



**AIATSIS**

# **Thaalijarmatha Nijinda Durlga Mougibi**

(Returning back home to my Country Mougibi)

**Return of Cultural Heritage Project: Repatriation  
of Gangalidda and Garawa cultural heritage  
material from the Manchester Museum**

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AIATSIS acknowledges and thanks the Gangalidda and Garawa Nations and the Manchester Museum.

Cover image: Gangalidda feather body ornament returned from Manchester Museum, October 2019.  
Image credit: Andrew Turner, AIATSIS.

**Warning: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander readers should be aware this document may contain sensitive information, images or names of people who have since passed away.**

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# Executive Summary

Between 2018 and 2020 the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) partnered with the Gangalidda and Garawa Nations to repatriate a significant collection of cultural heritage material from the Manchester Museum, The University of Manchester. This partnership was part of the Return of Cultural Heritage (RoCH) project, where AIATSIS facilitated and secured the return of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural heritage material to Country in order to support those Custodians to maintain their cultural practices. This report describes the partnership, collaborative research and ultimately the success of AIATSIS and the Gangalidda and Garawa's efforts to repatriate their material. It also demonstrates how the repatriation of cultural heritage material strengthens communities and culture, and promotes reconciliation and healing.

## Acronyms

ABC	Australian Broadcasting Corporation
AIATSIS	Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
CLCAC	Carpentaria Land Council Aboriginal Corporation
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease of 2019
FPIC	Free, Prior and Informed Consent
GERAIS	AIATSIS Guidelines for Ethical Research in Australian Indigenous Studies
GGNTAC	Gangalidda Garawa Native Title Aboriginal Corporation
ISM	Illinois State Museum
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
MM	Manchester Museum, The University of Manchester
NITV	National Indigenous Television
QLD	Queensland
RoCH project	Return of Cultural Heritage project
UK	United Kingdom
UM	The University of Manchester
UNDRIP	United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
USA	United States of America

# Key Terms and Definitions

Collecting institution	Museums, universities, libraries, galleries and archives – organisations or institutions which hold and care for all forms of cultural heritage material.
Country	For the purpose of this document, the term 'Country' means an area of land or body of water to which a community, organisation or individual has a cultural and/or spiritual connection, and in which they have rights or interests.
Cultural heritage material (material)	Things, or their remnants, that have been created or modified by the efforts of humans. In the case of the RoCH project, all forms of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural heritage material, including but not limited to objects, audio visual, artwork and documentary cultural heritage material.
Custodian	An individual with cultural authority or knowledge which is recognised by the relevant Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander community.
Elders	Knowledge holders within a community, some of whom are Loremen / Lorewomen.
Loreman / Lorewoman	A male / female knowledge holder within an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander community, who has responsibilities for culture, ceremonies and to make important decisions on behalf of the community.
Native Title Bodies, Aboriginal Corporations, Native Title Representative Bodies	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander owned corporations, peak bodies and organisations that represent or work with or for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Please note that these terms have specific meanings but are used generally within this document.
Senior Loreman / Lorewoman	The most senior among Loremen / Lorewomen and the most significant knowledge holders within a community. Senior generally implies a person is an Elder but not necessarily.
Traditional Owners	Members of an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander community. Within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, some cultural heritage material is owned by individuals, while other material is the responsibility of the community, who are stewards of that material to ensure it is looked after for future generations.

# Acknowledgements

This report would not have been possible without the generous support and contributions of Senior Gangalidda man Murrandoo Yanner and Senior Garawa man Donald Bob, as well as Mangubadijarri Yanner. Special mention should be made of the contributions of Rachel Amini-Yanner and Emily Chalmers of the Carpentaria Land Council Aboriginal Corporation (CLCAC) who went above and beyond to support this project. We'd like to acknowledge the contribution of the Gangalidda Garawa Native Title Aboriginal Corporation, and the support of Clare Keenan and the Burke Shire Council. The work of Ingrid Button of IAS Logistics was invaluable. The work and support of staff from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, particularly staff at Australia House London and especially Alessandra Pretto and Prue Loney, was greatly appreciated. Finally, we'd like to acknowledge the time, support and hard work of Esme Ward, Stephen Welsh, Gillian Smithson, Mark Furness and Alia Ullah of Manchester Museum and AIATSIS staff members, especially Andrew Turner and Daniel Walding.

All mistakes and errors are our own.

The AIATSIS-led RoCH project was funded by the Australian Government as part of the measures to mark the 250th anniversary of James Cook's first voyage to Australia.

## Partners

To repatriate cultural heritage material internationally is a large undertaking and AIATSIS could not have achieved this without the generous support and partnerships of:



# 1 The Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies

The Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) is Australia's only national institution focused exclusively on the diverse history, cultures and heritage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australia. We conduct research to the highest ethical standards, directly benefiting the communities we work with. Our partnerships span the globe, including government, academic, corporate, cultural and community sectors. Our unique and dynamic convergence of knowledge, resources and expertise enables us to tell the nation's story and enhance the lives of all Australians. The functions of AIATSIS were established under the *Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies Act 1989 (Cth)* (AIATSIS Act). They are:

- to develop, preserve and provide access to a national collection of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and heritage;
- to use that national collection to strengthen and promote knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and heritage;
- to provide leadership in the fields of:
  - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research; and
  - ethics and protocols for research, and other activities relating to collections, related to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples; and
  - use (including use for research) of that national collection and other collections containing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and heritage;
- to lead and promote collaborations and partnerships among the academic, research, non-government, business and government sectors and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in support of the other functions of the Institute; and,
- to provide advice to the Commonwealth on the situation and status of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and heritage.

