

## AIATSIS at a glance

- the world's leading research, collecting and publishing institution in the field of Australian Indigenous studies
- a network comprising a Council and committees, members, staff and other stakeholders in urban, regional and remote areas throughout Australia, and abroad
- a community working in partnership with Indigenous Australians to carry out tasks that acknowledge, affirm and raise awareness of Australian Indigenous cultures and histories, in all their richness and diversity
- a team with a vision of worldwide knowledge and understanding of Australian Indigenous cultures, past and present
- a staff of 120 people, headed by the Principal, engaged in a range of endeavours of interest to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, scholars and the Australian and international public
- a research team conducting high-quality research and administering research grants for significant projects approved by Council
- a prestigious publisher, Aboriginal Studies Press, producing and promoting an array of books, CDs, film, videos, reports and the Institute's journal, *Australian Aboriginal Studies*
- a Library and Audiovisual Archive managing the world's most extensive collections of printed, audio and visual materials on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, history and societies
- an accessible source of abundant information about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander studies, retrievable by Internet, mail, telephone or email, or by arranging to visit AIATSIS on Acton Peninsula in Canberra.

## ABOUT THIS REPORT

This report continues the direction taken in the last four years' reports in reflecting outputs as they relate to our goals across the organisation, rather than by an individual program area.

The corporate goals are listed on page vii, which identifies the main program areas that implement them.

The Chairperson's and Principal's contributions together provide a snapshot of the Institute's achievements and challenges during the year under review.

Some of the appendices found in previous annual reports can now be accessed instead on the AIATSIS website, [www.aiatsis.gov.au](http://www.aiatsis.gov.au).

We would welcome your feedback on this year's annual report. Please contact:

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Cover image: Luke Gardiner from the Jindi Worabak dancers performing at the Native Title Conference 2009. Photography by Gerald Preiss, AIATSIS

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The Institute logo is taken from a Gu:nani (Kunjen) shield from the Mitchell River region, Gulf of Carpentaria. The shield was purchased by Ursula McConnel in the early 1930s on behalf of the Australian National Research Council and is now part of the AIATSIS collection.



**AIATSIS**

Australian Institute of Aboriginal  
and Torres Strait Islander Studies

**Executive**  
Fax: 02 6261 4286

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*Worldwide knowledge and understanding of Australian Indigenous cultures, past and present*

7 September, 2009

The Hon. Kim Carr  
Minister  
Department of Innovation, Industry, Science and Research  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Minister

In accordance with *Commonwealth Authorities and Companies Act 1997*, I am pleased to submit the annual report on the operations of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies for 2008–2009.

Councillors are responsible, under Section 9 of the above Act, for the preparation of this report. The report is made in accordance with a resolution of the Councillors.

Professor Michael Dodson, AM  
**Chairperson of Council**



Dancers from the National Aboriginal Islander Skills Development Association (NAISDA) perform at the opening of The Voss Journey. Photography by Alex James, AIATSIS

