

Senator the Hon Kim Carr  
Minister for Innovation, Industry, Science and Research  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Minister,

### **AIATSIS STATEMENT OF INTENT**

On behalf of the Australian Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS), I am pleased to respond to your Statement of Expectations.

As a Council, we will continue to **pursue excellence in the performance** of our functions as outlined in the *Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies Act 1989*. AIATSIS is 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.

AIATSIS' **strategic directions** are developed in our new three year 2010/11 -2012/13 Corporate Plan which sets out the broad objectives for AIATSIS and outlines the strategies to be pursued by the institution in achieving the identified goals. In developing the plan we address the changing use of the organisation by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, the research community and by the broader public and take in advice from our Research Advisory Committee and membership. The Council also accommodated the current policies of the Government, including the Government's National Research Priorities and National Innovation Priorities in this plan.

On an annual basis we develop the AIATSIS Business Plan which identifies specific projects against the Corporate Plan. We will provide you with reports on our performance against the Corporate Plan and Business Plans in formal documentation that includes the Annual Report.

The Council will also review its performance, composition and skill base at regular intervals to ensure it is operating efficiently, effectively and having regard to the principles of good corporate governance

In line with its tradition of **research excellence**, AIATSIS will conduct research at world class levels in fields relevant to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander studies, as measured by international performance benchmarks. Such benchmarks will include publication of research articles, books and chapters, as well as national and

international awards. The full detail of publications by research staff will be included in our Annual Report.

AIATSIS has developed a reputation for rigorous, independent research across the breadth of Indigenous studies and affairs. We will ensure that we continue to undertake research and deliver outcomes relevant to the National Research Priorities and will also undertake activities that support the Government's National Innovation Priorities as outlined in the Innovation White Paper *Powering Ideas: An Innovation Agenda for the 21st Century*.

In respect to these priorities a number of our research projects, as outlined in the AIATSIS Business Plan, address issues of environmental sustainability on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander lands including the issue of climate change. Our Native Title Research Unit, funded in large part through the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA), is a national leader in working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to identify options in relation to Indigenous lands. AIATSIS maintains multiple research partnerships with other government departments and Indigenous organisations to ensure the uptake of this research. Research of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health is another longstanding and key stream of research interest and this work includes the examination of issues of population health. Our work on digitising the collections and creating innovative research tools, such as the AUSTLANG Indigenous language database, assists Indigenous communities to source priceless cultural heritage materials. This activity also positions the organisation to be a major hub in a network of cultural agencies working to deliver cultural materials to Indigenous communities by means of broadband technology. In respect to these developments AIATSIS is a major participant in the FaHCSIA managed scoping study for the National Indigenous Knowledge Centre proposal.

We will foster **national and international collaboration** with a variety of organisations including other Publicly Funded Research Agencies and universities and encourage other bodies to undertake research in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander studies. Through this, AIATSIS will work towards improving Australia's productivity and competitiveness by working in collaboration with industry. We are members of the Cooperative Research Centre (CRC) for Aboriginal Health and collaborate with others in health research through National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) funded projects. We are also members of the new CRC for Remote Economic Participation and the new orientation of this CRC captures more of our existing research activities. Our research staff maintain a number of joint projects under a Memorandum of Understanding with the Australian National University. We are also currently developing formal agreements with the National Museum of Australia and the National Film and Sound Archive on research and collection related matters. We have developed relationships with multiple government agencies in respect to policy research. For example a number of our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language projects are supported by the Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts Maintenance of Indigenous Languages and Records program. In respect to development on Aboriginal lands we are in consultation with the CSIRO. We have links with other Australian universities through specific ARC

funded projects and through adjunct positions for our research staff. Our research grants are accessed by a broad base of university and Indigenous community partners.

AIATSIS will continue its' work and commitment to be a national centre for research on Indigenous studies, attracting national and international visitors to work at AIATSIS and utilise the collections.