AIATSIS has a growing collection of over 1 million items encompassing archives, films, photographs, audio recordings, art and artefacts, published and other resource materials. The Institute publishes award winning books, journals, CDs, DVDs and apps that engage people with the stories of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australia.

***The vision of AIATSIS is a world in which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge and cultures are recognised, respected, celebrated and valued.***

## 2 Introduction

The Return of Cultural Heritage (RoCH) project was part of a suite of initiatives funded by the Australian Government to mark the 250th anniversary of James Cook's voyage to the east coast of Australia, henceforth Cook 2020. The legacy of Cook's voyage continues to impact Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and is generally regarded as being the catalyst for the widespread removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural heritage material. These items were stolen, collected or purchased and then transported to overseas collecting institutions, thereby removing the material from the culture and lives of the present day Custodians. Thus, Cook 2020 was a poignant time to intensify the effort to return cultural heritage material to its Custodians and Owners for the purpose of cultural maintenance and revitalisation.

In 2019 and 2020, AIATSIS scoped, facilitated and secured the return of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural heritage material to Country in order to support those Custodians to maintain their cultural practices. In doing so, AIATSIS contributed to a global discussion about the repatriation of cultural heritage material, a discussion that many nations around the world have been involved in for decades. It is hoped AIATSIS' efforts will inform and intensify this discourse in the future.

### Overview of the Return of Cultural Heritage Project

The RoCH project supports the Australian Government's commitment to Articles 11 and 12 of the United Nations *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (UNDRIP) and the aspiration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to have their cultural heritage material held in overseas institutions returned.

The RoCH project formed part of a larger *View from the Shore* narrative which AIATSIS fostered during the Cook 2020 anniversary to support the cultural resurgence of Australia's First Nations peoples and signal to the nation and globally that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture is respected, celebrated and valued.

The RoCH project goals were to:

- Facilitate and secure the return of cultural heritage material from overseas collecting institutions to Country or a nominated keeping place.
- Build relationships between overseas collecting institutions and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.
- Develop an appropriately accessible database of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural heritage material held in overseas collecting institutions.
- Prepare a business case for a future work program.

The RoCH project ran for 2 years (July 2018 to June 2020). The team comprised Lyndall Ley (Executive Director), Christopher Simpson (Director), Tamarind Meara (Research Manager), Jason Lyons (Research Manager), Alana Harris (Community Liaison Manager), Dr Iain G Johnston (Senior Researcher), Rose Rutherford (Research Officer) and Diana Quadri (Research Officer). Jasmine Tearle (Research Officer) and Jeffrey Paul (Research Officer) were also contracted for a short period to undertake research on collections and data entry.



The RoCH project team drew upon AIATSIS' unique and irreplaceable role within Australia's research framework and its reputation for rigorous and independent research across the breadth of Indigenous studies and affairs. Key to AIATSIS' work is cultural competency. For the RoCH project team this involved acting in ways which supported the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and acknowledging that colonisation still affects Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The RoCH project aimed for the community partnerships to help all Australians to feel proud of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and promote each community's sovereignty.

*The real powerful part of self-determination, indeed sovereignty, is the freedom to define ourselves and our context and our situation. So projects like this that build and rebuild and support our culture and give us, in a sense, access to our values, and give us the ability to exercise self-determination, the power to define and articulate our own identity are really, really important. I think that's an aspect of self-determination that we haven't really come to grips with as a country. And in many ways even as Indigenous Australians we're still fronting up to that and that's why institutions like AIATSIS are so important, because we help that with support and facilitate that process.*

Craig Ritchie, AIATSIS CEO

## Ethical Review of the Return of Cultural Heritage Project

AIATSIS recognises Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have the right to be fully engaged in any processes, projects and activities that may impact them. Indigenous repatriation programs, whether involving cultural heritage material or data and knowledge, must proceed on this basis. The AIATSIS *Guidelines for Ethical Research in Australian Indigenous Studies* (GERAIS) establishes a frame work for designing and carrying out ethical research, including research involving collections. GERAIS is informed by the rights of Indigenous peoples as articulated in UNDRIP.

In the implementation of the RoCH project, AIATSIS employed a staged engagement approach based on the principles of GERAIS and Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC). The five Aboriginal communities involved in the project (Aranda, Bardi Jawi, Gangalidda and Garawa, Nyamal and Yawuru) were engaged at the earliest possible stage process and at the centre of the all decision making processes.

The RoCH project's research methodology underwent review by the AIATSIS Research Ethics Committee to ensure it conformed to appropriate ethical standards for research involving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The project was approved by the AIATSIS Research Ethics Committee on the 13<sup>th</sup> of March 2019.

### 3 Success of the Return of Cultural Heritage Project

Returning cultural heritage material to Country for purposes of cultural maintenance and revitalisation is a key aspiration of First Nation communities across the world and the RoCH project demonstrated how this aspiration can be achieved for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Fundamentally, the project demonstrated how to successfully partner with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to return their cultural heritage material.

In the course of the RoCH project, AIATSIS identified 199 overseas collecting institutions with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural heritage collections (see also Cooper 1989; Kaepler & Stillman 1985). In the course of the RoCH project:

- Over 100,000 Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander objects have been identified in overseas collecting institutions (this excludes private collections);
- 124 institutions expressed a willingness to share information regarding their collections (at the time of preparing this report we have received information from 108 institutions);
- 73 expressed an eagerness to establish a relationship with AIATSIS and/or First Nation communities in Australia; and
- 45 expressed a willingness to consider a repatriation request.

AIATSIS is continuing to work with 124 institutions to establish the preliminary geographical provenance and cultural origin of collections / objects. Information gathered will be documented in an appropriately accessible database of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural heritage material held overseas (currently under construction).

