

AUSTRALIAN INSTITUTE OF ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER STUDIES

Annual Report

2011–2012



AIATSIS

AUSTRALIAN INSTITUTE OF
ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT
ISLANDER STUDIES

About this report

This report continues the direction taken in the last seven 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 p. 12 and the main program areas that implement them are identified.

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 appendixes found in previous annual reports can now be accessed on the AIATSIS website, www.aiatsis.gov.au. We would welcome your feedback on this year's annual report. Please contact:

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This report is also accessible from the Institute's website at www.aiatsis.gov.au

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are advised that this report contains images of people who have passed away.

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The Institute logo is taken from a Guunaani [Kunjen] shield from the 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.



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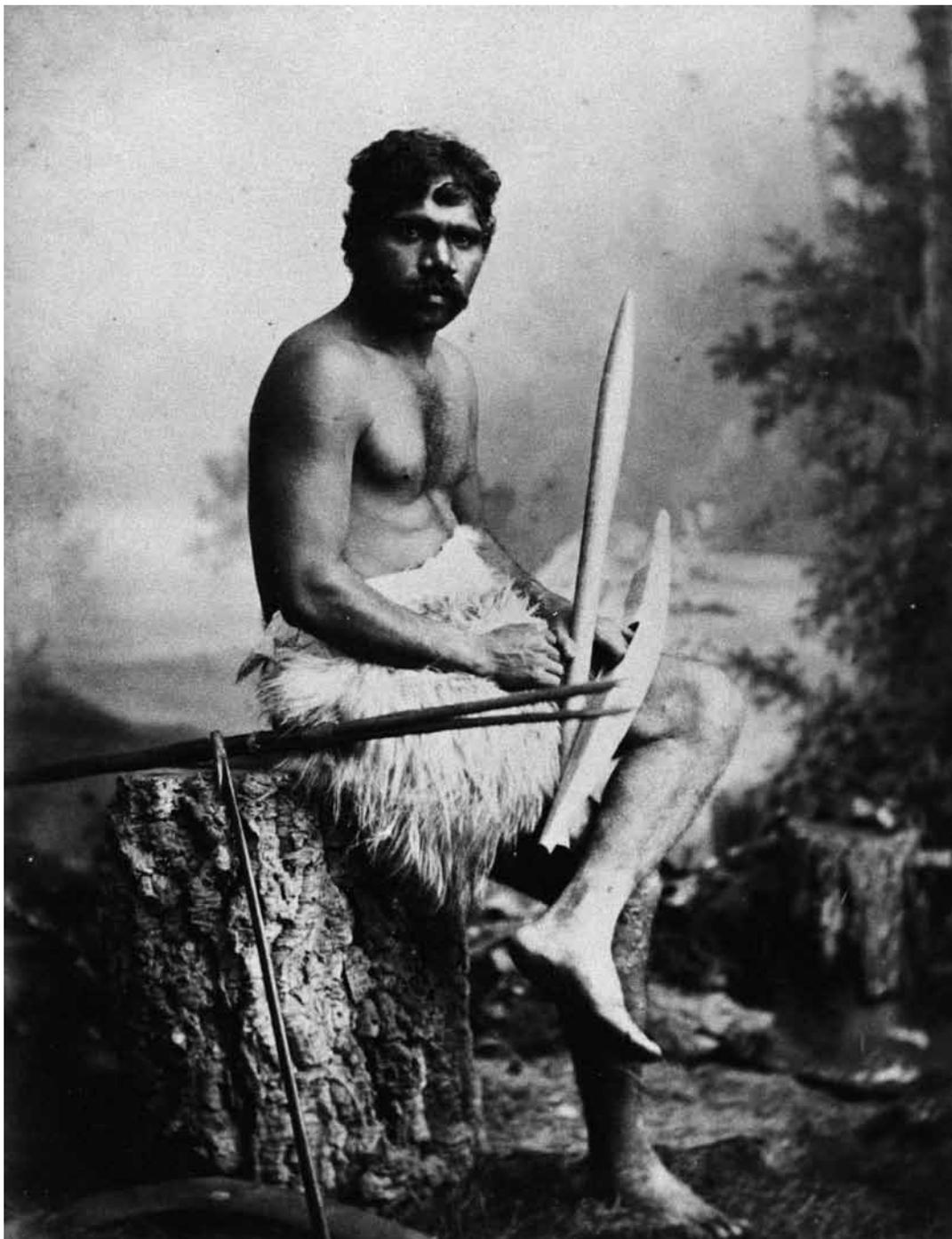
Senator the Hon Chris Evans
Minister for Tertiary Education, Skills, Science and Research
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Minister

In accordance with the *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 2011–12.

