

## Research

### 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 Institute's policy of seeking research funding from external sources has been highly successful, providing around 42 per cent of total research expenditure.

Restructuring and external funding established a solid base for expansion of research activities over the next three years. One result has been a greater focus on the publication and communication of research outcomes.

The Native Title Research Unit completed a three-year research and services program in the area of native title and traditional ownership, and is negotiating a new three-year agreement for funding.

June 2009 saw the launch of a new series of research symposia to tackle topical issues. The first symposium examined bilingual education in the Northern Territory.

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).

## OVERVIEW OF THE RESEARCH PROGRAM

AIATSIS is the premier national, multidisciplinary research institution focusing on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander studies. Its mission is to increase understanding of Indigenous cultures and societies within Australia and internationally.

AIATSIS has responsibility for a multitude of research programs and services, and engages in numerous partnerships with research institutions and Indigenous regional alliances, communities and individuals. Research Program activities are conducted by the Research Section and the Native Title Research Unit, and are mainly carried out by staff researchers who are experts in their fields of study and practice. A research grants program provides funding for external researchers to conduct their own research.

AIATSIS offers an attractive research environment, increasingly for early- to mid-career Indigenous scholars. In June 2008, the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) and the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA) agreed to contribute nearly \$1 million to enhance our ability to engage Indigenous visitors, for the period 2008–11.

The Research Program maintains wide-ranging expertise in Indigenous studies and policy research. We focus on six areas of research under two themes:

### Indigenous country and governance

- native title and traditional ownership
- governance, public policy and development
- land and water

### Indigenous social and cultural wellbeing

- health and wellbeing
- education, history and cultural transmission
- language, arts and cultural expression.

In 2006 the Institute allocated additional resources to seeking research funding

from external sources. This policy has been spectacularly successful: around 42 per cent of total research expenditure was derived from external sources in 2008–09. The main sources are income from consultancy projects for other organisations, grants to operate the Native Title Research Unit, and registration fees to attend conferences.

Restructuring of staff positions continued during the year. Together with external revenue, this has established a solid base for expansion of research activities over the next three years. One of the main outcomes from the restructure has been a greater focus on publication of research outcomes (see Chapter 2).

## RESEARCH ACTIVITIES FOR THE YEAR

This section summarises the research activities that AIATSIS staff undertook during the year. A list of publications and presentations by research staff in 2008–09 is provided at Appendix 1. More detailed information can be obtained by contacting individual researchers.

### Indigenous country and governance

#### Native title and traditional ownership

The Institute's activities in this research area are conducted primarily through the Native Title Research Unit (NTRU). The NTRU is chiefly funded through a research partnership with FaHCSIA. Some specific research projects and activities, such as the Native Title Conference, also attract funding from other government, private and industry sources.

The NTRU completed a three-year research and services program in June 2009, and is negotiating a new three-year agreement with FaHCSIA. The NTRU has two research fellows. The Director of Research Programs also contributes to research outcomes in this area.

#### Native title jurisprudence

**Dr Lisa Strelein** completed the second edition of her legal text *Compromised Jurisprudence*, which is due to be published in November 2009.

## Negotiation

**Ms Toni Bauman** completed this project, in partnership with Ms Shirli Kirschner and with Mr Delwyn Everard of Resolve Advisors. The project consisted of a number of interconnected elements, including producing a discussion paper scoping native title negotiation issues and conducting a negotiation workshop for Native Title Representative Body staff. During the workshop a negotiation hypothetical was filmed, which involved a panel of native title stakeholders, including mining industry and government representatives; Indigenous claimants and native title holders; representatives from native title representative bodies; and private consultants.

## Connection requirements

The management of native title claims, from proof of connection through to final determination, continues to be a central concern to native title stakeholders. The third phase of this project addressed connection threshold requirements and critically examined section 223 of the *Native Title Act 1993*. In July 2008, Dr Strelein and Ms Bauman presented to the Federal Court User Group. The presentation was later submitted on invitation for publication in a special native title-related edition of the Australian Law Reform Commission journal *Reform*.

