

The 2025 AIATSIS Summit, held on Larrakia Country in Garramilla (Darwin), was the most successful Summit to date – bringing together more than 2,000 delegates and over 270 presenters.

Delivered in proud partnership with the Larrakia Nation Aboriginal Corporation, the Summit united Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, Elders, academics, legal and policy professionals, researchers, artists, communities and non-Indigenous allies as well as government representatives, and GLAM and public policy sector members. It was a powerful opportunity to connect, collaborate, and champion self-determined futures.

Throughout a week of robust engagement and respectful exchange, participants

discussed key issues aimed at supporting and strengthening Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander governance, cultures and knowledge.

Guided by the theme 'Voices of Empowerment: Strengthening Our Future' Summit 2025 paid tribute to a world in which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' rights, knowledge and voices are recognised, respected, and valued by all Australians – today and for generations to come.



 $Smoking\ ceremony\ preparations.\ Photo:\ Jacinta\ Keefe\ Photography.$



2025 Summit MC, Stan Grant, welcomes guests on day one. Photo: Jacinta Keefe Photography.



Larrakia dancers welcome delegates. Photo: Jacinta Keefe Photography.

Sub-themes

The program centred on key themes that reflect the strength, innovation and leadership of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples:

- Sustainability / Sustainable Futures
 (Caring for land and sea Country)

 Honouring cultural and spiritual
 connections to land and sea Country,
 and how these relationships shape
 sustainable ways of living and leading.
- Rights, Recognition and Representation

 Exploring how Traditional Owner rights
 can be activated and respected across
 local, regional, and national levels.
- Cultural Preservation, Revitalisation and Resurgence – Celebrating the beauty, strength, depth and brilliance of the oldest continuous living cultures in the world.
- Intergenerational Knowledge Recognising the knowledge, traditions, and practices passed down by Elders and ancestors, and how they continue to guide the present and future.
- Contemporary Innovations Showcasing the achievements and ingenuity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples across sectors including governance, arts, education, science and technology.

The 2025 Summit was more than a conference – it was a space for truth-telling, knowledge sharing and empowerment. Summit reinforces the critical role of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership in shaping a just, inclusive, and sustainable future for all Australians.



Leonard Hill, AIATSIS CEO, welcome delegates to the 2025 AIATSIS Summit. Photo: Jacinta Keefe Photography.

The 2025 AIATSIS Summit brought together more than 2,000 delegates and over 270 presenters for a week of truth-telling, knowledge sharing and cultural exchange on **Larrakia Country in Garramilla** (Darwin). Centred around the theme 'Voices of Empowerment: Strengthening Our Future', the Summit highlighted key areas of Indigenous advancement, including self-determination, cultural revitalisation. intergenerational knowledge and sustainability.

Powerful keynote addresses from national and international leaders such as Travis Borsi, George Nona, Patricia Anderson AO, Professor Tom Calma AO and Commissioner Katie Kiss affirmed the enduring strength and resilience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. The Larrakia Nation Aboriginal Corporation, as co-host, delivered a rich cultural program that embedded local leadership and values throughout the event.

The program foregrounded a strong commitment to structural change,

justice-based reform, and international solidarity. Speakers reflected on the unfinished business of treaty, Voice and constitutional reform, and called for full implementation of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. International keynotes from Mexico, the United States, the United Kingdom and Guatemala shared global perspectives on Indigenous governance, language protection and truth-telling processes, reinforcing the Summit's role as a platform for shared learning and collaboration. Key moments included the 2025 Mabo Lecture delivered by Kevin Smith. President of the National Native Title Tribunal, and the deeply personal reflections of Kaleb Mabo on the continuing legacy of his grandfather's fight for land rights and education.

Discussions around the future of Native Title featured prominently, with the Native Title Expert Panel outlining the system's evolution and urgent need for reform. Emphasis was placed on moving beyond recognition to compensation and nation-building, with strong calls for resourced governance, cultural continuity, and community-driven legal and economic frameworks. Speakers highlighted that meaningful empowerment requires more than symbolic recognition – it demands structural investment, sustained accountability, and the return of decision-making power to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.



Panel members of the Native Title Expert Panel. Photo: Jacinta Keefe Photography.

About AIATSIS

The Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) is the only national collecting institution solely dedicated to sharing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' cultures, histories and heritage.

The AIATSIS vision is a world in which the rights, knowledge, cultures and stories of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are recognised, respected, celebrated and valued by all.

AIATSIS preserves, protects and appropriately shares Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' knowledge through the Collection, our leadership in research and our network of collaborations and partnerships by:

- Telling the story of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australia.
- Creating opportunities for everyone to engage with, and be transformed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' knowledge, cultures, rights and stories.
- Enhancing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural vitality; and
- Shaping the national narrative.