Based upon this research, six case studies (returns) from two collecting institutions, Illinois State Museum (ISM) and the Manchester Museum, The University of Manchester (MM), were selected for further investigation. The case studies included cultural heritage material from five Nations. These comprised:

- Aranda<sup>3</sup> (ISM and MM),
- Bardi Jawi (ISM),
- Gangalidda and Garawa (MM),
- Nyamal (MM), and,
- Yawuru (MM).

AIATSIS engaged with representatives of these First Nations to confirm custodianship of the material and to explore partnerships.

In collaboration with, and on the authority of Aranda, Bardi Jawi, Gangalidda and Garawa, Nyamal and Yawuru Nations, AIATSIS prepared formal requests for the unconditional repatriation of 85 culturally significant objects. Requested items were secret sacred, ceremonial and secular objects (including but not limited to: boomerangs, shields, spears, clap sticks, body ornaments and necklaces). The requests were assessed and approved by the ISM and MM on the 9<sup>th</sup> of September 2019 and 2<sup>nd</sup> of October 2019, respectively.

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<sup>3</sup> Aranda / Arrernte, the Senior Aranda Elders and men requested we use the former spelling throughout the RoCH project.

Infographics displaying some of the results of the RoCH project.



In October 2019, AIATSIS staff members, Christopher Simpson (Wakka Wakka Nation) and Jason Lyons (Wiradjuri Nation), along with representatives from the Aranda and Bardi Jawi Nations travelled to Springfield, Illinois in the United States of America (USA) to collect 42 objects. An official handover of the material was held at the ISM on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of October 2019.

*I am extremely honoured and fortunate to have supported the Aranda and Bardi Jawi peoples to return their cultural heritage material to Country. The repatriation from Illinois State Museum was the first under the RoCH project and the official handover was one of the proudest moments of my career. As a Wiradjuri man, I think the repatriation of material is significant. It is essential to Indigenous peoples' wellbeing and cultural strength – it promotes truth telling, healing, reconciliation and the preservation of our enduring cultures.*

Jason Lyons, RoCH project Research Manager

Following the return of the material to Australia, AIATSIS facilitated its return to Country. These events were marked with small on Country celebrations with Aranda at Mparntwe (Alice Springs) and with Bardi Jawi at Ardyaloon (One Arm Point, Cape Leveque).

In November 2019, AIATSIS along with representatives from the Gangalidda and Garawa Nations travelled to Manchester, United Kingdom (UK) to collect 18 objects. Nyamal representatives nominated AIATSIS to act on their behalf. An official handover of the material was held at Australia House, London. AIATSIS facilitated the direct return of materials to Country, and celebrations occurred with Nyamal at Marapikurrinya (Port Hedland) and with Gangalidda and Garawa at Mougibi (Burketown).

In March 2020, the third and final delegation with representatives from Aranda and Yawuru Nations was scheduled to collect the remaining 25 objects negotiated for unconditional return. However, owing to the Coronavirus Disease of 2019 (COVID-19) global pandemic and following consultations with Aranda, Yawuru and MM, AIATSIS decided to cancel the delegation to Manchester. Because of the extenuating circumstances the material was collected by an IAS Logistics partner and returned to Australia without a delegation travelling to Manchester. This was a difficult decision for the Senior Aranda and Yawuru men but their trust in AIATSIS and partnership with the RoCH project team helped them to make the safest choice for their communities. Shortly after, the Yawuru material was returned to Country at a private ceremony near Rubibi (Broome). In contrast owing to border restrictions, the Aranda material, under the direction of the Senior Aranda Loremien, was placed in temporary storage at IAS' climate controlled secure facility in Mascot, New South Wales. The material will be collected by the Aranda men and returned to Mparntwe (Alice Springs) in late 2020.

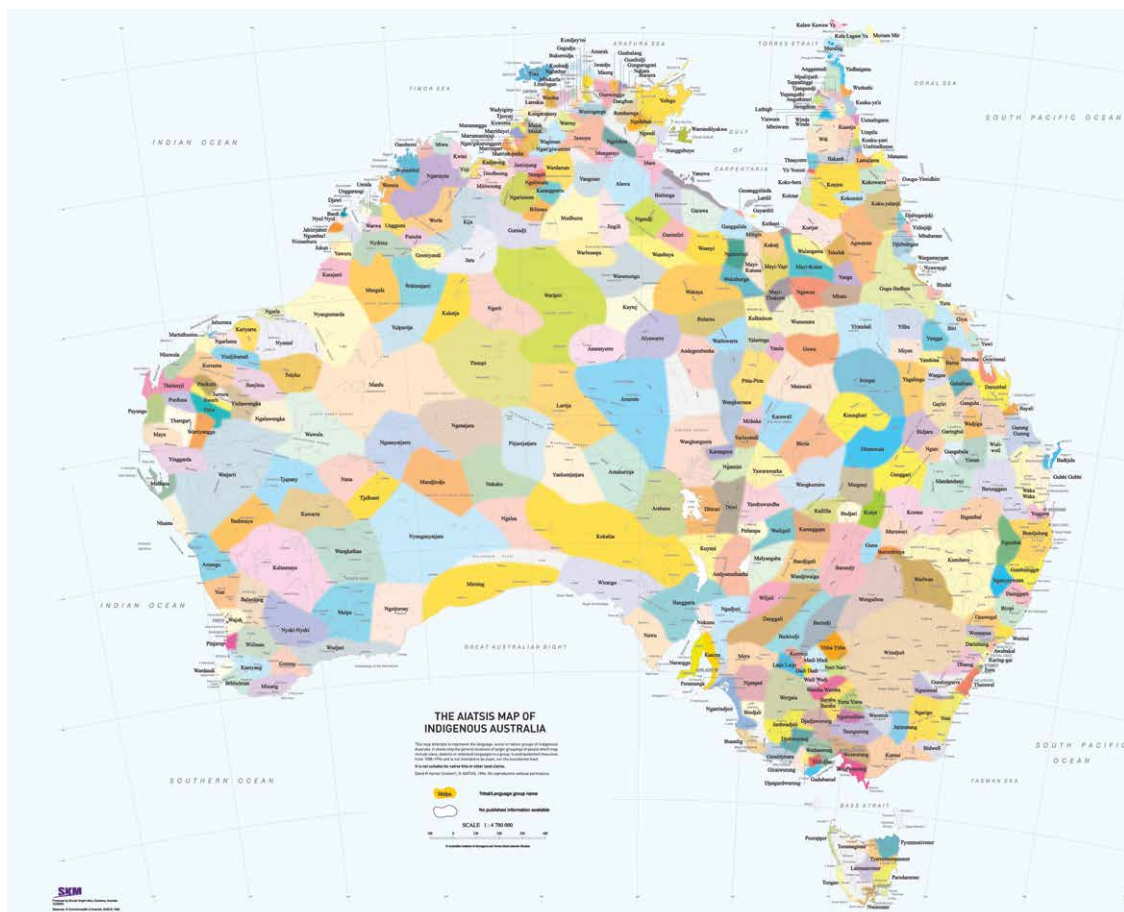
The successful returns by the RoCH project are evidence that overseas collecting institutions, irrespective of the complexity and difficulties associated with repatriation, are willing and able to unconditionally repatriate cultural heritage material (including secular material). The returns are a major step forward for overseas collecting institutions in at least two respects: because they extend the process of return from ancestral remains to culture heritage material and because the returns were repatriations, instead of a loan, which has been the primary method for returning cultural heritage material previously.