Together with the Cape York Institute and the Agreements, Treaties and Negotiated Settlements Project at the University of Melbourne, Dr Strelein and Ms Bauman co-convened a symposium in May 2009 on interpretations of section 223.

## Indigenous decision-making

Ms Bauman and Dr Strelein continued their involvement in the Federal Court of Australia's Indigenous Dispute Resolution and Conflict Management Case Study Project commissioned by the National Alternative Dispute Resolution Advisory Council. Ms Bauman wrote a chapter for and co-edited the final report of the project. The project findings are of broad relevance and

the final report identifies critical factors for the development of more effective approaches to managing conflicts involving Indigenous Australians.

Recommendations arising from the Indigenous Facilitation and Mediation Project, undertaken by Ms Bauman 2003–06, continue to influence government policy and practice. Ms Bauman provided expert advice to FaHCSIA's Indigenous Leadership and Engagement Group on the project's recommendation for a national Indigenous dispute resolution service. In February 2009, she coordinated a leadership workshop, in partnership with FaHCSIA, for trained mediators who have been associated with the project.

Ms Bauman also authored a chapter on native title mediation practice for an international publication on mediation in the Asia-Pacific. She was invited to participate in the Attorney-General's Department's Pacific Judicial Development Program 'Mediation Standards for the Pacific' in September 2008 in association with the Ninth National Mediation Conference.

## Prescribed bodies corporate

The NTRU's prescribed bodies corporate (PBC) project culminated in a second national meeting for registered native title bodies corporate (RNTBCs) held in Melbourne in June 2009 in association with the annual Native Title Conference. The meeting was attended by sixty-one native title holders representing RNTBCs from across Australia.

Over the past three years NTRU research fellows have been involved in PBC research partnerships sponsored by the Minerals Council of Australia. The case studies have examined the structure and activities of PBCs; issues affecting the ability of native title holders to hold and manage their traditional lands and waters post-determination; and native title holders' aspirations and priorities. The research partnerships have also involved planning workshops, governance advice and other practical assistance to RNTBCs.



Delegates at the second national meeting of Registered Native Title Bodies Corporate, MCG, Melbourne

Dr Strelein worked with RNTBCs in the Torres Strait, Ms Bauman worked with the Djabugay RNTBC in north Queensland and **Dr Weir** worked with the Karajarri Traditional Lands Association in the Kimberley. Prior to the national meeting in Melbourne, research partners attended a workshop with researchers to discuss their issues and their experiences of the project, and assess the project outcomes.

Papers arising from this project, together with the work of a number of other researchers on RNTBCs, will be aggregated into a final volume. Dr Weir also undertook a project with Gunditjmara native title holders in Victoria, and wrote the *Gunditjmara Land Justice Story* (see breakout box).

The project has also involved bringing government stakeholders together for meetings to discuss PBC needs and aspirations and identify opportunities to improve government engagement with the PBC sector. Resources for RNTBCs, including the development of fifty-six PBC profiles and updating of information in the national, state and territory PBC toolkits, were also completed by Ms Hilary Jones.

#### **Native title, land and water management**

**Native title and freshwater:** Dr Weir completed a series of speaking engagements to Indigenous groups, community groups, and academic

and policy audiences on her Murray River work and was invited to participate in the National Water Commission's Indigenous Water Planning Forum in February 2009. Her manuscript 'Murray River Country', based on her PhD thesis, was accepted for publication by Aboriginal Studies Press.

Water management and allocation emerged as an important issue in Dr Weir's Karajarri case study, and during her fieldwork she met with WA Department of Water staff to discuss water planning and facilitate opportunities for Karajarri Rangers to be involved in water monitoring. She also provided assistance to Ms Sarah Yu in the preparation of the Karajarri response to the Government of Western Australia's 'Draft La Grange Groundwater Sub-areas Water Management Plan-Allocation'.