AIATSIS' strategic focus areas include:

- 1. Steward a national collection that is regularly used and enjoyed by all Australians.
- 2. Foster quality and innovation in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research.
- 3. Promote understanding of diverse Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' rights, knowledge, culture and stories.
- 4. Deepen local connections and strengthen our global reputation.
- 5. Invest in our capability and capacity to deliver on our ambition.

Our vision, purpose and strategic focus areas reflect the functions we are legislated to deliver under the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies Act 1989.

AIATSIS embodies Yindyamarra in everything we do.

Yindyamarra is a Wiradjuri and Ngunnawal word meaning 'to show respect, kindness, empathy'.



2025 AIATSIS Summit staff, Photo: AIATSIS,

The Co-Hosts

The 2025 Summit was hosted in partnership with Larrakia Nation Aboriginal Corporation.

Larrakia Nation Aboriginal Corporation is one of Darwin's leading community service organisations. The corporation has grown strong in recent years and deliver a wide range of programs and services across the Darwin region.

Larrakia Nation Aboriginal Corporation was set up in 1997 through the Northern Land Council to provide a corporate identity for Larrakia people to uphold Native Title claims. In 20 years, they have grown to represent the Traditional Owners of the Darwin region and to speak on behalf of Larrakia people while delivering community and outreach services to the broader Darwin community.

Today, Larrakia Nation Aboriginal Corporation are one of the largest not-for-profit, non-government employers of Aboriginal people in Darwin. They operate in nine program areas with the collective vision of Living Longer, Living Stronger.

International Attendance

AIATSIS was proud to host an international delegation as part of the 2025 AIATSIS Summit, made possible with the support of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) and its Council on Australia Latin America Relations (COALAR). Their ongoing commitment to deepening connections between Australia and Latin America was instrumental in facilitating this powerful cultural exchange.

The delegation brought together influential Indigenous leaders from Guatemala, Mexico and the United States for a transformative three-week program across Australia. Through Summit presentations, keynote addresses, community visits and on-Country experiences, delegates engaged in meaningful conversation

on cultural heritage, language revitalisation, and Indigenous governance.

By listening to the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and sharing their own perspectives, the delegates forged lasting friendships and a strong sense of cultural solidarity. Together, they explored common challenges and aspirations – strengthening global Indigenous connections rooted in respect, reciprocity, and shared purpose.

AIATSIS warmly thanks DFAT and COALAR for their support and dedication to international partnership, that continues to elevate First Nations voices and build enduring bridges between Indigenous communities across the world.

Attendance and Engagement



1651 in-person delegates

460 virtual attendees

175 presentations across the five days, with **273** presenters

809 registered to attend the Gala Dinner

29 exhibitors

Summit 2025 Program

The 2025 AIATSIS Summit brought together more than 2,000 attendees, and over 270 presenters delivering nearly 200 presentations and workshops across a powerful week of knowledge sharing and truth-telling.

Themes of sustainability, rights and representation, cultural revitalisation, intergenerational knowledge, and contemporary innovation grounded the discussions. Keynote addresses were delivered by respected leaders including Travis Borsi (Chairperson, Larrakia Nation Aboriginal Corporation), George Nona (Chairperson, Torres Strait Regional Authority), Patricia Anderson AO (former Chairperson, Batchelor Institute), Professor Tom Calma AO (National Coordinator, Tackling Indigenous Smoking), and Katie Kiss (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner).

International keynotes added a global lens, with addresses from Almandina Cárdenas Demay (General Coordinator of Language Policies, National Institute of Indigenous Languages, Mexico), Esme Ward (Director, Manchester Museum, United Kingdom), Christina Snider-Ashtari (Trival Affairs Secretary, Office of Governor Gavin Newsom, United States), and Laura Jazmín Cotí Lux (Vice Minister of Cultural and National Heritage, Minstry of Culture and Sports, Guatemala), each sharing distinct experiences and strategies in Indigenous advocacy, governance and cultural resurgence.

A personal moment came from Kaleb Mabo, Eddie Koiki Mabo's grandson, who opened the 2025 Mabo Lecture by reflecting on his grandfather's tenacity and the role of education as a tool for self-determination. The lecture was then delivered by Kevin Smith, President of the National Native Title Tribunal.

A rich cultural program, curated by Larrakia Nation Aboriginal Corporation, was woven throughout the Summit, with dedicated spaces for Women's and Men's Business. Breakout rooms, yarning circles, and workshops explored topics such as Prescribed Body Corporates futures, conservation, digitisation, and more. A dedicated three-day Youth Stream uplifted the voices and visions of the next generation.



