, with staff anthropologists Michael Robinson and Chris Clarke instrumental in getting PAAAS up and running. Representative but not accrediting, as an organisation PAAAS played an active role in supporting their membership. In their first year they helped organise the ANZAAS Congress in Perth in May 1983, got involved in the

Western Australian Aboriginal Land Rights Inquiry and a review of the Western Australian Aboriginal Heritage Act, and proposed changes to the Western Australian Environmental Protection Act. PAAAS also provided support for five members who were caught up in a legal matter regarding Aboriginal heritage. (Acciaioli et.al. forthcoming, p.9)

At the same time on the other side of the country, a small group of anthropologists including Peter Sutton, David Trigger, Jay Hall and Athol Chase were organising themselves in similar ways. In 1983 they successfully incorporated the Queensland Association of Professional Anthropologists and Archaeologists (QAPAA). (Clarke 1986, p.19) QAAPA was born partly out of what Sutton has described as a “need for self-protection” during the reign of the conservative Bjelke-Petersen Government, during which anthropologists involved in Aboriginal land rights found themselves under police surveillance. Among other things, QAAPA provided a legitimate professional forum for anthropologists to be able to publicly comment on such issues. (Sutton 2008, p.1) The organisation does not seem to have endured beyond the 1980s, but in its moment it reportedly served its membership well.

AAAA

In 1983 these various efforts coalesced in an attempt to organise nationally. Discussions at a “Workshop on Applied Anthropology” held as part of the ANZ Association for the Advancement of Science (ANZAAS) congress at UWA in Perth were dominated by issues to do with ethical practice, professionalisation, training and definition of ‘applied anthropology’. The workshop attracted a diverse range of practitioners from across the country – over 55 in all and variously employed by universities, museums, government and industry as well as a number of consultants. (Clarke and Stanton, 1983, p.6) There was “universal” agreement among those present about the need for a specialised curriculum in applied anthropology to be available nationally across tertiary institutions, with Peter Sutton and John von Sturmer presenting some model outlines for a post graduate course on the subject. (Clarke and Stanton, 1983, p.10) And by the workshop’s end it had been decided that a professional association of applied anthropologists should be formed “as a matter of urgency”, and such an organisation should be separately incorporated from the AAS. An interim committee of the Australian Association for Applied Anthropology (AAAA) was duly formed and was to be responsible to the workshop. Committee members included Diane Bell, Chris Clarke, Peter Sutton, John von Sturmer, Ron Berndt, Pat Grimoldby and Dan Vachon. (Clarke and Stanton, 1983, p.22) A special edition of UWA’s anthropology

journal, *Anthropological Forum*, dedicated to Applied Anthropology was published shortly afterwards, and included papers by Bell, Berndt, and Vachon as well as Rory O'Connor, Bob Tonkinson, and Basil Samson.

Business is booming: the drive to organise

What was the catalyst for this flurry of professional anxiety and collective effort among applied anthropologists at this particular point in time? Much of the effort was triggered, it seems, by events occurring well outside of the anthropological discipline and certainly the academy. The 'energy boom' of the late 1970s and early 1980s in particular resulted in rapid change and expansion to the nature of anthropological field work. National enthusiasm for mining fuelled by the prospect of generating huge profits from the exploitation of Australia's coal, oil and gas reserves (Battellino 2010, p.6) collided with emerging expectations among Aboriginal people for the delivery of land rights and protection of sacred sites. Anthropologists were in demand as never before as Aboriginal people increasingly found themselves in the way of the national interest. One of the most public and difficult confrontations of the era was at Noonkanbah in the Kimberley, where in 1980 a dispute over the validity of a sacred site on a petroleum exploration lease turned violent. Writing only a few years after these events, Clarke suggested that one of the unexpected outcomes of Noonkanbah was a huge increase in demand for Aboriginal site surveys in Western Australia. The demand was such that it overwhelmed the resources of the Department of Aboriginal Sites and led to an unprecedented and uncontrolled market in anthropological consultancy. (1986, p.18)

With greater involvement in the high-stakes business of mining came increased exposure to critique and criticism from outside the academy. The involvement of anthropologists as expert witnesses in land rights hearings also meant an expansion of accountability beyond research subjects and the discipline to include the law of the Crown. (Edmunds 2001). The Warumungu Land Claim of 1982 during which the court subpoena the field notes of claim anthropologists was a turning point, prompting what Kingsley Palmer has described as "a good deal of agonising debate about the ethics and the practice of the profession". (Palmer in Chalk 2001, p.5) On a more positive note, anthropologists in the early 1980s were optimistic about the possibility that long-promised land rights legislation might finally be delivered following the election of multiple Labor governments at both State and Commonwealth level. (Clark 1986, p.18) In anticipation, the Australian Institute of

