

## **INTRODUCTION**

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Self-governance has been a consistent political aspiration for Aboriginal people in colonial Australia. A growing trend of demanding that Aboriginal communities incorporate in order to be able to access government money and services has seen an intricate relationship develop between governance as a political aspiration and corporate governance.

In the post-ATSIC environment, there is also a complex relationship between a government policy move away from support for elected representative bodies and the continuing desire for Aboriginal communities to organise themselves to better manage their own affairs.

This collection of articles explores the way that Aboriginal communities around the country are seeking to achieve their political aspiration to exercise greater control over their own lives and in order to do so either seek to utilise or subvert existing government policies and legislative frameworks. The work collected in this volume is supported by two ARC Linkage grants, both with Reconciliation Australia as the Industry Partner.

The first project, ‘Building stronger Indigenous communities’, is a collaboration between Reconciliation Australia working with BHP Billiton, the Australian National University, the Australian Government, the Government of Western Australia, the Government of the Northern Territory and 13 Indigenous communities. The study has looked at different models of governance in 13 case studies around Australia to inform communities and policy makers on the importance of governance within the Australian legislative and policy environment.

The second project, ‘Regional governance for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities: the development of a legal framework and practical models to address discrimination and disadvantage’, is a collaboration between Reconciliation Australia, the Gilbert + Tobin Centre of Public Law and the Jumbunna Indigenous House of Learning and has used the Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly as its key case study on models of Indigenous self-governance. Government leaders and agencies have identified more localised decision-making by Indigenous communities as a policy priority. Despite this, there is little comprehensive research regarding the legal and policy issues associated with regional governance for Indigenous people in Australia. This research project is undertaking in-depth legal analysis in this area and developing achievable and practical models of regional governance for Indigenous communities.