Larrakia Nation signage in the exhibition trade hall at the 2025 AIATSIS Summit. Photo: Jacinta Keefe Photography.



Saltwater blessing on day one of the 2025 AIATSIS Summit. Photo: Jacinta Keefe Photography.

Program Breakdown

Day 1 Opening remarks

Stan Grant – Master of Ceremonies

Leonard Hill, Chief Executive Officer, AIATSIS – Welcome address

Jayde Geia, Deputy Chairperson, AIATSIS – Welcome address

Travis Borsi, Chairperson, Larrakia Nation Aboriginal Corporation – Welcome address

Almandina Cárdenas Demay, General Coordinator of Language Policies, National Institute of Indigenous Languages, Mexico – Keynote address

Day 2 Keynote presentations

Doug Bond and Mer Peibre Dance Troupe – Performance

George Nona, Chairperson, Torres Strait Regional Authority – Keynote address

Kaleb Mabo – Introductory remarks

Kevin Smith, President, National Native Title Tribunal – Mabo Lecture

Day 3 Keynote presentations

Patricia Anderson, former Chairperson, Batchelor Institute

Esme Ward, Director, Manchester Museum, The University of Manchester, United Kingdom

Tom Calma, National Coordinator Tackling Indigenous Smoking,

Department of Health and Aged Care

Day 4 Keynote presentations

Katie Kiss, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner Christina Snider-Ashtari, Tribal Affairs Secretary for Governor Gavin Newsom, Governor's Office of Tribal Affairs, California, United States of America

Laura Jazmín Cotí Lux, Deputy Vice Minister of Cultural and Natural Heritage,

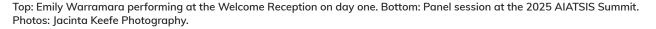
Guatemala

Day 5 Keynote presentations

Native Title Expert Panel facilitated by Rachel Perkins







Leonard Hill, CEO of AIATSIS, opened the 2025 AIATSIS Summit by acknowledging the significance of gathering on Larrakia Country in Garramilla (Darwin), just after Reconciliation Week. Welcoming the largest number of delegates to date, he introduced the Summit theme, 'Voices of Empowerment: Strengthening Our Future.' Leonard thanked the Larrakia Nation Aboriginal Corporation (LNAC), co-hosts of the Summit, and emphasised the importance of upholding Larrakia values and the AIATSIS principle of Yindyamarra. He also celebrated the historic appointment of AIATSIS' first all-Indigenous Council and encouraged delegates to engage with the diverse and dynamic program, spotlighting voices from community, leadership, youth and scholarship.



Almandina Cárdenas Demay, from Mexico's National Institute of Indigenous Languages delivering a keynote address. Photo: Jacinta Keefe Photography.

LNAC Chairperson Travis Borsi delivered a powerful welcome, highlighting Larrakia resilience and leadership amidst ongoing challenges. He outlined LNAC's 2023-2028 Strategic Plan, focused on Country, culture, community, and sustainability, including key initiatives such as land return negotiations, ranger program expansion, and a Larrakia treaty strategy. Travis strongly criticised the NT Government's withdrawal from treaty commitments and laws that disproportionately impact Aboriginal communities, calling for full implementation of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. He shared new initiatives demonstrating cultural leadership, including the establishment of a Larrakia Council of Elders and a youth leadership program grounded in cultural knowledge. He closed with a call for unity, truth-telling and respectful partnerships.

Jayde Geia, Acting Deputy Chairperson of the AIATSIS Council, officially opened the fifth annual Summit, celebrating record attendance. She thanked the Larrakia Nation and Summit sponsors, and reflected on the importance of this year's theme in recognising the strength, knowledge and diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Jayde also celebrated Summit's recognition as the 2024 Australian Event of the Year and encouraged delegates to connect and participate in the week ahead.



Acting Deputy Chairperson, Jayde Geia welcomes delegates to the 2025 AIATSIS Summit. Photo: Jacinta Keefe Photography.

International keynote speaker Almandina Cárdenas Demay, from Mexico's National Institute of Indigenous Languages, shared Mexico's experience in language revitalisation. She outlined the country's linguistic diversity - 68 national Indigenous languages and over 360 variants – and the impacts of colonisation and state-led language suppression. Almandina highlighted recent reforms and shared three pillars of Mexico's approach: intergenerational language transmission, grassroots community planning, and institutional reform. She underscored the global responsibility to protect Indigenous languages, describing them as vessels of knowledge, justice and cultural survival.