Aboriginal Studies (AIAS, now AIATSIS) was ramping up its research agenda into issues of Aboriginal land tenure, leading to an increase in research dollars and opportunities for anthropological field work across Australia. (Sutton 2008, p.2)

This complex high-stakes mix of mining, money, law and sacred land generated many compelling reasons for anthropologists to seek out others with whom they might build a stronger sense of professional identity and community. But even at its inception, the idea of AAAA was nevertheless controversial among its potential membership. For while there was agreement that professionalisation was important, there was no consensus about who should do it, let alone how it should be done, resulting in the demise of AAAA before it even began.

The best laid plans

The first meeting of the newly-established AAAA committee was held in Adelaide in August 1983. It was well attended, with those on the committee joined by the likes of David Trigger, Chris Anderson, Diane Austin, Kingsley Palmer and Lee Sackett. (Clarke 1986, p.22) The momentum that had been generated at the initial AAAA workshop in Perth remained strong. Nine months later the inaugural meeting of the potential membership of AAAA held at the Australian National University in Canberra was well attended. Those present included more familiar names: Andrew McWilliam, Ian Keen, Eric Michaels, David Nash, Gaynor MacDonald and Nic Peterson. (*AAAA Bulletin* 4 1984, p.4)

Although AAAA and PAAAS appeared to have been holding parallel conversations about professionalisation, throughout this period there was a degree of collaboration and they shared ideas and research on training and accreditation. In late 1983 PAAAS hosted its own conference on "Professionalism and Practice in Anthropology" in Yanchep, Western Australia to which a number of AAAA 'members' also attended. Michael Robinson offered four possible models for consideration. These were necessarily complex structures layered to accommodate the interests of both individuals and existing organisations. A national professional body with state affiliates was one option, and would allow state bodies such as ASWA to continue operating under their own constitution and rules. A second option involved establishing a national body with state-based management, under which existing organisations could choose to affiliate or remain separate. The third option and Robinson's preferred was to create a national body with state chapters that operated in a similar way to

political parties. This body would replace existing organisations, potentially unifying anthropologists while keeping local members informed and involved. The final model was a federation of state professional bodies, which would permit state organisations to continue but would facilitate a common association. (Robinson 1986, pp.11-14)

Ultimately no decision was made by either PAAAS or AAAA about which model to pursue and despite the growing interest in professionalisation, getting individuals to commit proved difficult. By the end of 1985, two years after it had been conceived, AAAA could claim only 12 financial members with a further 11 applications under consideration. (*AAAA Bulletin* 6 1985, p.5) PAAAS was somewhat more successful despite their Western Australian focus, with 41 financial members with another 15 non-financial members by 1985. (Acciaioli et.al, forthcoming, p.10) As early as April 1984, there had been some consideration given to the idea of consolidating ASWA, PAAAS and AAAA. There were good reasons for this. The burden of maintaining separate organisations, including overlapping memberships and particularly overlapping executives, was onerous. (Acciaioli et.al, forthcoming, p.10) In the case of PAAAS, running the organisation was a “crippling burden” on those already heavily implicated in the problems it was trying to address, and a number of the executive had duplicate functions on other organisations such as ASWA and AAAA. Even though at their peak PAAAS had over 60 members, attendance at meetings dwindled, raising the question about the organisation’s long-term viability. As Clarke frankly expressed it:

Executive duties became ‘pass-the-parcel’, and committee meetings were at times slightly hysterical encounters of the same exhausted group of persons unsure whether this time they were ASWA, ANZAAS, PAAAS, AAAA or the Aboriginal Land Inquiry Workshop. (1986, p.20)

All three organisations had different membership criteria and incorporation status, however, making them effectively incompatible and rendering the idea of merging to create a mega-organisation for applied anthropologists a complicated proposition. So by 1985 there remained three separate associations for Australian applied anthropologists: PAAAS, AAAA and QAPAA. In order to try and progress the matter to the point of decisive action, a meeting of AAAA hosted by AAS was held in Darwin in August 1985. Although not well attended, those present did agree that a national organisation for professional anthropologists was still worth pursuing, and that the best vehicle to drive this was AAS. The models being proposed, however, potentially involved considerable changes to the structure and function of the AAS, and therefore required the support of all AAS members and not just those involved in applied work and consultancies. In the end, securing this

broad support across the discipline proved impossible. Less than a year later the dream was over, with the fledgling AAAA absorbed into AAS as the society itself 'professionalised'.