Councillors are responsible, under Section 9 of the above Act, for the preparation of an Annual Report of Operations. The report is made in accordance with a resolution of the Councillors, on the 11th day of September 2012.

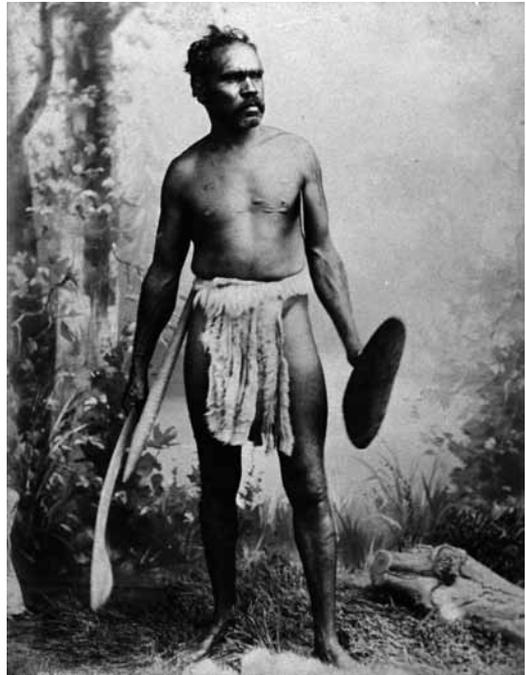
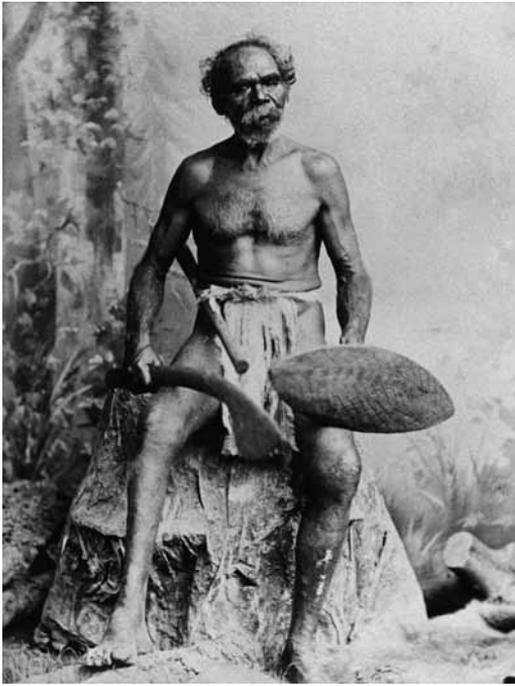
Professor Michael Dodson, AM
Chairperson
19 September 2012



Portrait by Harry King, John William Lindt and JW Beattie. [AIATSIS Ref. Mackay.L01.DF]

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INTRODUCTION



Professor Mick Dodson, AM

CHAIRPERSON'S MESSAGE

It is a great honour to once again take the opportunity to acknowledge that AIATSIS has accumulated an extensive and diverse inventory of achievements over the past 12 months. These achievements have been gained despite the uncertainty that has lingered over the future financial capacity of the Institute to effectively manage and preserve our priceless collections.

Maintaining our cultural resource — the Commonwealth's largest and most valuable public collection of Indigenous heritage materials — is one of our legislated functions. It is a responsibility that our staff have proudly and expertly met for almost 50 years.

A great challenge confronted the organisation when our Federal Government funding for our archival digitisation programme ended on 30 June 2011.

However, in order to maintain our momentum in preserving our vast collections of audio, visual and print materials for future generations, AIATSIS welcomed an agreement from the Minister for Finance and Deregulation to carry an operational loss of \$3.2 million over the reporting period.

Carrying this operational loss provided temporary respite to AIATSIS' funding crisis, however, in order to meet our on-going statutory requirements we sadly, modified, suspended and cut several of our services and programs. This has had unavoidable negative impact on the services we offered external users and clients during the year as we diverted available internal resources towards our digitisation effort.

In human terms, carrying an operational loss meant we were able to maintain employment for over 30 staff — a third of AIATSIS' workforce — predominately from the Institute's Audiovisual Archive. These staff are specialists in the area of digitisation of audio, visual and print materials and are integral to the processes involved in the sustainable access, maintenance and preservation of our collections.