# 4 The Gangalidda, Garawa and AIATSIS Repatriation Partnership

The Gangalidda People are recognised as the Traditional Owners of land in and around Mougibi (Burketown) and are part of Australia’s rich cultural heritage that dates back more than 70,000 years. It is one of the world’s oldest continual cultures. It has a diversity of language, art, dance, and song with a core primary cultural value of looking after country and living sustainably.

Yagurli Tours Pty Ltd<sup>4</sup>

The Gangalidda and Garawa peoples are the Traditional Owners of a large section of land and sea in the Gulf of Carpentaria, Queensland (QLD). Today, the Gangalidda and Garawa peoples are represented by the Carpentaria Land Council Aboriginal Corporation (CLCAC) and the Gangalidda Garawa Native Title Aboriginal Corporation (GGNTAC). GGNTAC hold native title rights and interests in the land and sea country in the southern Gulf of Carpentaria, stretching east from the Northern Territory border to the Leichhardt River near Mougibi.



**This map attempts to represent the language, social or nation groups of Aboriginal Australia. It shows only the general locations of larger groupings of people which may include clans, dialects or individual languages in a group. It used published resources from 1988–1994 and is not intended to be exact, nor the boundaries fixed. It is not suitable for native title or other land claims. David R Horton (creator), © AIATSIS, 1996. No reproduction without permission. To purchase a print version visit: <https://shop.aiatsis.gov.au/>**

<sup>4</sup> Yagurli Tours is an Indigenous owned business and operated by the Gangalidda and Garawa Peoples.

## Gangalidda Material Repatriated from Manchester Museum

The Gangalidda material repatriated from MM was donated to the museum in 1926 as part of the W.G. Samond Collection. The Gangalidda material was collected at Burke [Moungibi, Burketown Qld.] and formed part of a larger donation from W.G. Samond, which included a number of other objects of poor or limited documentation from Queensland, Australia (see Lewis 1977:14, 19, 22). Unfortunately, little more is known about W.G. Samond or how he/she collected the material and transferred it to the MM.

## Developing the Repatriation Request With Gangalidda and Garawa

AIATSIS first met with representatives of the Gangalidda and Garawa peoples and the CLCAC on the 29<sup>th</sup> of May 2019 at Moungibi (Burketown). Christopher Simpson and Iain Johnston, AIATSIS representatives, met with Murrandoo Yanner, Senior Loreman and leader of the Gangalidda peoples, and Rachel Amini-Yanner CEO of CLCAC to discuss the material. As much of the material consisted of ornaments worn during ceremony and restricted men's objects, Murrandoo reviewed the material first to assess what, if any, were used in public ceremonies and what were restricted men's objects. Murrandoo confirmed each of the objects were typically made by Gangalidda peoples and he believed most of the objects were used in public ceremonies.

Murrandoo suspected the material belonged together as all the items are connected to ceremonial performances, particularly dancing, and he suspected they were likely collected together. He and the other Gangalidda and Garawa dancers still make the emu feather bushels and kangaroo teeth ornaments for the ceremonies they conduct. Murrandoo explained being able to show younger people in his community the objects made by the old people would be incredibly valuable for passing on knowledge and assisting with Gangalidda and Garawa's cultural maintenance.

At the conclusion of this meeting, Murrandoo entrusted AIATSIS to submit a repatriation request to MM on behalf of the Gangalidda peoples. In the request, the Institute argued the material needed to be returned in order to support Gangalidda and Garawa's cultural resurgence and continue their ceremonial practices.

The repatriation request was assessed by The University of Manchester's Board of Governors on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of October 2019 and was unanimously accepted. The external repatriation request reviewer, a requirement of MM's repatriation policy, Dr Emma Martin, Senior Curator of Ethnology, National Museums Liverpool, wrote:

*Reviewing the repatriation claim and the research provenance documents it is clear that the claim to ownership has been proven and that there are no competing claims against the items selected for return. With this in mind, I fully endorse the request for the return of these items to the originating communities in Australia.*



Examples of the Gangalidda dancers with material culture similar to the repatriated material from Manchester Museum.