# Contents

|   |           |  |      |
|---|-----------|--|------|
| AIATSIS at a glance   | i         | <b>Figures and tables</b>                                |      |
| About this report   | ii        | Figure 1. Outcome and output structure                   | viii |
| Letter of transmittal   | iii       | Figure 2. AIATSIS organisational chart                   | viii |
| 08–09 Highlights  | vi        | Figure 3. Comparison of ASP authors                      | 18   |
| <b>Overviews</b>  |           | Figure 4. Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff            | 49   |
| Functions   | vii       | Table 1. Library use statistics                          | 26   |
| Corporate goals   | vii       | Table 2. Family History Unit statistics                  | 27   |
| Outcome and output structure  | viii      | Table 3. Native title research and access statistics     | 29   |
| Organisational structure  | viii      | Table 4. Elected and appointed Council members and terms | 46   |
| Chairperson’s message   | x         | Table 5. Attendance at Council meetings                  | 47   |
| Principal’s report  | xii       | Table 6. Audit and Risk Committee members and attendance | 47   |
| <b>Chapter 1. Research</b>  | 1         | Table 7. Staffing levels and numbers                     | 49   |
| <b>Chapter 2. Dissemination of information</b>                        | 15        | Table 8. Salary ranges under Agency Agreement            | 50   |
| <b>Chapter 3. Collection development and management</b>               | 35        |  |      |
| <b>Chapter 4. Corporate governance, management and accountability</b> | 45        |  |      |
| <b>Financial statements</b>   | <b>57</b> |  |      |
| <b>Appendices</b>   |           |  |      |
| 1. Publications and presentations                                     | 94        |  |      |
| 2. Research grants approved   | 98        |  |      |
| 3. Gifts and donations  | 100       |  |      |
| 4. Audio finding aids   | 103       |  |      |
| 5. Contracts and consultancies  | 109       |  |      |
| Abbreviations and acronyms  | 111       |  |      |
| Compliance Index  | 112       |  |      |
| Index   | 114       |  |      |

# 08 09

## HIGHLIGHTS

The Australian Government agreed to contribute nearly \$1 million to enhance the Institute's ability to engage visiting Indigenous scholars for the period 2008–11.

The AIATSIS Council approved 28 research grants to a value of \$712,048, compared to \$620,000 the previous year. A total of 78 applications were received for the 2009 grant round (75 in 2008).

Aboriginal Studies Press increased its revenue by 66 per cent to more than \$480,000. As well as books and maps, ASP sold CDs and DVDs of music and films, journal subscriptions, and earned income from rights.

The Library's online exhibitions received over 4.5 million web hits, an increase of one million over 2007–08.

The 10th annual Native Title Conference was held at the Melbourne Cricket Ground in June 2009. It attracted over 700 delegates, making it the largest to date.

Rare technical equipment was acquired and repaired to enable the preservation of collection material on obsolete media. Archive staff designed and implemented a number of innovative technical solutions.

Over a thousand audiovisual items were received from the Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association, the Kimberley Language Resource Centre, and other Indigenous organisations, for long-term conservation.

The Institute offered Indigenous cadetships and training positions to provide paid work experience and enhance future employment opportunities for Indigenous people. Two cadets were employed and completed their cadetships during 2008–09.

## FUNCTIONS

The functions of the Institute are set out in Part 3, Section 5, of the *Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies Act 1989* (the Act):

- to undertake and promote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander studies
- to publish the results of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander studies and to assist in the publication of the results of such studies
- to conduct research in fields relevant to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander studies and to encourage other people or bodies to conduct such research
- to assist in training people, particularly Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders, as research workers in fields relevant to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander studies
- to establish and maintain a cultural resource collection consisting of materials relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander studies
- to encourage understanding, in the general community, of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander societies
- such other functions as are conferred on the Institute by this Act, and
- to do anything else that is incidental or conducive to the performance of any of the preceding functions.

## CORPORATE GOALS

To carry out its functions as defined in the Act, the Institute has adopted the following goals:

1. to provide leadership and excellence in promoting, facilitating and undertaking high-quality research in Australian Indigenous studies
2. to maximise the role of Australian Indigenous peoples in the activities and services of the Institute
3. to develop, maintain and preserve well-documented archives and collections, and to maximise access to these, particularly by Indigenous peoples, in keeping with appropriate cultural and ethical practices
4. to create, develop and disseminate a diverse range of publications and services about Australian Indigenous cultures
5. to develop and maintain strategic alliances that add value to our activities
6. to manage efficiently and effectively in a transparent, accountable and supportive manner
7. to promote and market the products, services and capacity of AIATSIS.

Corporate goals 2, 5 and 7 are implemented by all program areas of AIATSIS. Goal 1 is specific to the Research Program, goal 3 is specific to the Library and Audiovisual Archive programs, goal 4 relates primarily to the dissemination program (Aboriginal Studies Press), and goal 6 relates to Corporate Services.