Additionally, the \$6.4 million two-year investment by the Australian Government in the May 2012–2013 Budget and the exemption from the efficiency dividend (applied in the 2011–12 Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook) enables Institute staff to maintain vital momentum in our work to preserve materials at risk of irretrievable loss because of their continuing deterioration and changes in technology.

Without this funding, AIATSIS could not have maintained the staffing and technical capacity to continue digitising its materials at an appropriate rate. Without them, there are serious impacts on access to our archives by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, organisations, schools, families, researchers, mainstream publishers and broadcasters.

We warmly welcome this Australian Government investment. However, the need to address AIATSIS' long term funding crisis — including the Institute's preservation and access activities — remains our number one priority.

Looking back at the Institute's achievements of the past year, we have much to be proud of.

Our AIATSIS Centre for Australian Languages continues its vital work in language revitalisation and maintenance through taking a leadership role in curriculum development, developing digital languages portals and conducting the second National Australian Languages Survey of Australia (NILS2).

Our partnership with the Federal Government to support the native title sector continued to grow. This partnership is now entering its twentieth year and the flagship of this activity – the National Native Title Conference – is Australia's largest Indigenous policy conference and remains a 'must' for representatives including native title holders and claimants, traditional owners, native title representative bodies and service agencies. This year's conference in Townsville attracted over 700 delegates and discussed a range of native title related issues – with a particular focus on the twentieth anniversary of the Mabo decision.

Our research expertise formed the basis of AIATSIS submissions to several inquiries and reviews including the Expert Panel on Constitutional Recognition of Indigenous Australians, the Inquiry into the Native Title Amendment (Reform) Bill 2011, the Review of Indigenous Higher Education Access and Outcomes, the Productivity Commission Inquiry into Regulatory and Policy Barriers to Effective Climate Change Adaptation and the Inquiry into Australia's Biodiversity in a Changing Climate.

Again, our seminar series successfully brought together academics and practitioners from a wide range of disciplines and professions to share their expertise. They demonstrate and showcase research being undertaken by AIATSIS Research Fellows, partners and several visiting international academics.

The 2011 biennial National Indigenous Studies Conference attracted over 430 delegates from across Australia and internationally, with representation from numerous organisations, institutions and government departments. This multidisciplinary, multisector conference again provided opportunity for information sharing, networking, debate and discussion enabling the delegates to share research, knowledge and expertise.

The excellent work of our publishing arm, Aboriginal Studies Press, again highlighted our proficiency and capacity within the sector. ASP

recently developed our first mobile phone app to be launched later in 2012 to complement its updated 2010 guide book *Aboriginal Sydney*, and notably, our publication, *Indifferent Inclusion*, was shortlisted for the Prime Minister's Prize for Australian History.

Remembering Mission Days online exhibition was launched making available a large set of magazines of particular interest for family history research.

Importantly also, Council members earlier this year approved an AIATSIS Council Charter which includes a commitment to review our performance and support our interest in evaluation and continuous improvement.

On behalf of Council and our staff, I would like to acknowledge the support of Minister Evans who since heading up the portfolio has demonstrated his strong understanding of the vital work of the Institute and also the challenges we face.

In addition, I acknowledge the support and assistance afforded to us by the Department of Industry, Innovation, Science, Research and Tertiary Education. Let me also thank and acknowledge my fellow Council members for their expertise and commitment during the course of the year.

Furthermore, I acknowledge the Principal, Russell Taylor, for his constant work to improve the systems and governance of the Institute. And finally, I join the Council in thanking our staff and members for their long standing personal commitment to the Institute and for their tireless and passionate contributions.



Professor Mick Dodson, AM
Chairperson



Russell Taylor

PRINCIPAL'S REPORT

The last operational year has again been both a challenging and rewarding period for AIATSIS.

Almost five decades on from the establishment of this remarkable Institute, we proudly continue to strive for — and attain — excellence in research, publishing, collection management and in digitising and managing the world's most extensive collections of printed, audio and visual materials on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, history and societies.

Given the breadth and diversity of our functions, in my view this reputation for excellence is well deserved.

We have undoubtedly met our responsibilities — both our legislative responsibilities and those entrusted to us by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities — despite ongoing budgetary resource constraints.

While these budgetary challenges have influenced some unavoidable negative impacts on our client services, we have continued to strive to meet and go beyond our statutory requirements.

Looking back over the past year we have excelled in so many diverse areas.