**Native title and ecology:** Dr Weir gave two seminars exploring different understandings of ecology and how these relate to government approaches to land management. She is continuing her work on an edited volume on native title and ecology.

**Native title and climate change:** Dr Weir and **Dr Luke Taylor** attended the second CSIRO National Indigenous Science and Research Roundtable on Water, Climate Change and Indigenous Futures in November 2008 and provided advice to the CSIRO on Indigenous

participation in water planning and the regulation of access to water.

**Native title and joint management of national parks:** Ms Bauman's Djabugay native title corporation case study highlighted deficiencies in the joint management arrangements for national parks and other conservation areas that are being implemented through native title agreements, and considerable inequities across states and territories. Ms Bauman is coordinating a project involving the compilation of information on joint management arrangements in each jurisdiction. Ms Janet Hunt from the Australian National University's Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research assisted in compiling data for New South Wales, and NTRU interns have completed research relating to other jurisdictions.

Ms Bauman was also invited to chair a session titled 'Urbanisation, Sustainability, Capacity-building and Gender' at the Land Administration Workshop: Knowledge Sharing for the Future, sponsored by Land Equity International in August 2008.

#### **Taxation, trusts and the distribution of benefits**

Dr Strelein continued to provide advice and presentations on the complex area of native title taxation. This involved completing submissions for Australia's future tax system review and to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs inquiry into Indigenous enterprise. Dr Strelein gave evidence to the inquiry and the AIATSIS submission was cited in the final report.

Dr Strelein presented a paper on better native title and tax practice at a FaHCSIA Native Title Representative Body Senior Professional Officers' Forum in October 2008 and provided expert advice to the forum held in March 2009. The NTRU completed a comprehensive literature review and selected bibliography for the FaHCSIA Working Group on Native Title Payments and Dr Strelein participated in a public consultation on the Commonwealth

Government's native title payments discussion paper.

Dr Strelein is continuing her collaboration with the Agreements, Treaties and Negotiated Settlements team at the University of Melbourne, submitting a successful Australian Research Council Linkage Grant application, 'Poverty in the Midst of Plenty: Economic empowerment, wealth creation and institutional reform for sustainable Indigenous and local communities'. The project is examining government, private sector and Indigenous initiatives enhancing Indigenous economic development and wellbeing outcomes. Project partners include FaHCSIA, Rio Tinto, Woodside, Santos and Marnda Mia (Aboriginal Trust).

#### **Governance, public policy and development**

**Dr Patrick Sullivan** completed a project, in conjunction with the ANU's National Centre for Indigenous Studies and commissioned by the Australian Human Rights Commission, on options for a representative Indigenous voice at the national level. The Commission published an issues paper, 'Building a Sustainable National Indigenous Representative Body: Issues for Consideration', in July 2008.

Dr Sullivan also completed a report on the Indigenous Land Corporation. He recommended that the purpose of the Indigenous Land Corporation and the Indigenous Land Fund be reviewed, and its policy-making made more transparent and inclusive of Indigenous people.

Dr Sullivan worked with the University of Notre Dame, Broome and at the National Centre for Indigenous Studies while drafting his forthcoming book on the Indigenous affairs public policy environment.

FaHCSIA provided funding to AIATSIS in June 2008 to compile community profiles of the seventy-three Northern Territory communities involved in the government's Northern Territory Emergency Response, plus a number of communities in Queensland involved in reform projects. This work was completed during the year.

## Land and water

Dr Sullivan visited Yakanarra, near Fitzroy Crossing, with the founder of the community, Hanson Pampila Boxer, to discuss a case study he has produced on the effects of climate change on arid areas. The case study is part of a project led by Dr Donna Green at the University of New South Wales.

**Dr Graeme Ward** is analysing data and writing articles based on his fieldwork in the Wadeye area, and inspections of collections of bark paintings held in national and state institutions. With colleagues he is finalising a book on the history and culture of the area, and completed editing of the collection 'Protecting Country: Indigenous governance and management of protected areas'. Dr Ward also edited *Australian Aboriginal Studies* 2008/2 and a number of other publications.