Mangubadijarri Yanner with the material repatriated from Manchester Museum.

## Preparations for Collecting the Material From the Manchester Museum

Christopher and Diana Quadri, AIATSIS representatives, met with the CLCAC for a repatriation planning meeting on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of September 2019. In this meeting, the Gangalidda and Garawa men discussed who should travel to Manchester to collect their material, where and how the material would be cared for at their Keeping Place at Mougibi and what assistance AIATSIS could provide to ensure the material can be best incorporated into Gangalidda and Garawa cultural practices.

In this meeting, Donald Bob was nominated to travel to Manchester to represent the Garawa people and Mangubadijarri Yanner was nominated to represent the Gangalidda people at the official handover ceremony.

As a Senior Garawa Loreman, tribal elder and cultural advisor, Donald Bob has full cultural authority and autonomy within Gangalidda and Garawa Lore. Whilst Mangubadijarri is a Gangalidda Loreman himself, Donald was chosen to join him on the journey to collect the cultural heritage material so he could guide and watch over him and ensure everything was done in a culturally appropriate and culturally sensitive way.

## AIATSIS' Work With the Manchester Museum

AIATSIS began working with MM in late 2018 when the Institute wrote to the Museum to inform them of the RoCH project. In February 2019, AIATSIS followed up on this correspondence to confirm if the MM would be willing to consider a request to repatriate material to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Australia. Over the first half of 2019, AIATSIS corresponded with MM to better understand the material held in their collection, its collection / acquisition history, geographical provenance and who may be the Custodians of it. At this stage, MM also confirmed they were legally able to repatriate the material in their collection, a crucial step to returning the material to the Gangalidda people.

After The University of Manchester's Board of Governors approved the request (2/10/2019), AIATSIS started working in earnest with MM to prepare the material for repatriation. As some of the Gangalidda material is secret sacred men's business MM only had male staff members create the storage boxes for the safe and secure transportation of the material.

AIATSIS took this opportunity to formalise the relationship between AIATSIS and The University of Manchester (UM) by signing a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). The formal agreement committed both institutions to promoting greater understanding between cultures and ensuring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture is respected, valued and celebrated. UM saw the MOU as a way to further its museum's goal to become a more inclusive, caring and relevant institution to the communities it serves both locally and globally. Beyond the repatriation work, AIATSIS saw future opportunities in this partnership to share knowledge on best practice for the display and treatment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander collections and facilitate exchanges on protocols and standards around the acquisition, management and access to collections, relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities. In short, the creation and opportunities from the MOU between AIATSIS and UM demonstrates the positive outcomes of the partnership approach to repatriation adopted in the RoCH Project.



The repatriation of our sacred cultural heritage items is a fundamental part of the healing and reconciliation process. Bringing these sacred cultural heritage items back to Country where they belong is important and necessary for the purpose of cultural revitalisation – because locked deep within these items is our lore, our histories, our traditions, our livelihoods and our stories.

Mangubadijarri Yanner, Representative for the Gangalidda Garawa  
Native Title Aboriginal Corporation



Left to right: Stephen Welsh, Donald Bob, Christopher Simpson, Tamarind Meara and Mangubadijarri Yanner at Manchester Museum.

## 5 Freight and Logistics

While collaborating with overseas collecting institutions and relevant Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, AIATSIS organised the required import permits in accordance with the Biosecurity Act 2015 and all relevant letters of exemption to transport the material home. This included permits and permissions issued by the:

- Department of Agriculture for the import of Australian native plant material back into Australia;
- Department of Health for the import of human material (hair) into Australia; and
- Department of Immigration and Border protection for the import of sensitive material, including weapons (spears) into Australia.

In addition to the above, while not required under the *Protection of Moveable Cultural Heritage Act 1986* (Cwth), a letter of exemption was also sought from the then Department of Communications and the Arts.

AIATSIS submitted an Import Permit Application to the Department of Agriculture in August 2019. The application was approved shortly thereafter.

To administer and manage the logistics and freight for the return of the repatriated cultural heritage material from overseas, AIATSIS engaged IAS Logistics.<sup>5</sup> IAS has extensive experience in handling sensitive and fragile freight, an understanding of the complex nature of repatriation the process and has demonstrated cultural competency through past experience. Kingsley Munday AM, an Aboriginal man and Managing Director of IAS Logistics, explained their role in the process:

*IAS Logistics is a family business but more importantly we are an Indigenous family. The work we do in our daily lives involves moving valuable, delicate and secure objects across the country and around the world but there are times when we have the privilege to do things which have a higher meaning.*

*The removal of Indigenous cultural objects from their land to be taken thousands of kilometres around the world into foreign land places them in a state of unrest. No matter whether we are black or white, the reuniting of these objects with their community and with their land, with their place of origin, is to bring them to their natural resting place and to their ultimate place of peace.*

*To return them to Country is of immense significance to the communities, but it also gives to us and our people a tremendous sense of accomplishment and satisfaction. Once each task is completed we too feel a sense of calm and peace – it was meant to be.*

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<sup>5</sup> International Art Services (IAS) Logistics is a Supply Nation certified business.

## 6 The Journey to Collect the Gangalidda Material From the Manchester Museum

Donald Bob and Mangubadijarri Yanner left the Gulf Country for Manchester, UK on the 16<sup>th</sup> of November 2019 accompanied by Christopher Simpson and Tamarind Meara of the RoCH team and Andrew Turner, Communications Manager – Media and Promotions, at AIATSIS. National Indigenous Television (NITV) also sent a team from Australia to record the journey of Gangalidda and Garawa delegates to collect their material.