Day two opened with a performance by the Mer Peibre Dance Troupe, led by Doug Bond.

George Nona, Chairperson of the Torres Strait Regional Authority (TSRA), delivered his first national keynote in this role, sharing a deeply personal reflection on his upbringing on Badu Island and the enduring significance of culture, language and community. He honoured the late Uncle Bernard Namok, designer of the Torres Strait Islander flag, and acknowledged the resilience that defines Torres Strait Islander identity.

George outlined TSRA's role as the lead Commonwealth agency for Indigenous affairs in the region, governed by an all-Indigenous elected board. He highlighted strategic priorities across eight focus areas, including health and safety, governance, land and sea management, infrastructure, culture and heritage, fisheries, economic development and education. He also acknowledged the legacy of the Mabo decision and TSRA's continued collaboration with Traditional Owners and regional partners. In closing, George reminded delegates of the immeasurable value of identity, culture, and self-worth, urging all to recognise the strength within their communities.

Kaleb Mabo delivered a moving tribute to his grandfather, Eddie Koiki Mabo, emphasising

that his legacy extended beyond land rights to education, identity, and self-determination. Kaleb reflected on the creation of the Black Community School in the 1970s as a bold act of resistance and empowerment through culturally grounded education. He called for continued truth-telling and action, sharing his own work capturing the voices of Elders and activists through film. Kaleb introduced a preview of his forthcoming documentary, offering a personal and powerful continuation of his grandfather's legacy.

Kevin Smith, President of the National Native Title Tribunal, delivered the 2025 Mabo Lecture, marking 32 years since the High Court's landmark decision. He reflected on the belief and courage of Eddie Koiki Mabo—qualities that remain essential to the future of the native title system. Kevin called for a shift from process to purpose, urging a whole-of-system approach that recognises native title as a living framework grounded in relationships, cultural knowledge and justice.

With Native Title determinations in effect for over 40% of the Australian landmass, Kevin noted the sector is transitioning into a more complex phase, involving compensation, governance and broader legal intersections. He identified urgent pressures, including workforce capacity, cultural knowledge loss and the emotional toll on communities.

He advocated for trauma-aware, culturally safe practice and a reimagined system focused not only on recognition, but on the realisation and enjoyment of rights.

Kevin concluded by affirming that honouring Koiki Mabo's legacy requires more than remembrance – it demands sustained action grounded in the same conviction that made the Mabo decision possible.



Mer Peibre Dance Troupe, led by Doug Bond. Photo: Jacinta Keefe Photography.

Patricia Anderson AO, former Chairperson of Batchelor Institute, delivered a powerful video address from Canberra, reflecting on her life as a member of the Stolen Generations. She spoke of her mother's removal to the Kahlin Compound and her own upbringing in fringe camps, shaped by the resilience and activism of her community.

Aunty Pat called for urgent policy renewal and succession in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership. She questioned the lack of generational change in the sector and urged Elders to support emerging leaders, emphasising that succession is about renewal, not retreat. A national mechanism to elevate young voices, she argued, is critical to ensuring leadership is inclusive and accountable.

She criticised the shift in policy away from justice-based reform, such as treaty and constitutional recognition, towards narrow economic and service agendas. Aunty Pat warned against the concentration of power among a disconnected few and reiterated the importance of structural change, including a democratically elected Voice. She reaffirmed her commitment to the Uluru Statement from the Heart, asserting that its vision remains vital despite the outcome of the 2023 referendum.

Esme Ward, Director of the Manchester Museum, delivered a keynote on the transformative potential of museums in advancing justice, healing and inclusion. She outlined the museum's journey to becoming a values-led institution, grounded in empathy, accountability and community co-design.

Esme highlighted key initiatives, including inclusive spaces and programs shaped by lived experience. She acknowledged challenges in managing trauma and the importance of ethical, care-centred practice. Central to her address was the museum's partnership with

AIATSIS' Return of Cultural Heritage program, through which it became the first European museum to unconditionally repatriate secret/sacred and ceremonial materials to Australia.

She shared powerful moments from past returns, including the gifting of dilly dolls from the Anindilyakwa community taken off display allowing visitors to play with the dolls. Esme emphasised that true decolonisation is Indigenous-led, emotionally grounded and systemic. She called for museums to embrace this responsibility with humility and courage.



Esme Ward delivering a keynote address. Photo: Jacinta Keefe Photography.

Day 3 (cont.)

Professor Tom Calma AO, National Coordinator for Tackling Indigenous Smoking, focused his keynote on long-term, community-led empowerment. He urged governments to shift decision-making power to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and invest in sustainable, culturally grounded initiatives.