## Indigenous social and cultural wellbeing

### Health and wellbeing

**Dr Nerelle Poroch** was appointed to provide support to the health research area until a replacement for Dr Graham Henderson, who retired in December 2008, is found. Ms Jill Guthrie began a three-year research fellowship in health.

### Universe-referent citizenship

**Ms Kerry Arabena** attended an international 'Futures' conference in Lund, Sweden, where she was an invited expert in her PhD field of universe-referent citizenship research. Forty scientists from around the world participated in this event, writing a synthesis of scientific thinking to repair the relationship between the earth community and the human community.

Ms Arabena wrote Discussion Paper No. 22 titled 'Indigenous Epistemologies and Wellbeing: Universe referent citizenship', which was commissioned by the NSW Department of Environment and Climate Change.

## Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Justice Health—National Health and Medical Research Council Grant 2009–13

AIATSIS is part of the consortium for a National Health and Medical Research Council Capacity Building Grant, 'From Broome to Berrima: Building Australia-wide research capacity in Indigenous offender health and health care delivery'. Partners include Winnunga Nimmityjah Aboriginal Health Service, the ANU's National Centre for Epidemiology and Population Health, Telethon Institute of Child Health Research, Centre for Urban Mental Health, Black Dog Institute, Hunter Mental Health, National Drug Research Institute, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, and the Cooperative Research Centre for Aboriginal Health (CRAH).

The grant will support understanding of the health of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander offender population and models of health service delivery to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in prison.

### Victims of crime

Ms Arabena completed a report for the ACT Victims of Crime Project titled 'We Don't Shoot Our Wounded', which was launched in March 2009. Models of healthcare and socially beneficial interventions for Indigenous victims of crime (particularly family violence) are being developed, building on previous Winnunga Nimmityjah Aboriginal Health Centre prison research. Dr Poroch assisted in redrafting the report for publication.

### Yarrabah Family Violence Project

The final report on this project has been completed. The report focused on the formative stages of a violence prevention program, implemented through a crime prevention project in the Yarrabah community. The report made five recommendations to the Yarrabah community and a further seven to the Queensland Government more broadly, around community solutions to local domestic and family violence problems.



Gunditjmara dancers,  
Gunditjmara Native Title Consent  
Determination, March 2007

## People, culture: the Gunditjmara land justice story

Rarely do the headlines proclaiming 'native title victory' reveal the details of Indigenous Australians' struggle for land justice. *The Gunditjmara Land Justice Story*, written by Dr Jessica Weir, documents the Gunditjmara's journey for recognition as traditional owners.

Native title is just one part of this story. As Gunditjmara Elder Don Smith reflects, 'We're talking about land, we're talking about culture, we're talking about people and we're talking about suffering, hurts and pain.'

This research monograph is the culmination of a research collaboration between the AIATSIS Native Title Research Unit (NTRU) and Gunditjmara native title holders which began in 2005. Frustrated by the lack of progress towards a native title determination, Gunditjmara native title claimant Damein Bell asked the NTRU to research the implications for their claim of their earlier High Court challenge under heritage laws, which resulted in the decision in *Onus v Alcoa* in 1981.

Lodged in 1996, the Gunditjmara's native title claim was determined by consent on 30 March 2007. The determination recognised non-exclusive rights and interests over 1,400 square kilometres in south-western Victoria. Mr Smith describes the determination as 'the start of the healing process'.

*The Gunditjmara Land Justice Story* incorporates the voices of Gunditjmara native title holders who speak of discrimination, setbacks and frustration as well as pride, hope and reconciliation. An accompanying DVD-ROM, produced by the NTRU's Communication Officer, Amy Williams, includes scenes of the celebrations following the determination, as well as interviews with Gunditjmara native title holders.

## Social and emotional wellbeing

**Dr Graham Henderson** and research partners completed their report 'The Muuji Regional Centre for Social and Emotional Wellbeing: Ways forward', published by Muuji in December 2008. The report found that mainstream organisations are not serving the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population well in terms of the social determinants affecting their social and emotional wellbeing, and that mainstream organisations must build their capacity to serve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people better.

