



AIATSIS

Australian Institute of Aboriginal
and Torres Strait Islander Studies

MEDIA RELEASE

Further understanding of Australian Indigenous cultures, past and present through undertaking and publishing research, and providing access to print and audiovisual collections

AIATSIS proud to play essential role in highlighting remarkable moment of 20th Century ‘first contact’

4 March 2010

In 1964, while on a mission in the Western Desert of WA to clear the impact zone for a series of rocket tests, two patrol officers came across a group of 20 Aborigines living as they had for tens of thousands of years.

That remarkable moment of 20th century ‘first contact’ between a small group of Aboriginal women and children and two white Australians was captured on film and photographs. The story of this meeting, captured in the book *Cleared Out*, is now the subject an award winning film *Contact*.

Contact will screen on ABC TV 1 tonight - Thursday 4 March, at 9.25pm.

The multi award winning film derives from *Cleared Out*, a book that started from an oral history research grant from the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) and published in 2005 by Aboriginal Studies Press - the publishing arm of AIATSIS. The book was awarded both the WA Premier's History Prize and WA Premier's Literary Award in 2006.

Cleared Out masterfully captures the story of the removal and relocation to Jigalong mission of a small group of Martu women and children from the Percival Lakes region of the Western Desert. This was done because the Martu, who had no previous contact with Europeans, were within the ‘uninhabited’ crash site for the Blue Streak rockets – test rockets launched some 1200 miles south east from Woomera in SA under a joint British and Australian government programme.

Two native patrol officers were dispatched to make sure no Aboriginal people were located in the crash area.

Cleared Out is the recollection about white Australia’s first contact with this group of Martu women and children, in particular Yuwali – who as a 17-year-old girl met Europeans for the first time.

Material and research included in *Cleared Out* was sourced from the substantial audio-visual archives collection deposited in AIATSIS.

And according to AIATSIS’ Chairperson, Professor Mick Dodson, both *Cleared Out* and *Contact* highlight the significant and proud role AIATSIS plays in the on going maintenance and promotion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultures.

“Telling the world the story of this remarkable moment of first contact was only possible due to the strong relationships between AIATSIS and the authors of the book,” he said.

“That relationship also helped in the successful creation of the film.”

“The project, which started from a AIATSIS research grant in 2004, has continued since the publication of *Cleared Out* with the Martu Community working with us to deposit thousands of their historical objects and materials.

“In December last year, six members of the Martu People travelled to Canberra and deposited over 4,000 photographs to our audio visual collection.”

“AIATSIS’ connection with the Martu community extends back nearly 50 years, with current AIATSIC Council member Emer. Professor Robert Tonkinson having worked with the Martu in recording and preserving their culture since the 60s.”

“It is a wonderful and very significant relationship for us,” Professor Dodson concluded.

AIATSIS is the caretaker of the world’s greatest collection of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural materials including archival film, sound, photographs and print materials. The collection comprises 6 ½ million feet of motion picture footage; 45,000 hours of recorded sound; 620,000 photographic images; over 8,000 video titles as well as a collection in excess of 1,000 artefacts and works of art.

In total, the Audiovisual Archive holds almost one million items.

To celebrate the public release of *Contact*, Aboriginal Studies Press has packaged a exclusive longer version of the film (78 mins) with a copy of the book *Cleared Out* for \$59.95

Further Contact: John Paul Janke, Director, AIATSIS Executive and Communications - 02 6261 1123 or 0408 600 867.