## OUTCOME AND OUTPUT STRUCTURE

There was no change to the Institute’s outcome and output structure during 2008–09.

**Figure 1:** Outcome and output structure

| Outcome  |                              |                                       |
|--|------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Promotion of knowledge and understanding of Australian Indigenous cultures, past and present |                              |                                       |
| Outputs  |                              |                                       |
| Research   | Dissemination of information | Collection development and management |

## ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE

**Figure 2:** AIATSIS organisational chart

|  |  |
|--|--|
| <b>Minister</b><br><b>Senator The Hon. Kim Carr</b><br>Department of Innovation, Industry, Science and Research  |  |
| <b>Council</b><br><b>AIATSIS members</b>   |  |
| <b>Principal</b><br>Russell Taylor (from 25 March 2009)<br>Steve Larkin (to end of December 2008)  |  |
| <b>Deputy Principal (Collections)</b><br>Bronwyn Nimmo   | <b>Deputy Principal, (Research and Information)</b><br>Luke Taylor |
| <b>Director, Corporate Services</b><br>Jeff Hobson   | <b>Director, Aboriginal Studies Press</b><br>Rhonda Black          |
| <b>Director, Audiovisual Archive</b><br>Dianne Hosking <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• AVA</li> <li>• Community Access</li> <li>• AVA digitisation</li> </ul> | <b>Director, Research Programs</b><br>Lisa Strelein                |
| <b>Director, Library</b><br>Rod Stroud <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Library</li> <li>• Family History Unit</li> <li>• Library digitisation</li> </ul>      |  |

The **Executive** ensures the smooth transition of **Council** directives through to the business plans of the AIATSIS programs. The Council-appointed Principal is responsible for the Institute's performance and advises the Council on all operational matters. The Principal is assisted by the Deputy Principal. These senior executive staff are responsible for ensuring that all Council policy and budget directives are implemented. They are also responsible for maintaining high-level relationships with the Institute's stakeholders and for program directors' performance. Executive staff assist the Council and its committee meetings, liaise with the AIATSIS members, develop the organisation's media profile, and facilitate senior AIATSIS staff meetings, including those of the Executive Board of Management.

The **Research Program** undertakes multi-disciplinary research, sometimes collaboratively, in diverse areas of Australian Indigenous studies. It also contributes to policy formulation in priority areas. In addition, the Research Program supports Australian Indigenous studies, teaching and trainee researchers, and publishes widely in print and on the AIATSIS website. It holds seminars, workshops and conferences and has established a comprehensive set of ethical research protocols. The Native Title Research Unit addresses specific needs arising from the recognition of native title. The Research Program administers the Institute's research grants program and supports the Institute in providing training, facilities and support for Indigenous trainee researchers and visiting and honorary scholars.

**Corporate Services** supports other programs by providing financial, personnel, information technology and building management services. It is also responsible for ensuring that good practices in risk management and business planning are followed by the Institute.

The **Library** contains one of the most comprehensive collections of print materials on Australian Indigenous studies in the world. Through the AIATSIS website, remote users can access the Library's catalogue, online exhibitions and electronic documents. The Library also provides document delivery, interlibrary loans and reference services. The Family History Unit assists Indigenous Australians with family history research.

The **Audiovisual Archive** holds almost one million items comprising photographic images, works of art, artefacts, audio, film and video in many different formats. The role of the archive is to ensure the safety and longevity of the materials, and to constantly migrate the information onto the latest technologies so that the material remains accessible for future generations of Australians.

**Aboriginal Studies Press (ASP)** publishes up to eight new titles annually in the area of Indigenous studies. Academic books include history, anthropology, archaeology, land rights and native title, health, education, languages and art, while general books include biography, autobiography and community stories. ASP publishes in print, sometimes with CD-ROMs. Its move into electronic publishing recommenced in 2008–09. ASP is the publisher of the best-selling Aboriginal Australia map and, with the Research Program, publishes the journal *Australian Aboriginal Studies*. ASP runs a small bookshop within AIATSIS and uses national and international trade distributors.