On Monday the 18<sup>th</sup> of November, the delegation was welcomed to MM by Esme Ward, Director of the Museum, and met with Stephen Welsh and other MM staff. They also had private time with their material in order to make sure everything was ready for its safe transportation home.

Upon handling the items in person and after further virtual consultation with Senior Gangalidda Elders, several of the items were re-identified to be completely restricted to men's ceremony and therefore not to be publically displayed at the welcome or press events.

On seeing the objects for the first time Donald said he:

*...felt cold because it was the person of that thing, that spirit" [speaking to him]  
"crying for his home... our lore, our histories, our traditions, our livelihood and our stories"  
[are in those objects].*



**Mangubadijarri Yanner and Donald Bob in the Manchester Museum store room with the Gangalidda material.**

Once Mangubadijarri and Donald had prepared their material for its safe transportation home, the female curatorial staff of MM who had unintentionally handled the restricted items were invited to participate in an intimate and moving cleansing ceremony in the Museum's storeroom. The cleansing ceremony had a profound and lasting impact on the MM's staff and ensured the cultural safety of everyone involved in the return.



**Mangubadijarri Yanner providing a cleansing to MM staff and Tamarind Meara in the store room.**

On Wednesday the 20<sup>th</sup> of November, AIATSIS with Gangalidda and Garawa gave a public lecture at MM about the RoCH project and the importance of returning material back to First Nations communities. The lecture was live-streamed around the world and attendees at the public event filled the museum's event space. Many present on the evening commented they had travelled in from London and the greater Manchester region specifically to hear from AIATSIS, Gangalidda and Garawa in person. The event attracted a lot of positive public attention and generated intense discussions both online and on the night. On Twitter a live recording of the lecture has been viewed over 36,000 times since it was first posted.



**AIATSIS, Gangalidda, Garawa and Manchester Museum representatives presenting together at a public lecture.**

On Friday the 22<sup>nd</sup> of November, His Excellency the Hon. George Brandis QC, the Australian High Commissioner to the United Kingdom hosted an official handover ceremony at Australia House, the High Commission of Australia in London. In attendance were His Excellency the Hon. Paul de Jersey AC Governor of Queensland, and Mrs de Jersey, the Agents General of Victoria, Queensland and Western Australia, Mr Craig Ritchie CEO of AIATSIS, Professor Ian Anderson Deputy CEO of the National Indigenous Australians Agency, Professor Nalin Thakkar Vice-President for Social Responsibility at UM and Ms Esme Ward, Director of MM. The handover was live streamed on periscope by the MM and has subsequently been viewed over 2,500 times.



**Top: The Gangalidda Garawa Handover ceremony at Australia House, (left to right) Esme Ward, Donald Bob, George Brandis, Mangubadijarri Yanner and Craig Ritchie. Above left: Donald Bob and Mangubadijarri Yanner showing how the Gangalidda and Garawa material is worn to the audience at Australia House. Above right: Mangubadijarri Yanner and Esme Ward at the Gangalidda Garawa Handover ceremony at Australia House.**

His Excellency, the Hon. George Brandis QC said on the day:

*The return of cultural material to their traditional Country is a profoundly important issue for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australia, as it not only helps to promote healing and reconciliation but more importantly the revitalisation and maintenance of the world's oldest continuing culture. The repatriation of cultural heritage and ancestral remains provides the opportunity to right the wrongs of the past and build positive relationships between collecting institutions and Indigenous communities and governments. The Australian Government is proud to actively support and assist Australia's First Nations peoples to seek and secure the repatriation of cultural heritage material from overseas and I'd like to commend AIATSIS for their stewardship in this area.*

Mangubadijarri addressed the dignitaries and audience and his words had a resounding and emotional impact on all those in the room:

*We share a dark history – but it's moments like this, when we come together as one, united by our desire to do better, to be better and to right the wrongs of the past, that we start to heal spiritual wounds and the intergenerational trauma that still exists today.*

At the conclusion of the ceremony, Donald and Mangubadijarri officially took custodianship of the material on behalf of the Gangalidda peoples.

The significance of repatriating material culture from a UK museum to an Aboriginal community in Australia was palpable at the handover ceremony, especially in the lead up to Cook 2020. Media outlets across Australia and the UK ran stories, including the BBC, The Australian, The Guardian UK, ABC, NITV, Channel 9 and Channel 7, about the landmark decision for the two countries.

*The profound significance of what we have done and witnessed this morning is lost upon none of us. It has been a privilege to host this morning's event and it's been a privilege for all of us to witness history being made.*

His Excellency, the Hon. George Brandis QC the Australian High Commissioner  
to the United Kingdom

The news outlets present at the ceremony reported Mangubadijarri's thoughtful words which resonated with those in the room and the people around the world:

*It's extremely significant for us — it's not what the university is losing, it's what the world is gaining to return these items back to Country where they belong... Like us, these objects are of the land – they came from our land, our home. They give my people hope, life, meaning, sustenance and a future.*

After the ceremony, IAS' UK logistics partner Martinspeed ensured the material was handled in a culturally appropriate manner and Donald and Mangubadijarri were present at the final packing of the material before it was transported home.

Of the importance of MM participating in the repatriation with Gangalidda and Garawa, Esme said:

*By taking this action, Manchester Museum will become more inclusive, caring, and relevant to the communities it serves both locally and globally. Our work with AIATSIS to promote understanding between cultures, learn together and build new relationships for the future has never been more important or timely.*



**Mangubadijarri Yanner signing the official handover certificate at Australia House.**

## The Material Returning Home

The Gangalidda material landed safely in Sydney on the 16<sup>th</sup> of December 2019. A small event was held at IAS' office in Mascot where Michael Ramalli, the Deputy Chief Executive Officer of AIATSIS, spoke about the importance of the occasion.