Ms Arabena and Dr Henderson completed a submission, including a suicide prevention framework, to the Social and Emotional Wellbeing Framework for Queensland Project funded by Queensland Health and managed by the Centre for Rural and Remote Mental Health Queensland. This project is developing a framework that treats emotional, cultural and spiritual wellbeing in a unified way that may be applied to the design of future research and practice.

## Prison Health Project

The Prisoner Health Research Framework, developed following the round table on Indigenous prison health, was launched at AIATSIS in August 2008. AIATSIS, the University of Canberra and Winnunga Nimmityjah Aboriginal Medical Service submitted a paper on the findings of the Prison Health Project to the journal *Social Science & Medicine*.

## Adolescent fathers in the ACT

This project is about health and wellbeing interventions for adolescent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander fathers in an urban setting. Research partners are Gugan Gulwan Aboriginal Youth Corporation and Winnunga Nimmityjah Aboriginal Health Service. The aim of this research is to identify gaps in organisational support for young fathers, their partners and families. The Department of Health and Ageing contributed \$16,000 in funding for this project.

## Spirituality Project

This project reviewed the literature and local understanding of spirituality, and the relationship between spirituality and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's social and emotional wellbeing. It was conducted by Winnunga Nimmityjah Aboriginal Health Service, for the Muuji Regional Centre for Social and Emotional Wellbeing, in conjunction with AIATSIS and the CRCAH, and was completed in November 2008. As a follow-on to this project, the Australian Human Rights Commission has contracted AIATSIS to produce a supplementary paper, 'Freedom of Religion, Belief and Indigenous Spirituality, Practice and Cultural Rights', in 2009–10.

## Other activities

*Beyond Sandy Blight*, a book about the 1970s National Trachoma Eye Health Program, was launched in November 2008. Many of the original participants in the program attended the launch. It was later reprinted and distributed to around 300 organisations and policy makers.

Ms Arabena was one of the facilitation team for the national representative body workshop held in March 2009 in Adelaide. She also facilitated the 2009 Healthy for Life orientation workshop in April 2009.

AIATSIS supported a successful application for funding to extend the Cooperative Research Centre on Aboriginal Health, which was submitted by the CRCAH in March.

## Education, history and cultural transmission

### *Zenadth Kes* TSI journal

Kerry Arabena is a member of the Torres Strait Free Thinking Symposium coordinating committee and completed the inaugural journal, launched as *Zenadth Kes*. It is the first Torres Strait Islander journal and all contributors are Torres Strait Islanders.





Grace Koch, AIATSIS, and Antje Noll, QSNTS, with some of the boxes at QSNTS

## Preserving connections: saving records vital to native title claims

Every native title claim is unique. Each claimant group has singular connections to country through their own sets of rights, interests, laws and customs, such as rights to hunt or fish, access to land and water, and scores of similar considerations.

Much of the native title process requires research resulting in 'connection material'—anthropologists' reports, historical documents, legal opinions, audiovisual materials and sometimes handwritten records and roughly drawn maps. It can be voluminous and it is always precious, because it establishes a people's links to their country.

Managing these records is a challenge for native title representative bodies and service providers. So when Queensland South Native Title Services (QSNTS) was expanded in July 2008 and became responsible for the records of two additional land councils, some 250 boxes of vital records needed to be sorted urgently, to allow the organisation to report to the Federal Court on the progress of claims, and to ensure efficient collection management.

AIATSIS had the expertise and advice needed. The Native Title Research Unit's Research and Access Officer, Grace Koch, advises native title representative bodies and service providers on ways to manage their collections. She travelled to Brisbane at the request of QSNTS to report on the state of its collections and give recommendations about their management.

'Many of these documents provide unique insights into Indigenous groups and their connections with the land', Grace says. 'Field material can be irreplaceable because key elders might have passed away.'