Our expertise in the native title sector continues to grow from strength to strength. The Ministerial sign off on a new three-year agreement for AIATSIS' native title research and capacity building continues our partnership with the Australian Government aimed at supporting the native title sector. Since 1993, our Native Title Research Unit has provided invaluable

research, information and resources as well as coordinating activities across the sector. Our institutional value in this area is highly regarded by the Indigenous organisations and government agencies operating in this sector.

Proudly, we also continued to produce and support rigorous, high-quality research across many other sectors. As an example, within our research program, we launched the new AIATSIS Centre for Land and Water Research during the year. In addition, our researchers collaborated in drafting the Curriculum for Australian Languages and facilitated community workshops and related activities on Australian languages. Our research team provided leadership in developing a national dialogue on joint management of conservation parks and reserves as well as establishing and expanding international research relationships and linkages.

During 2011–12, we began a consultation process to develop a new Research Strategic Plan for AIATSIS. The plan will be developed to coincide with the new Corporate Plan beginning 2013–14.

Two successful seminar series were convened during 2011–12, as well as numerous workshops. The seminar series also provided an opportunity for our visiting international academics to present in their fields of expertise.

During the year, the Family History Unit within our Library, consistent with the strategic review undertaken in 2010–11, re-engineered the Unit's role and focus to solely support the National

Link-Up Network. Notably, the Unit delivered an accredited family history research course to Link-Up caseworkers in partnership with the Canberra Institute of Technology (CIT). All successful participants are now granted a formal CIT qualification. Since 1999, the Unit has trained more than 225 caseworkers, a commendable achievement.

As part of the AIATSIS Digitisation Program, our Library created a major new online collection, *Remembering Mission Days*. There are now a total of 21 online exhibitions which facilitates access to our collections through online discovery.

Our award winning publishing house, Aboriginal Studies Press (ASP), embarked on several new initiatives during 2011–12, reflecting the changing nature of publishing list development and the evolution from print to other formats. Titles published include Joan Martin (Yaarna), *Indifferent Inclusion* (shortlisted for the Prime Minister's Prize for Australian History), *Belonging Together*, *Legends*, *Kurlumarniny*, *The Lone Protestor* and the publication of the 2011 Stanner Award winner, *Our Greatest Challenge*.

Over the last 12 months, in response to strategic pressures, the Institute has been involved in comprehensive whole-of-organisation consultation processes involving all staff known as the One AIATSIS Project. The purpose of the project, initiated and sponsored by me as Principal, was to generate transformational consultative processes aimed at building shared understanding of the future of AIATSIS and the way we work together, to foster cooperation across all programs and to ultimately improve our effectiveness as an organisation.

In the context of these processes, we established a set of Guiding Principles and Shared Behaviours for all Council, senior management and staff. In addition we have commenced work on and/or completed a raft of business improvement measures and related cross program initiatives, captured and tracked through a comprehensive three-year action plan. In addition, work has commenced on the development of a Cultural Competency Framework (CCF) — an initiative derived from our Indigenous Caucus — which again will add value to and improve our operational culture and effectiveness. I thank our staff for the robust discussion and their many ideas. Through these processes, I am confident that we will continue

to improve our collective effectiveness as an organisation and as a result, AIATSIS will be positioned to better meet its current and future challenges.

Importantly, a new Enterprise Agreement came into effect 16 May 2012. The agreement delivers to staff, a three-tier classification structure, broad banding and an immediate increase in salary of 4.62 per cent — and a move towards much needed pay equity with our Australian Public Service counterparts.

The Audiovisual Archive returned over 2,700 archival records free of charge to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients. Our Audiovisual Archive and Library also developed integrated AIATSIS collection development and management policy which was formally endorsed by Council.

As part of this reporting period, AIATSIS also agreed to participate in a voluntary sustainability reporting pilot. Such future sustainability reporting will bring to the forefront ways and means by which AIATSIS can minimise operational costs whilst at the same reduce any harmful impacts on the environment.

I am proud of our considerable achievements over the reporting period. I take this opportunity to express my appreciation to our former Minister, Senator the Hon Kim Carr, for his support during his time in charge of the portfolio and also to Senator the Hon Chris Evans, Minister for Tertiary Education, Skills, Science and Research for his commitment and understanding of the vital role and value AIATSIS represents to contemporary Australia and to future generations.

I also must express my sincere appreciation and gratitude to our Chairperson, Professor Mick Dodson, and all members of the AIATSIS Council for their strategic guidance and support. My thanks is also due to my Deputy Dr Luke Taylor, our senior management team and all dedicated staff for their spirit, passion and commitment that ensures that the Institute remains a place of remarkable achievement, way beyond its size.



Mr Russell Taylor
Principal