

## PREFACE

Since its inception in 1999, the annual national Native Title Conference has established itself as the leading Indigenous policy conference in Australia and as a flagship event for the Native Title Research Unit (NTRU) and the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS). The conference combines key note addresses and multiple streamed sessions, cultural events, stalls and exhibitions. A range of speakers is invited each year, representing the fields of law, anthropology and public policy, both domestically and internationally. The public program attracts a wide range of native title delegates.

Each year a different native title representative body co-convenes the Native Title Conference with the NTRU in consultation with the Traditional Owners of the town or city where the conference is held. The first day of the program is reserved for native title claimants, native title holders and their representatives. This closed day and Indigenous Talking Circles held throughout the program are an important part of the conference program. These sessions provide an opportunity for Indigenous delegates to talk among themselves about the impact of the native title process on their communities and to discuss strategies to reach their goals for land justice and self-determination.

Three protocols shape the Native Title Conference:

1. recognising Traditional Owners;
2. working with native title representative bodies/native title service delivery agencies; and
3. maximising the participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

These protocols give the Native Title Conference standing as a legitimate and accessible forum for Indigenous people to have a voice in and lead national debates, think through ideas and share experiences from across the country. The high participation rate of native title representative bodies — and the many native title claimants and holders who have given

presentations and engaged in discussion — provides a unique opportunity for the discussion of common concerns and the development of valuable networks. This also makes the event attractive to other stakeholders, who gain insight and access to Indigenous native title networks through their participation in the conference. All of the relevant state and Commonwealth ministers have addressed the conference, alongside the federal judiciary and industry leaders.

Following the inaugural meeting in Melbourne, the conference has now been held in Townsville, Geraldton, Alice Springs, Adelaide, Coffs Harbour, Darwin, Cairns and Perth, arriving back in Melbourne for the tenth anniversary in 2009.

A significant feature of the conference program is the annual Mabo Lecture. The lecture is a dedication to the late Koiki (Eddie) Mabo and his historical legacy of the *Mabo* case that established native title under Australian law. The lecture aims to provide a contemporary commentary on native title issues in the context of Indigenous peoples' struggle for recognition and control over their country and their lives.

It is hoped that this volume goes some way to capturing the spirit of dialogue and accumulated wisdom of the conference, and that it marks its importance as a national forum to move native title forward in the pursuit of Indigenous land justice.

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