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Professor Amanda Davies,  
School of Social Sciences,  
The University of Western Australia

26 July 2021

**RE: UWA School of Social Sciences Proposal – Anthropology and Sociology**

Dear Prof. Davies,

I am an Irish heritage consultant who lived and worked in Western Australia for over a decade, from 2003 to 2015. I am a former Professional Member and former Secretary of the Anthropological Society of Western Australia (ASWA), and I am appalled by the proposal to discontinue the disciplines of Anthropology and Sociology at UWA.

From 2007–2015, through my heritage consultancy Amergin Consulting (Australia) Pty Ltd, I worked on hundreds of development projects across WA. This work was primarily ethnographic research in the context of cultural heritage impact assessments, directly connected with the statutory approvals process under the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 1972*.

Working alongside Traditional Owners and colleagues from the disciplines of anthropology and archaeology, I advised private and public sector clients from sectors including residential, commercial, infrastructural, and extractive industry, including some of the largest mining developments in the world. I worked on strategic infrastructure such as NorthLink (Perth–Darwin Highway), Latitude 32 and the Rockingham Industrial Zone, as well as other major projects such as the 'Building the Education Revolution' National Stimulus Plan Project and the Aboriginal heritage aspects of the Rottne Island (*Wadjemup*) Cultural Landscape Management Plan.

On all these projects, our clients required independent, professional, expert advice and I see no reason why this will not continue in the future.

Anthropologists play a vital role in cultural heritage impact assessment in Australia in relation to Indigenous heritage, both intangible and tangible. Working alongside professional archaeologists, their role includes identifying, recording, and evaluating reports of Aboriginal Sites, both sacred and non-sacred; undertaking cultural significance assessments of ethnographic and archaeological sites; and formulating mitigation proposals in consultation with Aboriginal communities and proponents to prevent, reduce and/or offset the adverse effects of development on Indigenous cultural heritage. This work is a key component of the approvals process with respect to Aboriginal heritage legislation, and Anthropology has provided the necessary skills to undertake these assessments.

By recording and articulating the intangible aspects of cultural heritage, anthropologists help wider society, and most particularly proponents and decision-makers, to understand the social, cultural, and spiritual concerns of those whose might not otherwise have a voice. In this regard, they also help to support culturally and environmentally sustainable development.

Many of the anthropologists and archaeologists I worked alongside were UWA graduates who are highly competent and respected in their fields. I also collaborated with experts from other consultancies and from the then Department of Indigenous Affairs, in which I also worked for a time. I attended UWA and ASWA-organised seminars and other events, which allowed me to access professional development opportunities offered by UWA's excellent Anthropology staff. I was fortunate to be able access this expertise, which as you know has a long and distinguished heritage, extending back to the Berndts. The professional and social contacts I made through the Department of Anthropology of UWA and ASWA, and the knowledge they shared, stood me in good stead for the work I was doing in WA.

On my return to Ireland in 2015, I joined a start-up consultancy called Archaeological Management Solutions which has since grown to become one of the leading heritage consultancies in Ireland. Based on my experiences and learnings in WA, I have become an advocate for the ethnographic research methodologies I learned and applied there.

It came as a shock, therefore, to learn of the proposal to discontinue the disciplines and Anthropology and Sociology at UWA. As well as undermining the important role anthropologists play in the development approvals process, this will inevitably limit the availability of trained anthropologists to undertake this work – and other important work – in the future, both in WA and elsewhere. This is especially concerning given some of the high-profile developments that have gained media attention worldwide in recent times, such as the Juukan Gorge controversy, global movements for social justice and racial equality, and the climate and biodiversity crises. At a State level, the *WA Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Bill*, if enacted, will also continue to require the expertise of professional anthropologists into the future.

It is my view that we need **more** anthropologists working in society, not just in the heritage sector but also many other critical areas. I urge you to maintain UWA's preeminent role in this area and reconsider this alarming proposal.

Yours sincerely,



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Bryn Coldrick  
Senior Consultant - Cultural Heritage

CC: Professor Amit Chakma, Vice-Chancellor; Professor Raymond da Silva Rosa; Dr Nin Kirkham; Richard Riordan, Secretary ASWA; Hon. Robert S. French, Chancellor, The University of Western Australia