Professor Mick Dodson

## Chairperson's message

Last Australia Day our Prime Minister acknowledged the First Australians as 'the oldest continuing cultures in human history'. In his address at a citizenship ceremony in Canberra, he spoke of the privilege of having among us 'these cultures who link this nation with deepest antiquity, unique across the world'.

At AIATSIS we are very conscious of the solemn trust inherent in our custodianship of so much that is vitally important to our Australian Indigenous cultures. As the leading research, collecting and publishing institution in the field of Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander studies, we are a keeping-place not only of a vast record of Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, but also of expertise, of ideas, of capacity, and of vision.

Of course AIATSIS is far from being a museum of antiquities, or a dusty library of ancient history. We have a role in the contemporary lives of large numbers of Australians, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous. And I believe we can play a role into the future for most if not all of our citizens, in particular the younger generation.

A role in the wellbeing of Indigenous Australians—in 'closing the gap'. A role in evidence-based policymaking. And a role in the provision of education to all Australians.

In his Australia Day address the Prime Minister described Australia as a nation now resolved to 'close the gap in education, in health, and employment, and those things which matter in people's daily and practical lives'. AIATSIS already works towards this important national goal on many fronts.

We provide a great deal of the evidence needed to inform policymaking in relation to the role of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians in the economy and in the community—at home, at work and at school.

When I was given the honour of being named Australian of the Year for 2009, I identified education as a principal concern. I said I wanted to be sure our children were going to get the best education this country could give them—that we need to bring to education in this country a much greater sense of urgency and necessity.

AIATSIS has the capacity to contribute in important ways to the education revolution we need, not just for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, but for all our children.

Our research, our knowledge, our science, our history, shed vital light on aspects of life that should form an essential part of education in Australia, at all levels.

Our researchers and facilitators are out in the field, in the schools, in the communities, or in towns and city streets, to talk with Australians who often are facing visceral daily life choices. And they are bringing critical insights to our work.

As a result we have a vast array of quality resources immediately available online to the education community, particularly to education professionals.

And as an institution sharing the Australian Government's dedication to excellence in research, we are very well placed to continue to contribute to our Minister's goal of enticing more of Australia's bright students into research careers, and doubling the level of collaboration between publicly funded research agencies and Australia's businesses and universities.

In the past year AIATSIS derived more than 40 per cent of its research expenditure from external sources, mainly through consultancies, grants and conference participation.

This was just one highlight of a highly successful and productive year for our Institute. Of the many other significant achievements outlined in this report, I am pleased to note an increase in the number and value of research grants approved by Council this year.

The success of *The Little Red Yellow Black Book* and its contribution to a major increase in revenue reflected very well on Aboriginal Studies Press, while the Library's online exhibitions continue to attract very large numbers of web hits.

The 10th annual Native Title Conference returned to Melbourne—the site of the first conference—in June this year, with a record number of delegates.

Significant donations and deposits of precious material continue to enhance our remarkable Audiovisual Archive, with 188 unique collections handed over during the year.

This year we concluded a public research agency charter with our Minister, Senator the Hon. Kim Carr, underpinning our freedom to engage in unfettered research and in public debate in our areas of expertise. I thank the minister for his strong support during the year and for his demonstrated interest in the work of AIATSIS.

It has been my privilege again this year to chair a very distinguished and supportive AIATSIS Council. During the year we welcomed Dr Payi-Linda Ford to Council. Professor John Maynard was appointed Deputy Chairperson.

To all members of our Council, to our former Principal Steve Larkin and our new Principal, Russ Taylor, and our staff, I also extend my sincere appreciation of a year of exceptional achievement.