In the intervening months between the Darwin meeting of AAAA in August 1985 and the death of the idea in July 1986, a vigorous debate had occurred between variously-positioned anthropologists about not only the establishment of the new organisation, but also proposed changes to the AAS which would see the implementation of new categories of membership and a code of ethics. The main forum for this debate was a special two-day meeting of the AAS held in Sydney in May 1986. Over 40 anthropologists attended, including Bob Tonkinson, Margaret Jolly, Annette Hamilton, Peter Sutton, David Trigger, Maggie Brady, Gillian Cowlshaw, Julie Marcus, Marie Reay, Michael Allen, Palmer, Jeff Stead, Nicholas Thomas, Martha Macintyre, Gaynor Macdonald, Kim Ackerman, and John von Sturmer. Possible models for an applied anthropology association based on research by Annette Hamilton were circulated to AAS members, along with those previously proposed by Michael Robinson through PAAAS. (Hamilton 1986) A draft code of ethics developed by Peter Sutton was also circulated.

Fears of exclusion and a possible monopoly of 'applied' work coupled with a dislike of the market place and concerns about its influence on the objectivity and quality of anthropological research were at the heart of protests against professionalisation. While there was considerable recognition of the need to support colleagues working in the increasingly unpredictable business of land rights, the majority of those present at the Sydney meeting ultimately voted down the proposal to establish what would have become the AAAA. This was not simply a numbers-game between those operating 'inside' universities and those consultants located on the 'outside'. The politics of the moment made for a far more complicated coalition of positions. As Gillian Cowlshaw observed at the time, the argument *against* professionalisation was coming from two distinct quarters. On the one hand, some opposition was conservative in character, based on a desire to "keep anthropology out of the market place and away from complex and controversial political questions". Other objections emerged from more radically-positioned anthropologists who saw moves towards professionalisation as representing "the wrong kind of politics". (1986, p.15) Those *in favour* of professionalisation considered both positions radical and neither helpful to those anthropologists who were choosing to engage. Cowlshaw herself, while sympathetic to the concerns of consultants and seeing some benefit in AAS attempting to find ways to respond to events in the public arena, made it clear that she believed "the

dilemmas and conflicts faced by anthropologists in relation to land claims... are a part of the body of anthropology... and do not warrant being split off in to another realm called 'professional'." (1986, p.16)

Anthropologist Chris Eipper, who was presumably a member of AAS at the time but who currently isn't, wrote a scathing submission to AAS in which he accused anthropological consultants of attempting to hijack the AAS and remake it in their own image. (1986, p.43) Eipper was most concerned about the implications of a single organisation presuming the authority to legitimise anthropological credentials in place of academic doctorates:

The end result of the proposed changes will be a hierarchical, exclusivist fraternity/sorority of elders and juniors, big apes and others. The primary concern will not be to legitimate anthropology according to criteria relevant to a distinctively anthropological worldview, but in subservience to criteria acceptable to those with authority and status independent of the discipline and ultimately indifferent to its concerns and values. (Eipper 1986, p.51)

As one observer remarked, "It would have been outrageous for AAAA to name themselves as the professionals leaving all those of us who are not land rights workers, workers on contracts, people without university jobs etc. with the choice of joining that group or somehow nomenclaturally [sic] becoming 'unprofessional'. (Crick 1986, p.18)

After the dust settled, what was left was a newly structured and incorporated AAS with a constitution, three tiers of membership categories based on experience and qualifications, and a code of ethics. These changes were not what those pushing for a national organisation for applied anthropologists necessarily wanted. But they were nevertheless significant, hard fought for and not without controversy. In particular, the draft code of ethics was roundly criticised by some for being unrealistic, overly prescriptive, and Australian-centric. (Jolly 1986, pp.14, 25)