Following Grace's report, FaHCSIA provided additional resources to QSNTS to employ collections management staff, and for staff members to visit Canberra to receive expert advice from AIATSIS and the National Archives of Australia.

## National Family Relations Competencies and Indigenous Workers Research project

In June 2008 the Attorney-General's Department commissioned a review of training competency standards for workers dealing with Indigenous family relationships and family violence. A workshop for staff in relevant fields was held in November 2008, and the review was completed in December 2008.

### Other activities

**Dr Geoff Gray** continued his research on rations, hunger and starvation on cattle stations in northern Australia. This includes the use of food and tobacco in lieu of cash to pay workers. His other research project, which is an outgrowth of previous work, focuses on the ethnographic frontier. He completed a manuscript tentatively titled 'Abrogating Responsibility: Vestey's, anthropology and Aborigines', which is expected to be published by the end of 2010.

**Ms Jeanine Leane** completed her three-year research plan and the final draft of her PhD thesis.

**Dr Jo Taylor** completed her three-year project tracking Indigenous children in urban settings making the transition through kindergarten, pre-primary and school year one.

**Dr Cressida Fforde** was awarded a short Visiting Fellowship at the Centre for Historical Research, National Museum of Australia, to begin work with Mr Ken Colbung on a book about the search for Yagan, a prominent Noongar man in the 1830s. Dr Fforde was in Perth in May conducting research for the project.

## Language, arts and cultural expression

**Ms Sarah Cutfield** began a three-year Language and Society Research Fellowship in January 2009. Ms Jutta Besold, Ms Salome Harris and Mr Tom Honeyman were engaged on short-term contracts to assist with language technology and digitisation.

Ms Cutfield developed a ten-year vision for the language research program encompassing activity in language documentation and research, leadership and policy, community development, provision of tools and resources, and communications. She was awarded visiting fellow status in the ANU linguistics program.

The language team submitted funding applications to the Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts (DEWHA) in February 2009 to continue work on the Online Language Community Access Pilot and the AUSTLANG online database in 2009–10. Both of these applications were successful.

Development work has begun on a new Aboriginal Studies Electronic Data Archive (ASEDA) catalogue database and website, in conjunction with the ANU's Research School of Humanities. ASEDA holds digital materials about Australian Indigenous languages and is available to language community members and to researchers in the field of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander studies.

### Online Language Community Access Pilot (OLCAP)

DEWHA provided funding of \$234,300 for phase 2 of this project in 2008–09. The primary activities for the year were the creation of user-friendly interfaces; loading language material onto the OLCAP server; and adding metadata and annotations. Mr Jason Lee completed a discussion paper and draft rights management plan for OLCAP, which will be developed into a rights management policy.

Recent activities include progress with developing a simplified upload procedure; breaking digital records into smaller 'sessions', such as a single song rather than an entire performance, for easier handling; and recruiting additional community trainees to support the project.

Ms Colleen Moerkerken, a community linguist working on the project, created an educational video in the Nungali language of the Victoria River District, using an AIATSIS audio recording



Djabugay native title holders at the planning workshop. Photography by Ian Kirkby

## Back in town: Djabugay research action partnership

The Barron Gorge national park north of Cairns, with its spectacular waterfalls and rainforest scenery, is a major tourist attraction, where many visitors are drawn to historic forest trails originally developed by the Indigenous owners.

This area was the subject of a historic native title determination in 2004—the first over a national park. But the Djabugay people, who won the determination, have been disheartened by a lack of reflection of their aims and aspirations in negotiations over the draft plan of management for the park.

In September 2008, as part of a research action partnership with the Djabugay Native Title Aboriginal Corporation, AIATSIS and the Minerals Council of Australia sponsored a Djabugay planning workshop in Kuranda. The workshop was facilitated by Bushwork Consultants, and produced a wiki-based ‘roadmap’ planning document, *Building Djabugay Foundations*.