He profiled three successful programs:

- Stronger Communities for Children supporting ten NT communities to develop local governance and deliver strategic, intergenerational solutions.
- Tackling Indigenous Smoking reducing smoking rates from over 50% to 29%, through community control and culturally relevant messaging; now to be funded via tobacco excise from 1 July.
- Living First Language Platform a globally recognised, Indigenous-owned app preserving endangered languages through community-led recording and teaching.

Uncle Tom highlighted the potential of Australia's young Indigenous population and called for investment in leadership pipelines. He acknowledged the disappointment of the Voice referendum but encouraged continued focus on truth-telling and long-term structural reform: "The Voice may have been lost, but the work continues." He closed with a clear message: real empowerment requires trust, sustained support and the return of decision-making power to communities.



MC Stan Grant thanks Professor Tom Calma for his keynote address. Photo: Jacinta Keefe Photography.



Patricia Anderson delivering a pre-recorded keynote address. Photo: Jacinta Keefe Photography.

Commissioner Katie Kiss, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, delivered a compelling address calling for structural reform rooted in truth, justice, and cultural strength. Acknowledging the enduring resilience of Larrakia Country, she urged a renewed commitment to genuine self-determination and accountability.

Commissioner Kiss highlighted the need to move beyond symbolic gestures towards legally embedded rights, calling for full implementation of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) through a National Declaration Implementation Act. She also reflected on the limitations of the Native Title system, which remains adversarial and burdensome for communities. While recent legal victories, including Timber Creek and Commonwealth v Yunupingu, mark progress, she emphasised the need for systemic redesign that centres First Nations law, cultural authority, and consent.

She called for properly resourced Prescribed Body Corporates (PBCs), culturally grounded governance, and stronger youth leadership pipelines. In a powerful conclusion, Commissioner Kiss honoured Kumanjayi Walker, highlighting the continued injustices of deaths in custody and reaffirming the urgent need for national accountability. Empowerment, she stated, must be structural and non-negotiable.

Christina Snider-Ashtari, Tribal Affairs
Secretary to California Governor Gavin
Newsom and member of the Dry Creek
Rancheria Band of Pomo Indians, delivered an
address grounded in truth-telling and justice.
She described California's colonial legacy
and state-sanctioned violence against Native
peoples, noting that many current residents
unaware of this history.

She outlined the work of the California Truth and Healing Council (the Council), a Native-led initiative addressing historical and ongoing injustices through firsthand testimonies and policy reform. Key outcomes already underway include:

- Return of over 38,000 acres of land to tribes.
- Removal of the Klamath Dams and salmon restoration.
- Development of Indigenous-run microgrids for clean energy.
- Creation of the Chumash Marine Sanctuary.
- Legal protections for cultural burning.
- Reintroduction of native species to traditional lands.



Katie Kiss, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, delivers a keynote address. Photo: Jacinta Keefe Photography.

Day 4 (cont.)

Snider-Ashtari emphasised the Council's work is not symbolic, but structural, based on consent, consultation, and self-determination. A forthcoming documentary, We Are Still Here, will share this journey and educate the broader public – reflecting global Indigenous solidarity, including connections with Australian initiatives of the same name.

Laura Jazmín Cotí Lux, Deputy Vice Minister of Cultural and Natural Heritage of Guatemala and a Mayan K'iche' leader, addressed the Summit with a message of cultural resilience and global solidarity. Speaking in her native language, she described Guatemala's rich Indigenous diversity and efforts to preserve and protect living heritage through national policy and international partnerships.

She highlighted legislative and institutional reforms, including recognition of Mayan spiritual practices, establishment of an Indigenous Peoples Assembly, and protection of Indigenous languages and knowledge systems. Despite this progress, Cotí Lux acknowledged persistent inequalities, especially for Indigenous women, and called for continued efforts to combat discrimination and ensure meaningful political participation.

She urged the international community to recognise Indigenous peoples as custodians of profound knowledge systems that contribute

to sustainability, governance, and justice. Referencing the Uluru Statement from the Heart, she called on Australia and other nations to stand in solidarity and commit to tangible actions that honour Indigenous rights and identity.

She closed with a powerful quote from the Popol Vuh: "Let everyone rise up. Let no one be left behind."



Christina Snider-Ashtari, Tribal Affairs Secretary to California Governor Gavin Newsom and member of the Dry Creek Rancheria Band of Pomo Indians. Photo: Jacinta Keefe Photography.



Laura Jazmín Cotí Lux, Deputy Vice Minister of Cultural and Natural Heritage of Guatemala and a Mayan K'iche' leader. Photo: Jacinta Keefe Photography.