Professor Mick Dodson, AM  
Chairperson



Mr Russell Taylor

## Principal's report

In Australian public service terms, AIATSIS could be described as a micro-agency, a statutory authority with a staff of around 120 and a budget of well under \$15 million. What is remarkable is that with those limited resources we have become something of a powerhouse of human endeavour, breaking new ground each year in the areas of research, sharing of knowledge, safekeeping of cultural treasures and history, and the provision of vital opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians.

As the incoming Principal, my appointment having taken effect from 25 March this year, I have had to become familiar with all of the organisation's operations in a very short time. And it was clear to me from the outset that as far as our key stakeholders are concerned, AIATSIS is more than delivering on their expectations. Those stakeholders include the Australian community at large, the Indigenous community, the government and our minister.

Their expectations include that AIATSIS seeks to position itself as the pre-eminent institution for information and research about the cultures and lifestyles of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, that we remain responsive to the government and to the parliament in fulfilling our functions, and that we maintain high standards of corporate governance.

To continue to deliver, our thinking and our planning must be strategic, and our processes have to be geared to identifying and dealing with strategic challenges. AIATSIS needs to remain a learning organisation to be effective and to maintain its value to its key stakeholders. We must continue to be an organisation setting standards of excellence in research, in maintaining and expanding our collections, in sharing our knowledge—indeed, in all our endeavours.

I am conscious of our obligation to deliver value to government and to its policymakers—to bring value to the activities and aspirations of government—either through our research output, or as custodians of the significant and irreplaceable information that we hold.

The restructuring of our research staff positions during 2008–09 was an excellent example of delivering value. Coupled with our use of external revenue, this established a solid base for the expansion of our research activities over the next three years, and has enabled us to give a greater focus to the publication of research outcomes.

The recent completion by our Native Title Research Unit of a three-year research and services program in the area of native title and traditional ownership is another example. With

the prospect of a further three-year agreement, this work has undoubtedly informed policy development in the sponsoring Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, and no doubt in other areas of government.

The first anniversary of the Prime Minister's National Apology to the Stolen Generations was celebrated with our major online exhibition, created as part of the ongoing digitisation of audio, visual and printed holdings in our collections, enabling Australians to reflect on the significance of this historic government initiative.

These are just a few examples of how our work can underpin public policy. And doing so does not detract in any way from the fulfilment of our obligations to the Indigenous community and the Australian public at large.

Our Audiovisual Archive, for instance, made significant progress in facilitating the return of collection materials to Indigenous communities in many parts of Australia. In the year under review, the communities at Lajamanu and Elcho Island benefitted from this ongoing endeavour.

Also, the Tiwi Land Council contributed funding for our digitisation of Tiwi genealogies, and these were returned to the Land Council in 2008–09. This was a particularly gratifying example of our collections repatriation program.

Digitisation is the key to making the treasures of our collections available to researchers and to

the community in perpetuity. However, despite the great strides that our digitisation program has made in recent years, we are running out of time to save some of the rare and critical holdings we need to preserve in digital form.

Digitisation is no longer an added extra in our goals and objectives—it has become an essential part of the way we do business. And a major financial challenge that we face in coming years is to establish the digitisation program, together with its skilled staff, as an ongoing part of our operations. There is a huge amount of work to be done, and we have barely scratched the surface.

In conclusion, I extend my thanks to the Minister for Innovation, Industry, Science and Research, Senator the Hon. Kim Carr, and to the Department of Innovation, Industry, Science and Research, for their consideration, guidance and support during the year. Thanks are also due to our Chairperson, Professor Mick Dodson, and the members of Council, for their wisdom and advocacy.

I also extend my sincere thanks to the staff of AIATSIS, who made the year's excellent achievements possible.



Mr Russell Taylor  
Principal



The Jindi Worabak dance group performing at the welcome ceremony for the Native Title Conference 2009, held on Wurundjeri country in Melbourne. Photography by Gerald Preiss, AIATSIS