We will work vigorously to promote careers in research and also provide **training and career paths for researchers**, particularly Aboriginal persons and Torres Strait Islanders in order to sustain Australia's quality system of research. We currently maintain an Indigenous Visitors Research Program that assists university-based Indigenous researchers to conduct work at AIATSIS and with Canberra-based government departments. These visitors also receive mentoring by senior researchers of the organisation. Similarly our research grants are strongly accessed by Indigenous researchers. We will also promote and support the research sector by facilitating access by university students to AIATSIS facilities. Through adjunct relationships with Australian universities, AIATSIS research staff are involved in formal supervision of twelve PhD and two Masters students.

In accordance with the *Publicly Funded Research Agencies Charter*, we will encourage public debate and the independence of the AIATSIS in order to test our research, in both a peer review setting and in the public arena. The Biennial AIATSIS Conference and annual National Native Title Conference are key events for the research community. AIATSIS is a major publisher of scholarly work in the field and, in addition, we encourage all our researchers to publish in recognised scholarly journals. Our Seminar series is now live webcast.

***In order to foster research in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander studies***, AIATSIS will take a leadership role in the ethical conduct of research with and about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and to provide support and advice on the conduct of research. We are currently updating our nationally recognised *Guidelines for Ethical Research in Indigenous Studies* in order stay at the forefront of research activity.

AIATSIS will continue to provide the Government with independent technical advice as required. We will assist the Government's policy development in how to best meet the challenges Australia faces.

We will continue to publish the work of researchers in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander studies, particularly Indigenous authors. AIATSIS maintains the Stanner Award to encourage the best Indigenous scholarly manuscripts.

AIATSIS faces significant challenges in the digital preservation of its collections since many of its collections exist on impermanent analogue magnetic media. It is internationally recognised that such media will degrade in coming decades even though the collections are currently held in ideal storage conditions. AIATSIS requires an enhanced capacity to transfer such materials into digital form before the year 2025. The organisation has developed a detailed plan on the work and resources required to meet this goal. The organisation's need for specific support for this new activity has been recognised by the Federal Government through allocations for the digitisation exercise although current funding ends in June 2011.

Within these constraints AIATSIS will continue to develop and maintain its world class Indigenous collections to support research into Indigenous studies and provide access for use by Indigenous communities and researchers.

We will collaborate to ensure that AIATSIS collections are discoverable through online catalogues and other Internet-based resources as a part of Australia's research collections infrastructure.

To **transfer benefits to industry and the community** from the work of AIATSIS, we will communicate our research and technical knowledge to the community through the publication of peer reviewed scientific and technical papers and through access to its cultural resource collection. We will actively work to raise community awareness and understanding of our activities and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander societies. Among our many publications the general publications *The Little Red Yellow Black Book: An Introduction to Indigenous Australia* and the *Aboriginal Australia* map have proved to be of major interest to teachers, schools, public servants working with Indigenous communities and the general public. In the coming year we intend to reversion some of our publications as audio books for communities and the general public.

AIATSIS will continue to **inform you and the Department** of significant issues relating to the agency in a timely manner. Through ongoing communications to the Departmental Secretary and other agency key staff we will support and advise you on matters related to AIATSIS.

We will work in collaboration with your representatives to maintain an appropriate level of awareness and understanding of each other's operations and priorities.

AIATSIS will also enhance and maintain its links with Government policies and programs through regular liaison with the Department of Innovation, Industry, Science and Research and other relevant Australian Government departments and agencies. As Chair of Council I would also expect to meet with you on a regular basis and to engage in respect to appointments to Council and of the Principal.

The Council will brief you detailing the performance of AIATSIS against the criteria set out in your Statement of Expectations. This will compliment the Annual Report required of all Publicly Funded Research Agencies under the *Commonwealth Authorities and Companies Act 1997*.

We look forward to an effective and collaborative partnership.



Professor Mick Dodson AM  
Chairperson  
April 2010