The Native Title Expert Panel explored the evolution and future direction of Native Title in Australia, structured around three phases:

- Recognition the foundation phase, now nearing completion.
- Compensation addressing historical dispossession and loss.
- Nation-building empowering selfdetermined First Nations governance and economic development.

Kevin Smith outlined the system's progress since Mabo, noting that over 600 Native Title determinations have now been made, most by agreement, covering over 40% of Australia's landmass (rising to 62% when including land rights acts). He projected another decade of recognition work, with remaining claims expected to be more complex and contested. The focus, he said, is now shifting toward compensation.

Tony McAvoy SC called for the reassessment of early determinations, particularly those predating 2014, which excluded key rights such as commercial use. He argued that many early settlements were unjust, and some claim groups were misclassified or excluded altogether. He urged reform to allow review and redress, especially for groups without Prescribed Body Corporates, supported by improved processes and resourcing.

Eddie Cubillo highlighted the legal system's failure to understand or reflect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander law. He warned that Native Title processes can divide communities and cause harm. He advocated for strategic litigation to strengthen collective rights and called for the development of young Indigenous legal leaders.



Native Title Expoert Panel facilitator, Rachel Perkins. Photo: Jacinta Keefe Photography.



Native Title Expert Panel members on day five of the 2025 AIATSIS Summit. Photo: Jacinta Keefe Photography.

Day 5 (cont.)

Jamie Lowe stressed that over 40% of PBCs operate without paid staff or core funding, despite holding significant responsibilities. Without proper support, true self-governance and land management are not achievable. He also advocated for alternative pathways for Traditional Owners who cannot secure Native Title determinations and for strong PBCs to lead future compensation claims.

Peter Yu criticised the lack of substantial policy reform in the 30 years since Mabo, warning that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples remain excluded from economic opportunity. He called for national economic partnerships, similar to Canada's model, to provide access to capital, infrastructure and financial self-determination. Recognition alone is not enough, he said, economic empowerment must follow.

Commissioner Katie Kiss reflected on the emotional toll of the current system and the need to rebuild Indigenous governance from the ground up. She acknowledged that Native Title is not the only path to rights recognition and urged investment in cultural succession, youth leadership, and healing. Post-referendum, she called for collective strength and unity toward the shared goal of empowered First Nations communities.

The panel offered a sobering yet forward-looking assessment: as the recognition phase nears completion, the Native Title system must evolve. Future progress requires legal reform, cultural healing, and structural investment in community capacity. True justice will be measured not just in rights recognised, but in communities resourced, empowered and self-determined.



2025 AIATSIS Summit delegates listening to the Native Title Expert Panel. Photo: Jacinta Keefe Photography.



Native Title Expert Panel. Photo: Jacinta Keefe Photography.

Highlight – 3 Day Native Title Component

AIATSIS convened the closed 'PBC Day', which is offered as an opportunity for PBCs and native title representative bodies/service providers to engage openly in sessions on matters of specific relevance to their daily roles and functions. The day opened with panellists from the Australian Law Reform Commission (ALRC) (Tony McAvoy SC (Commissioner), Nick Testro (Assistant Commissioner) and Jane Hall (Senior Legal Officer)) providing an overview of the ALRC Discussion Paper released in May, outlining options for reform to the future acts regime. Representatives from Canada and the USA then presented on economic reconciliation with Indigenous peoples in their respective countries, sharing insights for the Australian context. Gareth Ogilvie, Yamatji-Nanda man and Executive Officer of Bardi and Jawi Niimidiman PBC spoke of attempts to progress land returns in the Dampier Peninsula in particular, and generally of the vast areas of unallocated Crown land (UCL) in Western Australia which could be returned to native title holders. However, due to significant financial and administrative challenges PBCs are prevented from unlocking the full economic and cultural potential of their land estates. Nguraritja Traditional Owners spoke of their long journey fighting for the recognition of their rights and interests over three pastoral

leases at De Rose Hill Station, South Australia. Despite the Federal Court originally finding against the Nguraritja, their rights and interests were recognised on appeal. Members of the De Rose Hill-Ilpalka PBC Board spoke of their successes and challenges on their native title journey and spoke about a cultural camp which provided a rare opportunity for native title holders to come together and share stories and engage in a range of other cultural activities.





2025 AIATSIS Summit delegates. Photo: Jacinta Keefe Photography.



2025 AIATSIS Summit delegates. Photos: Jacinta Keefe Photography.

Highlight – 3 Day Native Title Component (cont.)

