Dear Vice Chancellor

We write to express our concerns about the future of Pacific studies at the ANU and to seek your commitment to support its continuation as one of the strengths of the university. The ANU is the recognized global leader in the study of the Pacific islands region and exerts an unmatched influence in scholarship, applied research, service, partnerships and education. It cannot be emphasised too strongly that the Pacific is the only area of research and study in which the ANU enjoys a distinct comparative advantage in both global and national terms. In addition, the ANU’s charter (National University Act 1st August 1946), established Pacific Studies as one of four foundational schools, as a ’high class graduate school in which all subjects connected with Pacific countries should be studied’ (Eggleston 10/9/45).

Today, the concentration of Pacific expertise in the College attracts large grants, centres of excellence and an international reputation for excellence. We also have an extensive number of platforms for Pacific publications that are available open access and draw authorship plus readership from across the Pacific.

The proposal to partially dismantle CAP, and the threats of future cuts to colleges, makes us concerned about the continuation of support for Pacific scholarship, especially given the dis-investment in Pacific scholarship by the ANU over the past two decades. Over this period, we have seen recurrent positions focussed on the Pacific being successively replaced by positions funded by grants and other soft money.

As you would be aware, the Pacific is a complex and diverse region of peoples, cultures, environments, challenges and opportunities. Understanding it and working within it requires long-term commitment and the development of strong and trusting relationships – it is not an expertise that can be turned on and off.

Currently, the Pacific is a site of significant interest by the government following the Pacific step-up, and a site of intense geopolitical interest. Our scholars are often called upon to advise and shape policies and programs, and because of their deep knowledge and extensive networks of partnerships and collaborations are able to often be profoundly influential. Advancing Australia’s engagement in the Pacific requires acknowledging, supporting, and empowering the existing knowledge base about the region, and our relational networks within it.

We note the suggestions that spreading Pacific expertise around the university is a way of supporting broader knowledge of the region. While this is true, and indeed a key reason why the Pacific Institute was established, we also note that creating enabling conditions for scholars of the region to work together in the same academic structures is also important for research collaboration, teaching, attracting undergraduate and graduate students, and knowledge exchange. All of this becomes significantly more difficult on a cross-college basis.

In sum, we seek a commitment from you that the renewed ANU will be one in which the ANU’s Pacific expertise preserved at their current levels at a minimum in all respects (small language programs, the library collection, the Pacific Manuscripts Bureau, the Pacific Research Archive, Cartographic and Digitization & Preservation specialists and ANU Press and Pacific online publication platforms, etc). We are grateful for any opportunity to contribute a vision for how a renewed ANU can better support and strengthen our current Pacific focus.

Signed on behalf of the Pacific Institute Board

16 October 2024