‘Some twenty-five Djabugay people attended the workshop and developed the roadmap through a participatory process’, says Toni Bauman, Native Title research Unit staff member, who co-facilitated the event. ‘The roadmap provides information on how the Djabugay are currently positioned; future possibilities; aims and aspirations; and the issues that Djabugay will need to address to achieve those aspirations. It is intended as a living document providing the basis for future discussions of particular issues by the Djabugay Governing Committee.’

As Gerald Hobbler, Chairman of the Djabugay Native Title Aboriginal Corporation commented, ‘The workshop provided the opportunity for the Djabugay to regroup and to work out strategies for getting “back in town”.’

The roadmap provides a participatory tool to guide the process of re-engagement and community development.

made in 1985. Mr Lee documented the process, from finding the short sentence-length stretches of audio to completing the final video. This documentation will be useful for future language workers using the system.

### AUSTLANG online language database

**Dr Kazuko Obata** launched the AUSTLANG online language database (see breakout box). AUSTLANG brings together available information about language names, resources, geographic locations, language programs, researchers and speakers into one easy-to-use database. This database has links to other online resources on Australian Indigenous languages, such as the OZBIB database (a linguistic bibliography of Aboriginal Australia and Torres Strait Islands) and the AIATSIS collection catalogue Mura®.

Dr Obata has been facilitating the programming work for the AUSTKIN project (with Dr Patrick McConvell, ANU). DEWHA has provided funding of \$35,000 for mapping of the Maintenance of Indigenous Languages and Records Program. Both projects use the geographic information system, or GIS, interface of AUSTLANG in order to map their data.

### INDIGENOUS VISITORS FUND

In 2007–08, AIATSIS received funding of \$900,000 from DEEWR to support a visiting Indigenous researchers program over the three years to 2010–11. Expenditure for 2008–09 was \$125,000. In addition, FaHCSIA funded two short-term visitors in 2008–09, one in the field of 'Youth Aspirations and Transitions' and one in 'Mental Health'. The program is intended to provide opportunities for new researchers to develop their skills in a formal research environment.

The first round of appointees under the program have been working on a variety of topics.

- Ms Shay Rodrigues wrote a briefing paper on transgender issues in the Tiwi Islands.
- Ms Jeanine Leane started a three-year fellowship in the area of Indigenous education and the use of images of Aboriginal people in Australian literary canons.
- Mr Joe Edgar researched issues of relevance to the Karajarri prescribed body corporate.
- Ms Samantha Faulkner wrote a briefing paper on Torres Strait research priorities.
- Ms Val Cooms conducted research on the history of Queensland–Commonwealth relations and Indigenous policy.
- Ms Lindsay Urquart is writing about the natural resources stewardship circle.

Four other appointments were made, to be undertaken during 2009–10. The second round was advertised in April 2009, and the next appointments are due early in the new year.

### GRANTS

Seventy-eight applications were received for the 2009 grant round (75 in 2008), seeking a total of \$2.23 million. The AIATSIS Council approved 28 grants totalling \$712,048 at its meeting in June.

A grant of \$15,000 was also approved to assist Mr Colbung, a former chairman of AIATSIS, to write his biography. In addition, an archivist from the AIATSIS Library visited Mr Colbung in Perth to assist with preliminary sorting of his documents.

### ADVISORY AND ETHICS COMMITTEES

The quality, independence and ethics of AIATSIS research activities and research grants are subject to oversight by the statutory Research Advisory Committee, the Native Title Research Advisory Committee and the Research Ethics Committee, which make recommendations to the AIATSIS Council.

The **Research Advisory Committee** assesses applications made to the Institute for research grants, and makes recommendations to the Council on research matters and applications for membership of the Institute. The committee comprises three members of the Council appointed by the Council and eight members of the Institute, elected by members of the Institute in accordance with the Institute's rules. The Principal is ex officio chair.



(l-r) Mr Russ Taylor, AIATSIS Principal, accepted the ICT Award on 11 May, together with Dr Kazuko Obata, AIATSIS Languages Research Project Officer, and Ms Junran Lei, Programmer at the ANU Research School of Humanities. Photography by Jon Lee

## AIATSIS online language database wins award

A groundbreaking online database of Australian Indigenous languages has won AIATSIS an industry award. The Institute has been named Government Agency of the Year in the 2009 Australian Community Technology Awards for 'using technology to connect to the community'.