The material was escorted from Sydney to Mougibi by Christopher and Tamarind and arrived on Country on Wednesday the 18<sup>th</sup> of December 2019.



**Welcome event at IAS warehouse Mascot: (Back row, left to right) Kingsley Munday, Christopher Simpson, George Boubeta, Michael Ramalli, (Front row, left to right) Sean O'Malley, Alison Guthrie, Tamarind Meara and Ingrid Button.**

## 7 Celebrating the Gangalidda and Garawa Repatriation

The celebration for the return of the Gangalidda material involved the whole community. The celebration took place on the 19<sup>th</sup> of December and the CLCAC and GGNTAC ensured Gangalidda and Garawa peoples from across the Gulf Country – Doomadgee, Gununa (Mornington Island), Borroloola, Robinson River and beyond – came to Mougibi to participate. The dignitaries at the ceremony included: Her Excellency Vicki Treadell CMG, MVO, British High Commissioner to Australia, Ernie Camp, Mayor of Burke Shire, Clare Keenan, CEO of the Burke Shire Council, Thomas Wilson, Chairman of CLCAC, Rachel Amini-Yanner, CEO for CLCAC, and Murrandoo Yanner, Chairman of GGNTAC. Esme Ward and Stephen Welsh provided a video message from MM for the event. From AIATSIS Michael Ramalli and most of the RoCH team attended including Lyndall Ley, Christopher Simpson, Tamarind Meara, Iain Johnston, Rose Rutherford and Diana Quadri as well as Daniel Walding from the AIATSIS communications and media team. NITV also sent a film crew to help record the event.

*It's not just the items, it's the spirits attached, they were taken. The people who once owned them, their spirit went with them and they returned today... It's a very, very powerful event and it helps with the cultural revival that's going on within our community.*

Murrandoo Yanner, GGNTAC



**Gangalidda and Garawa Senior Elders and men, Her Excellency Vicki Treadell CMG, MVO, British High Commissioner to Australia and the AIATSIS Return of Cultural Heritage Team.**





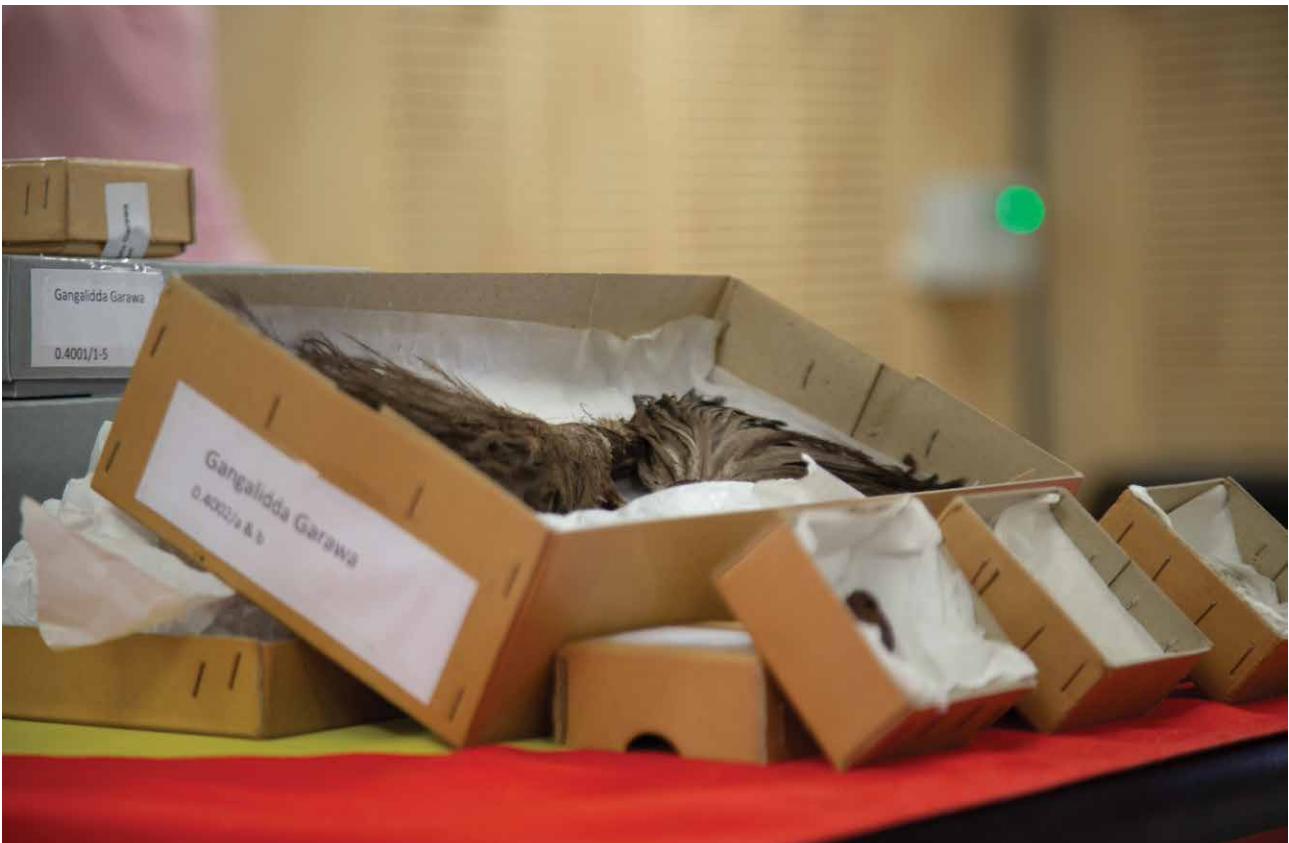
Gangalidda and Garawa community and guests at the return celebrations at Mungibi.