Presentations covered a wide array of native title and related topics from the National Native Title Council on its compensation strategy and on PBC funding reform. In separate presentations, the National Native Tile Tribunal presented on post-determination agreement-making; Indigenous land use agreements and on opportunities for achieving autonomy through native title. North Queensland Land Council (NQLC) lead a session looking at strengthening Indigenous economic empowerment through native title.

The Banjima Native Title Aboriginal Corporation presented insightfully on how the PBC is pursuing the modernisation of outdated mining agreements to be replaced by new fit for purpose agreements that are inclusive, equitable and reflect the contemporary needs and aspirations of Traditional Owners that incorporates principles of co-management, co-benefit and self-determination.

Members of the Huckitta PBC Board gave a fantastic presentation on its leadership and governance journey since the Amapete, Apwetyerlaneme, Atnweale and Warrtharre peoples native title determination was finalised by consent in May 2024, which included the recognition of exclusive rights and interests. The presentation talked to the cooperative governance arrangements between the Huckitta PBC and the Huckitta

Enterprises Pty Ltd. The board spoke of how it addressed governance challenges including through strong communication with Traditional Owners and getting young people involved and of its plans for the future, including establishing a youth program and a workforce development strategy.

One of the final key presentations in the Summit's Native Title program was a panel session from representatives of the First Nations Heritage Protection Alliance, Natalie Rotumah (CEO, NTSCorp) and Leon Yeatman (CEO, NQLC). The panellists spoke of the work it has been undertaking in cultural heritage reform, to strengthen the operation of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Heritage Act 1984. The panel spoke to key aspects of the much-needed reform, with the session eliciting a great deal of engagement from the audience.



2025 AIATSIS Summit delegates. Photo: Jacinta Keefe Photography.

Highlight – AIATSIS Youth Workshop

The 2025 Youth Workshop was held over two days (5 and 6 June) and brought together around 20 Indigenous youth participants to engage in teachings on governance and native title in a fun and interactive forum. The event was co-facilitated by AIATSIS, the Australian Indigenous Governance Institute (AIGI) and the National Native Title Council.

Day one began with a 'check-in' emoji activity designed to capture the participants' feelings coming into the event, sparking honest and open conversation. AIGI then presented on two-way governance, the collective process through which people organise themselves to manage their own affairs, share power and responsibilities and make decisions on their future. Emphasis was placed on governance as the collaboration and coordination of efforts within a community or organisation; as well as the important part youth play within this concept.

National Native Title Council began day two with a discussion on the younger generation and their involvement/impact on native title. Young people play a vital role in the long-term sustainability of Indigenous governance structures, including PBCs. Their involvement in succession planning is essential to support the transfer of cultural knowledge and ensure continuity in leadership and decision making. Participants shared stories of their current

experiences and future aspirations to do with native title, as well as feedback on areas where support is required for them to feel more confident when engaging across the sector.

This event allowed Indigenous youth to develop their governance skills and native title knowledge, whilst also creating meaningful connections with their First Nations peers from all around Australia.



2025 AIATSIS Youth Workshop delegates. Photos: AIATSIS.





Inaugural AIATSIS Summit Awards Program

AlATSIS established the Summit Annual Awards to recognise the ongoing contributions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Designed to prioritise self-determination and celebrate Blak excellence, the awards highlight leadership, creativity and strength across five key categories:

- Excellence in Cultural Revitalisation, Preservation, and Resurgence.
- Excellence in Sustainability and Sustainable Futures.
- Excellence in First Nations Collection Care and Management.
- Excellence in Youth and Emerging Leadership.
- Excellence in Contemporary Innovation.

The 2025 award recipients are:

- Bunji Enterprises Excellence in Sustainability and Sustainable Futures.
- Harvey Aboriginal Corporation Excellence in Cultural Revitalisation, Preservation, and Resurgence.
- Common Ground First Nations Excellence in Contemporary Innovation.
- Jamie Hampton Excellence in Youth and Emerging Leadership.

Finalists included Eastern Guruma Pty Ltd, Our Songlines, RMIT and Wungening Aboriginal Corporation.

AIATSIS congratulates all finalists and winners for their outstanding contributions to strengthening culture, leadership, and innovation within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.



AIATSIS CEO Leonard Hill and Award winner Jamie Hampton. Photo: Jacinta Keefe Photography.



Sara Stuart accepting the Award on behalf of Bunji Enterprises. Photo: Jacinta Keefe Photography.



(L) Leonard Hill, AIATSIS CEO, (M) Katena Valastro, Common Ground First Nations and Jayde Gaia, AIATSIS Council Acting Deputy Chairperson. Photo: Jacinta Keefe Photography.