Deflated but not defeated, those anthropologists committed to the idea of professionalisation retreated to their respective corners and remained active locally. The perception of an impassable geo-cultural divide among anthropologists on different sides of the country was not insignificant in the failure of AAAA. In a colourful introduction to an issue of the *PAAASWord* newsletter dedicated to professionalisation, editor Ralph Locke – an applied psychologist whose primary research interest was cross-cultural analysis of states of altered consciousness (indicating just how broadly the 'applied' church was pitched at this time) – described the interactions between organisations interested in contending for national auspices of applied anthropology as yielding "little more than the gloomy and repetitive picture of rival factions struggling for turf, and the indeterminate results of committee

procedures". Critical of what he perceived to be an unsupportive professional culture among anthropologists in the eastern states, Locke was vocal in his advocacy of a local rather than national solution, suggesting instead that Western Australian anthropologists take care of their own. (Locke 1986, p.i)

And so efforts among Western Australian applied anthropologists continued for a few more years but their energy soon petered out and PAAAS was formally disbanded in 1989. (*PAAASWord* Vol.3, No.4, p.3) QAAPA has also disappeared into history, with nothing emerging over the following decade to replace either organisation. Other anthropology associations including AAS, ASWA and the Anthropological Society of South Australia (ASSA) continued to provide broader forums for debate and disciplinary advocacy, but were not formally dedicated to the needs of consultants. The exception a Western-Australian organisation, Australasian Association of Professional and Consulting Anthropologists and Archaeologists (AAPCAA), established in 1992 by anthropologist Rory O'Connor. O'Connor had been a involved in early efforts to establish PAAAS, but appears to have stepped away from the forum early on. Despite the regional ambitions of its name and its relative longevity (it is still around), AAPCAA remains small and is not well known outside of Western Australia, and appears to have done little by way of supporting a broader community of professional practice among those whose interests it claims to represent.

The late 1990s: improved communication but still no national representation

Other than the establishment of AAPCAA, the 1990s saw little collective organisation among Australia's applied anthropologists. But the debate continued, with the issue of professionalisation continuing to be raised at AAS annual general meetings throughout the decade. During what he recently described as "one of those somewhat divisive discussions about professionalism that the [AAS] have been having since I was a graduate student in the 70's" at the 1996 AAS AGM in Albury, anthropologist Don Gardner observed that better communications might be of help. (pers. comm. June 2011) Those present at the meeting agreed, and the following year Gardner successfully launched an email discussion list that went by the name of 'AASNet'.

Since its inception, AASNet has made a significant contribution to the anthropological community of Australia. Anthropologists use the list to circulate information about jobs, conferences, articles, public debates and the like. It has also facilitated endless debates about

professionalisation and policy. These debates are at times highly emotive and somewhat divisive, but they nevertheless encourage debate about the state of the discipline in a way that few other forums allow for. The furore that erupted following the posting of a link to an article by Mary Edmunds on the Northern Territory 'Intervention' into Aboriginal communities (Edmunds 2011) is a recent and very relevant example. The substance of this particular exchange also demonstrates the extent to which the 'professionalisation' debate has moved well beyond the old 'academic' versus 'applied' dichotomy and yet remains highly ideological. In one particularly inflammatory post in this exchange by Norwegian-based anthropologist Andrew Lattas, it was the universities themselves that came under fire for engendering the 'wrong kind of politics'. Lattas' argument that "Aboriginal anthropology is becoming a very new kind of discipline that it exists within a corporate and governmental field that is radically reshaping it" is representative the more radical of critiques of the contemporary applied domain (12 December 2010, *AASNet* email post) Julie Finlayson's response to Lattas conveys the frustration felt by many with such arguments, which generally ignore not only their own positioning, but the ethical and political complexities that necessarily accompany genuine applied engagement:

What a lot of nonsense about the ANU and Australian universities in general (sites of neo-liberal thought indeed?!) I find it odd that people who have willingly spent their professional lives and made careers in Australian universities suddenly want to bite the hand that is (still) feeding them! (Finlayson, J. 14 December 2010, *AASNet* email post)

Despite or perhaps because of such debates, *AASNet* has been, I suggest, a particularly fertile ground for creating a sense of professional community among applied anthropologists. *AASNet*'s reach extends well beyond the academic journals and specialist media in which significant debates about the state of the discipline otherwise occur, such as the 'Intervention' debate discussed above. Although for the most part *AASNet* debates occur between small numbers of senior anthropologists with established public profiles, their relevance extends well beyond this elite, potentially influencing the ideas and practices of other anthropologists located outside of university networks. Isolated and sometimes inexperienced, it is these practitioners who are the most deeply entrenched in the professional messiness of native title anthropology and who have the most to gain from a strengthening a community of practice.