A highlight of the celebrations were the Gangalidda dancers.

## The Impact of COVID-19 on the RoCH Project

A ramification of the COVID-19 global pandemic on the RoCH project was the cancellation of the final 'follow up' research phase with each community partner. In this phase, AIATSIS intended to meet with key individuals involved in the repatriation, particularly Elders and other knowledge holders, to discuss the material and the impact of its return for their community. This research phase was intended to inform the next section of this report and provide an opportunity to document and record each community's perspective on the significance of repatriating cultural heritage material to First Nations people for the purposes of cultural revitalisation and maintenance.



**Gangalidda material on display at the return event.**

## 8 The Significance of the Gangalidda Material Coming Home

*This is, to me and my community, what true practical reconciliation looks like. It's not just flowery rhetoric and incremental or tokenistic change. This will have a real and profound positive impact on the practice, preservation and development of our culture, our language and our traditions for generations to come.*

Mangubadijarri Yanner, Representative for the GGNTAC

Mangubadijarri contextualised the return of the Gangalidda material within the larger discourse of reconciliation in Australia. As he said in Manchester and at the return celebrations, the involvement of the Australian Government in repatriation sends a signal to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples their government values their culture and takes some responsibility to help their objects be returned. Moreover, AIATSIS' involvement in repatriation demonstrates an acknowledgement by the Australian government that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander led organisations need to have a fundamental role in undertaking this work.

*It was an immensely proud moment for myself as a young Aboriginal person, as a young Gangalidda man, to be able to play a small part in bringing our cultural heritage materials back home to Country where they belong.*

Mangubadijarri Yanner, Representative for the GGNTAC

The Gangalidda and Garawa repatriation journey demonstrated the significance of involving a whole community in repatriation work, something to which Mangubadijarri's words succinctly drew attention to. His role as a young Gangalidda man was complimented by Donald's involvement as a senior Garawa man, and the Garawa man who had significant ceremonial responsibilities to initiate Mangubadijarri and his father, Murrandoo, into Gangalidda and Garawa culture. By forming a partnership with the community, AIATSIS supported the Gangalidda and Garawa to exercise control over who would travel to collect their material and they were able to ensure the material was collected in a manner which reflected their cultural practice. Ultimately, this ensured the material was returned to Country in a culturally appropriate manner.

In conversations at the return celebrations, many of the Gangalidda and Garawa community said the material will be most significant as a teaching tool for Elders in the community. The material provides an opportunity for Elders to teach young people, and people who visit the Gulf Country, the stories these objects hold about Gangalidda and Garawa people and Country. In this way, the material is significant and crucial to maintaining Gangalidda and Garawa culture now and in the future.

Another outcome of the Gangalidda and Garawa delegation's travel to Manchester is that neighbouring tribes within the Gulf Country region, such as the Waanyi peoples and the Lardil peoples, are inspired by the possibility of having some of their own cultural heritage materials returned from overseas. The powerful and inspiring ripple effect of the Gangalidda return will continue to reverberate throughout the Country and indeed the world for years to come.

AIATSIS' research supports and facilitates Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural resurgence in ways which shape the national narrative for all Australians for the better. While the impacts of the RoCH project were felt in Australia and beyond, for AIATSIS and those directly involved in the RoCH project it was also very significant.

*Delivering the Return of Cultural Heritage project was an extremely culturally grounding and humbling experience. Witnessing senior men sharing stories, holding these items, listening and singing to these items and seeing their spirit being revitalised by having these items home is something I will never forget. Returning items not only brings hope to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples but it also brings hope to First Nations people all over the world to have these items returned home to where they belong, to keep the stories going and to keep culture strong.*

Christopher Simpson, RoCH project Director

## The Significance of the Return for Manchester Museum

This section was contributed by Ms Esme Ward, Director of MM, and Stephen Welsh, Curator of Living Cultures and Honorary Research Fellow in Social Anthropology at the MM.

*Like many museums we have been active in returning ancestral human remains to their communities of origin since 2003, but this marked the first return of secret sacred and ceremonial material to Australia's First Nations peoples. The other distinguishing factor was the unconditional nature of the repatriation (without conditions or limitations). It did not move the objects from one institution to another, but instead fully acknowledged that Aboriginal people have the primary and sole right to the ownership and control of all forms of their heritage. I believe that repatriation shifts the processes, language and thinking of the past towards a context of possibility and action for the future.*

Esme Ward, Director of MM

*The unconditional repatriation allowed us to further challenge, disrupt and transform western colonial modes of curation, which were established to analyse, catalogue, display and preserve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural heritage in isolation and without consent from Australia's First Nations peoples. It facilitated a deeper understanding of how such practices continue to inflict loss, trauma and exclusion on those Traditional Owners and places most intimately connected with secret sacred and ceremonial objects. The trust that has been built will only encourage a deepening commitment to healing, reconciliation and inclusion.*

Stephen Welsh, Curator of Living Cultures and Honorary Research Fellow  
in Social Anthropology at the MM

## 9 Conclusion

*The return of these objects is part of unlocking the rich history of this Country stretching back beyond the 18th century and for the Country that's got to be a valuable thing. It's got to add richness to our sense of who we are as Australians. It's got to add something of just different ways of looking at things.*

Craig Ritchie, AIATSIS CEO

The vision of AIATSIS is to create a world in which all Indigenous peoples' knowledge and cultures are recognised, valued and respected. By returning the Gangalidda material to Country AIATSIS achieved this vision and also created opportunities for people around the world to encounter, engage with and be transformed by the Gangalidda and Garawa story. At the same time the return supported and facilitated Gangalidda and Garawa's cultural resurgence and maintenance.



**Gangalidda dancers and their families before their performance at the Mougibi welcome home event.**

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