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Senator Peris launches *Old Man's story*

Senator Nova Peris OAM officially launched the new book *Old Man's story* at Parliament House in Canberra today. *Old Man's story* is the last thoughts of one of Australia's most respected elders and traditional land owners, 'Big Bill' Neidjie – Peris' great-uncle.

Senator Peris said it was an honour and a privilege to be involved in the production of the stunning book – through writing the foreword and being invited to officially launch it.

"I say thank you to Big Bill Neidjie, my great uncle, not only for your teachings over the decades but your passion and resilience in ensuring your stories are passed on to future generations. I honour you," Senator Peris said.

"I felt like I belonged when he spoke to me. He told me about my place in the landscape, my place in country. The sounds, the colours, the special stories of places just flowed from him."

The last remaining speaker of Gaagudju language, Neidjie was committed to sharing his story with future generations as well as educating the wider community about Aboriginal culture, even breaking tradition to do so.

Before his passing in 2002, over a period of two years, Neidjie allowed photographer Mark Lang the opportunity to record his thoughts which explore his views on culture, family, community and country, offering beautifully nuanced stories in his own words and rhythms.

Speaking at the launch Mr Lang said it's a long way from East Alligator River to Parliament house, but somehow it seemed right and proper that *Old Man's story* had made that journey.

"Old Man was no ordinary man and his story is no ordinary tale. Old Man Bill Neidjie's story was a vital story, one that he wanted passed on to his people before he died," Mr Lang said.

"His major concern was his people losing touch with their culture, and that the values enshrined within a traditional attitude to life and to country were being eroded by the onslaught of the 20th Century.

"Probably more than any other Aboriginal elder, Old Man had been prepared to share the values of his traditional life with the outside world in the hope that we could, all of us, learn from the values contained within."

Old Man's story: The last thoughts of Kakadu Elder Bill Neidjie is published by Aboriginal Studies Press (ASP), the publishing arm of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS).

Media enquiries (Ph) 02 6246 1605 (E) commsmedia@aiatsis.gov.au