Despite its success in facilitating better communication among colleagues, *AASNet* was not enough to satisfy ongoing aspirations for a professional representative structure for applied anthropologists. A decade after AAAA was tried and failed, in 1999 AAS again convened a

'professionalisation committee' to conduct research into possible for supporting consultant and applied anthropologists. The 'professionalisation committee' had four sub-committees, including a native title sub-committee, and involved the likes of Jeremy Beckett, David Trigger, Kingsley Palmer, Martha Macintyre, Peter Sutton, Sandy Toussaint, Gaynor MacDonald, Julie Finlayson and Mary Edmunds. (It is striking that so many of those involved had been part of the earlier attempts at professionalisation.) Toussaint conducted research into issues relating to professionalisation on behalf of the AAS, and recommended among other things investigating whether AAS could establish a "Board of Review" for mediating professional and ethical issues. (Toussaint 1999, p.5) The then AAS President, Grant McCall, also investigated the possibility of AAS registering an ISO 9000 standard for professional practice. (McCall 1999, p.10) Neither of these possibilities eventuated, the first proving ethically too difficult and the second too costly. And as has consistently been the case, increased specialised training at university level was again recommended to address the perceived lack of adequate skill-base among recent anthropological graduates.

According to one observer, the 'professionalisation debate' at the 1999 AGM where Hamilton's recommendations were tabled stalled early on, with the proponents of professionalisation unable to articulate clearly what kinds of services they collectively required, and what the cost of these might be. Further, some 'non-consultant' anthropologists expressed concern that not only would "going professional" expose AAS to legal problems, but that fees would increase forcing many members to revoke their membership. (Fegan 2000, p.1) Nevertheless, the 1999 AGM voted to establish an applied anthropology 'wing' that would be open to any AAS member to join, and to carry out research into how best to identify and implement the services people wanted. Julie Finlayson began this process, and ultimately became the driving force behind the establishment in 2001 of the AAS 'Clearing House', a user-pays online portal for applied anthropologists that offered services such as advice on fees, contracts and insurance and a consultants' register. Although its membership was small and recruited only reportedly 12 members, those involved consider that it was nonetheless successful. During its short life the Clearing House held a number of workshops for members including one providing practical advice on running a small business, something few anthropologists are otherwise trained for. The Clearing House folded when the demands of maintaining it became too much for Finlayson, who was at the time working as a consultant anthropologist. As with PAAAS, the demands on time and human resources associated with having professional organisation run by volunteers again proved too much. (David Martin, pers. comm. June 2011).

One successful but again short-lived professional development project undertaken around this time was a Pilot Mentoring Project for Junior NTRB Anthropologists. Its primary aim was to improve the capacity of native title representative bodies to perform their functions by improving the anthropological expertise. The outcomes from this small-scale mentoring pilot were mixed. There were some clear benefits for participants, most of whom were early-career researchers employed by native title representative bodies, but the primary lesson learned was that mentoring at a distance does not work. (Martin 2004b, p.2)

Lessons of history

The emergent historical pattern is one of applied anthropologists seeking out and seeking to strengthen their sense of professional community and security at times of rapid change and increased public scrutiny. As with the intensification of activity around professionalisation that occurred in the mid-1980s, these efforts of the late 1990s occurred at a time when anthropologists working in Aboriginal Australia were experiencing rapid changes to the legal and ethical parameters of their practice. The Native Title Act of 1994, along with various state legislations, again renewed hope for long-promised land justice, but brought with it extraordinarily complicated legal and political evidentiary frameworks which anthropologists were increasingly expected to navigate on their own. Add to this the 1995 Royal Commission into the Hindmarsh Island Bridge affair over the validity of a sacred site, and the related 2001 civil trial which saw anthropologist Deane Fergie unsuccessfully sued over provision of consultancy services, created widespread anxiety about the vulnerability of anthropologists involved in both native title and Aboriginal heritage consultancy work.

There are a number of lessons that can be taken from these past efforts towards professionalisation. The successes of the national conversation around professionalisation to date have been few but significant. Most notably, the endurance of AASNet demonstrates that embracing new technologies to improve communication is well worth the effort. Such a network is potentially a valuable asset for a geographically-dispersed and variously positioned community of practitioners. The difficult decision for native title anthropologists moving into the future is whether or not they require a more specialised forum dedicated to applied anthropology in which conversations about professional practice might occur without fear of unsympathetic and unhelpful criticism of their practice from others.