The award is for the AUSTLANG database, which was released online to the public last December.

'AUSTLANG is a language identification and resource discovery tool', explains AIATSIS research project officer Dr Kazuko Obata. 'It can be searched by a language name or a place name, or by navigating the incorporated Google maps.'

It is estimated that there were 250 languages unique to Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples prior to European colonisation. However, just 18 of those are considered to be still strong, with some 110 languages now endangered and at risk of being lost to younger generations.

Australian Indigenous languages are associated with geographical areas, and have deep spiritual meaning. AIATSIS believes it is vital to keep languages alive because of their importance to Indigenous peoples' identity and spiritual grounding.

AUSTLANG has been several years in development, most recently in partnership with the Research School of Humanities at the Australian National University. The Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts will fund the next stage of development during 2009-10.

Dr Obata said AUSTLANG was available to anyone interested in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages. 'Once a user finds a language of interest, they can also find information about the language and available resources', she says.

During 2008–09, the eight elected members of the committee and their areas of expertise were:

Professor Peter Veth	Archaeology
Dr Mary Laughren	Linguistics
Dr Gaynor Macdonald	Social anthropology
Dr Bronwyn Fredericks	Health and biological sciences
Professor Bob Reece	History
Professor Lester-Irabinna Rigney	Education and cultural transmission
Mr Russell Taylor	Public policy, politics and law
Ms Christine Watson	Arts

Council representatives on the committee were Mr Bedford, Dr Ford and Mr Williams.

The committee met twice in 2008–09. At the committee's April 2009 meeting Dr Sarah Holcombe stood in for Dr Macdonald. Following his appointment as Principal, Mr Taylor resigned his position on the committee and was replaced by Professor Garth Nettheim for the April meeting.

The **Native Title Research Advisory Committee** provides advice to the Principal on the NTRU's research program. Committee members are appointed by the Council for terms of two years. The committee met twice in 2008–09.

Members of the Native Title Research Advisory committee at 30 June 2009 were:

#### Council members

Professor Michael Dodson

Mr Michael Williams

#### Experts in the field of native title

Dr Kingsley Palmer (Consultant Anthropologist)

Dr Gaye Sculthorpe (Member, National Native Title Tribunal)

Mr Robert Blowes (Barrister)

Mr Kevin Smith (CEO, Queensland South Native Title Services)

#### FaHCSIA representative

Mr Greg Roche (Indigenous Programs Branch, FaHCSIA)

#### Ex officio members

Mr Russell Taylor (Principal, AIATSIS)

Dr Luke Taylor (Deputy Principal, AIATSIS)

The **Research Ethics Committee** is concerned with the clearance of ethical aspects of community-based research proposed by the Institute's staff and by grantees, as well as external collaborative research projects to be carried out with AIATSIS staff under the auspices of the Institute. Members of the committee are appointed by the Council in line with categories established by the National Health and Medical Research Council. The committee met in October 2008 and May 2009.

In 2008–09, the following members of the committee were appointed for two-year terms, ending 31 August 2010:

Ms Christine Grant	Chair
Pastor Bunja Smith	Minister of religion, or Aboriginal Elder or equivalent
Mr Graeme Evans	Layperson
Ms Joyce Graham	Layperson
Ms Vivien Holmes	Lawyer
Mr Dave Johnston	Person with knowledge of, and current experience in, areas of research regularly considered by the committee
Mr Mark McMillan	Person with knowledge of, and current experience in, areas of research regularly considered by the committee
Dr John Thompson	Person with knowledge of, and current experience in, the care, counselling or treatment of people

Following requests by the Research Advisory Committee and the Research Ethics Committee at their most recent meetings, the AIATSIS Guidelines for Ethical Research in Indigenous Studies will be reviewed and updated during 2009–10.