

MEDIA RELEASE

Arabena becomes first Meriam woman to deliver prestigious Mabo Lecture

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Nineteen years on from the landmark determination, Mabo Day was commemorated at the 2011 National Native Title Conference through its annual Mabo Lecture- which for the first time was delivered by a Meriam woman, Dr Kerry Arabena.

“It’s an incredible honour. I get to celebrate the life of an outstanding Australian, one who gave the great gift of sight to Australians through his vision.”

“The Mabo determination meant that Australians will forevermore have to recognise that Australia is a nation cared for by over 200 nations of people” she said.

Dr Arabena - CEO of the Lowitja Institute - said that her lecture was a deeply personal offering – sharing her life’s instructions and deep respect for those she has learnt from, her Meriam peoples and other warriors with whom she’s spent her life.

“We need to create visions; do global and local, both; stay within our philosophic traditions and acknowledge the principle of equality in diversity.”

Having regard to these instructions for life, Dr Arabena urged the need to consider what native title might become in the next years.

“We need to consider not only the role of native title, but the whole of Australia and what role traditional owners have in positioning land, seas and cultures of our people as rarefied into the future.”

Dr Arabena spoke passionately about the future of native title and Indigenous peoples skills in living on country in relation to our changing environment.

“Indigenous peoples have maintained eco-systems in the country for over 50 years. Where will these skills be placed to guide us through the next 50 years considering issues like climate change and the loss of biodiversity?”

“All Australians must comprehend and embrace the principle of equality in diversity and recognise the equal value of Indigenous knowledge in helping to determine a vision and strategy for the management of country.”

Dr Arabena describes “it’s all human knowledge” with the only difference between Indigenous and non Indigenous knowledge being our energy context – both offer very different outcomes for our eco-system.

“For Indigenous peoples the sun was our source of energy – static and constant – it has allowed generations of our people to live on country. Non-Indigenous society relies on fossil fuels – highly volatile, non-constant and, through their extraction, cause great damage to our country,” she said.

The 2011 National Native Title Conference - co-convened this year by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) and Queensland South Native Title Services (QSNTS) –concludes in Brisbane this evening.

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