An important lesson to be taken from past failures is that successful professional organisation requires the sustained involvement of a number of individuals passionate enough to get involved and remain committed on a voluntary basis. Further, attempts at establishing profession-wide representation need to accurately target their potential membership. Pitched too broadly, such as the AAAA, the idea of a national organisation engendered great division among anthropologists generally. Pitched narrowly, such as the idea of the AAS Clearing House, there was insufficient time, money and professional interest to make it viable in the long-term.

The idea of accrediting anthropologists in order to improve or at least standardise the quality of applied anthropological research has repeatedly been raised in debates about professionalisation. Establishing a formal accrediting body has, however, remained an elusive idea and in fact at times has resulted in the stalling of other initiatives. As early as 1983 Ron Berndt had stated that despite much talking, little headway had been made on 'professionalisation' because of difficulties associated with establishing formal accreditation. (Berndt 1983c, p.171) Contemporary research by John Stanton on behalf of PAAAS led him to a somewhat pessimistic assessment about the likelihood of accreditation occurring for Australian anthropologists. Both the British and American anthropological associations had also attempted accreditation in the 1980s, and both had ultimately decided against it. The lesson to be learned from their experiences, Stanton suggested, was that "procrastination and indecision is the most efficient means of stalling any proposal for professionalisation". (1986, p.25) Perhaps more importantly, the question of just who does the accrediting and how remains unanswerable today. Prohibitive costs, arguments over standards and enforceability, complicated legal arrangements, and a fierce sense of independence on the part of some have to date prevented any national accreditation scheme getting beyond the conceptual stage.

The issue of training, on the other hand, has been consistently and universally acknowledged as important to improving the capacity of applied anthropologists and lifting professional standards. For the past 30 years, Australian anthropologists have stated that they want and need better preparation for applied work, and that universities are the best place for this training to occur. Recently need for training and mentoring has been reiterated on a number of occasions. (Martin 2004; Bauman 2010; Trigger 2010) To the extent that the Attorney General's Department is funding training for anthropologists through Native Title Anthropology Grants program (which funds the ANU Centre for Native Title

Anthropology), this advice has been heard. But universities themselves seem to be more reluctant to address this need. A number of Australian universities including Australian National University, Macquarie, University of Melbourne and the University of Queensland currently run postgraduate programs in Applied Anthropology. However, the only applied anthropology program aimed specifically at native title and heritage established by the University of Western Australia in the late 2000s has this year been closed.

It makes sense that anthropologists have been moved to organise at times of professional growth and change. The political and ethical complexities of working in Aboriginal Australia have not, I suggest, relented since Hindmarsh Island affair. If anything, they have intensified and are part of motivation behind this most recent expression of interest in professionalisation. The muddying of the original structure and intention of native title law through various legal decisions and interpretations of policy, as well as an anecdotal increase in the number of anthropologists working for mining companies, has complicated anthropology in this arena in unprecedented ways. Anthropologists now have many masters, and are increasingly faced with difficult choices about how to do their jobs in a way that neither compromises their integrity or their relationships with the Aboriginal people for whom they work. Ideas about what constitutes best practice, ethical engagement and appropriate accountability are by no means agreed, making native title anthropology a nerve-wracking prospect at the best of times. Moreover, this anxiety belongs not only to anthropologists. The ideals of professionalisation should be pursued on the understanding that, as the subjects of native title research projects, it is Aboriginal people who have the most to lose when anthropology is done badly.

Perhaps the key lesson of the past is that building a better community of practice for native title anthropologists cannot be achieved solely from within the discipline itself. Influencing the legal and commercial processes which shape our professional practices and relationships requires more than dialogue among only anthropologists. We should also engage with those institutions whose agendas most profoundly determine the parameters of our professional lives: National Native Title Tribunal, Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, Federal Court of Australia, and Attorney General's Department. As employers, funders and consumers of the products of native title anthropology, each of these institutions has their own expectations of applied anthropology. An outwardly-focused 'professionalisation' agenda has the potential to align these external expectations more closely with those of practitioners as well as Aboriginal collaborators. In doing so we

will not only improve our own practice, but might also have a positive influence the broader structures in which we choose to work.

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