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

EMBARGOED UNTIL 11AM ON THURSDAY, 29 JUNE 2006

Going Digital: A new era for preserving Indigenous cultural heritage

Priceless Indigenous cultural heritage materials will be saved for future generations with the launch in Canberra today (Thursday) of the \$12 million AIATSIS Digitisation Project (ADP).

The project is being undertaken by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies which holds the world's most extensive collections of audiovisual and written materials on the cultures and histories of Indigenous Australians, more than half a million items.

The ADP will be formally launched at 11am by Gary Humphries, Senator for the ACT, on behalf of the Minister for Education, Science and Training, the Hon Julie Bishop.

The Australian Government-funded project has enabled AIATSIS to employ 20 extra staff, re-fit its building, and purchase new equipment including a \$1.3 million telecine machine for transferring films to digital video tape.

Over three years to the end of 2008, the ADP will see digitisation of up to a third of the Institute's audiovisual collections and development of an online Indigenous research library.

The Chairman of AIATSIS, Professor Mick Dodson AM, said the project marks the start of a new era for preserving Indigenous cultural heritage.

"All items in the collection are important to us, because they each help us to piece together the histories of our people – where and how we lived and how we continue to relate to our communities and places to this day," Professor Dodson said. "They provide a critical link between our past, present and future."

"Examples include precious footage from an expedition to the Torres Strait in 1898, recordings of long-lost Aboriginal languages that were first made on Edison wire and wax cylinder devices, and original footage from the film *Land Bilong Islander* about the late Eddie Koiki Mabo."

"Many of these items are very old, fragile or in a poor condition when they are deposited and must be handled with extreme care if they're to have any chance of survival."

"Digitisation will dramatically increase access to the collection for Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, scholars and researchers, and we hope this will enable a better understanding of our history by all Australians."

AIATSIS holds more than 650,000 photographs; 40,000 hours of audio tape; three and a half million feet of film footage; 15,000 hours of film soundtrack; 7000 video titles; 1000 works of art and artefacts; and 80,000 written items, including 10,000 manuscripts and 2000 rare books up to 200 years old.

The ADP launch will include two new online exhibitions *To remove and protect: laws that changed Aboriginal Lives* and *Collectors of Words*; a performance by Australian 'National Living Treasure', Mr Jimmy Little AO; and tours and demonstrations of the new facilities.

Broadcast quality vision/footage of the new facilities will be available to TV outlets.

Media contact: Kirstie Parker on 02 6261 4225 or 0412 646 926.