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ACADEMY OF THE SOCIAL  
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## EXPERTS URGE NEW POLICY FOR REMOTE COMMUNITIES

A national forum of experts from peak Aboriginal organisations, homeland resource agencies and leading academics has found there is a desperate need for new policy approaches to small remote Aboriginal communities and homelands/outstations across Australia.

The forum, hosted over the past two days by the Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia (ASSA) and Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research (CAEPR) at The Australian National University, has called for a parliamentary inquiry into the survival of remote Aboriginal communities.

In a series of recommendations that will be put to the Prime Minister and Minister for Indigenous Affairs, the forum also proposes the Australian Government:

- Recognise the cultural, environmental and strategic importance of nearly 1000 homelands/outstations located on the Aboriginal estate including along the northern coastline
- Recognise the unique significance of homelands/outstations for Aboriginal livelihoods, health, education and well-being and in the provision of environmental services
- Recognise the importance of homelands/outstations for linguistic diversity and Indigenous Knowledge
- Call a moratorium on COAG and other government processes, especially the reform of CDEP, that are undermining positive contributions of homelands/outstations to Close the Gap
- Assess the compatibility of current policy on homelands/outstations with the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples which the government publicly endorsed earlier this year

Professor Jon Altman, CAEPR Director, said that there was a desperate need for a whole-of-governments, evidence-based approach.

"Aboriginal people living on homelands/outstations on Aboriginal-owned lands provide crucially important protection for Australia's environment and provide cost-effective management of cultural and natural resources, ecosystem maintenance, coastal surveillance, border protection, and biosecurity," he said.

"Aboriginal students from small remote communities should be able to access an equitable level of schooling provision, because evidence tells us that such students have better attendance and greater support from families.

"On health, the available evidence suggests that current government policies towards small remote Aboriginal communities are likely to have adverse health outcomes that will widen rather than close the gap in life expectancy

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“On housing and infrastructure, funding commitments under COAG’s National Indigenous Reform Agreement for remote communities will not address the needs of any homelands/outstations. The existing policy approach will result in the deterioration and loss of massive historic public and private investment in housing and community facilities. Population migration will create new need and unnecessary abandonment of existing housing and infrastructure.”

Professor Altman said the forum had concluded that substantive equality will only be achieved by strong governmental commitment to service provision, effective communication, and genuine recognition of the environmental and social benefits homelands/outstations provide in the Aboriginal and national interest.

To arrange interview:

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| [Altman, J. 2009 ‘Experts urge new policy for remote communities,’ Media Release, Australian National University, Thursday 29 October 2009.](#)