(L) Leonard Hill, AIATSIS CEO, Brad Vitale and Sharon Cooke, Harvey Aboriginal Corporation and (R) Jayde Gaia, AIATSIS Council Acting Deputy Chairperson. Photo: Jacinta Keefe Photography.

Gala Dinner and Annual Awards Program

The AIATSIS Summit Gala Dinner was a vibrant celebration of excellence, culture and community.

The evening opened with a Welcome to Country from a respected Larrakia elder, followed by powerful performances from the Kenbi Dancers and yidaki music, setting a celebratory tone. A solemn minute's silence honoured Kumanjayi White, a young Warlpiri man who tragically passed during Reconciliation Week, reflecting the Summit's commitment to solidarity and justice.

Larrakia Nation Aboriginal Corporation presented message sticks to AIATSIS and 2026 Summit co-hosts, Danggan Balun Aboriginal Corporation, symbolising cultural partnership and exchange. The inaugural AIATSIS Summit Awards were presented by AIATSIS CEO Leonard Hill and Acting Deputy Chair Jayde Geia, recognising outstanding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders and innovators.

The night concluded with dynamic performances by Saltwater Band and Electric Fields, energising attendees well into the evening.

AIATSIS extends sincere thanks to all 2025 Summit sponsors, especially the Department of Industry, Science and Resources, whose support made the Gala Dinner possible.



Guests at the Gala Dinner. Photo: Jacinta Keefe Photography.



Guests at the Gala Dinner. Photo: Jacinta Keefe Photography.



Clockwise from top left: Cultural performance at the Gala Dinner. Guests enjoying the 2025 Gala Dinner. Larrakia Nation dance group at the Gala Dinner. Electric Fields performaing at the Gala Dinner. James Parfitt delivering the Welcome to Country. Summit 2026 announcement handover with Uncle Ted Williams and Candace Kruger from Danggan Balun and Victor Williams, Deputy CEO of Larrakia Nation Aboriginal Corporation. Photos: Jacinta Keefe Photography.

Cultural Activities

AIATSIS and Summit 2025 attendees extend sincere thanks to Larrakia Nation Aboriginal Corporation and the Larrakia families for their generous welcome to Larrakia Country and Waters. Their hospitality, cultural knowledge and generosity made the Summit in Garramilla (Darwin) a truly meaningful experience.

The Larrakia-led cultural program offered immersive on-Country experiences that honoured Larrakia Protocols and deepened connections to land and culture.

Highlights included:

- Gurambai Trail & Crocodylus Park:
 Guided by Larrakia Land and Sea
 Rangers, attendees explored cultural
 heritage and land stewardship, alongside
 wildlife conservation and storytelling at
 Crocodylus Park.
- Belyuen Community Visit: Crossing Darwin Harbour, participants engaged with the community through cultural performances, bush tucker, school visits, and insights into local services and resilience.
- Blak Markets: Showcasing Blak-owned businesses, the markets celebrated Indigenous creativity and entrepreneurship through jewellery, fashion, homewares, weaving, and cultural performances.

- Darwin Harbour Cruise: Aboard the vessels Flatback and Olive Ridley, attendees experienced cultural and environmental insights with Larrakia Rangers, including croc trap inspections and dolphin spotting.
- Small Bites, Big Stories: Traditional bush food tastings by Victor Williams, Deputy CEO of the Larrakia Nation Aboriginal Corporation connected participants to Larrakia culture and Country through native ingredients.

We are deeply grateful to the Larrakia people for sharing their Country, stories and traditions, exemplifying respect, reciprocity, and true partnership.

AIATSIS thanks the Larrakia Nation Aboriginal Corporation and peoples for their warm and wholehearted welcome.







Delegates enjoying the Blak Markets at the 2025 AIATSIS Summit. Photos: Jacinta Keefe Photography.

AIATSIS International Delegation to Australia 2025

The AIATSIS International Delegation to Australia 2025 was a strategic initiative designed to foster mutual learning, build both individual and institutional capacity, and strengthen international ties between AIATSIS, like-minded institutions and First Nations peoples.

In late May 2025, AIATSIS welcomed an international delegation to Australia, supported in part by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) and their Council on Australia Latin America Relations (COALAR) – a body established to enhance diplomatic, cultural and economic connections between Australia and Latin America.

The delegation brought together a distinguished group of Indigenous and non-Indigenous leaders and cultural experts from Guatemala, Mexico and the United States for a transformative three-week journey centred on learning, connection, culture and shared purpose.

The COALAR supported delegates included Laura Jazmín Cotí Lux, a First Nations Mayan woman who serves as Vice Minister of Cultural and Natural Heritage in Guatemala's Ministry of Culture and Sports and representing Mexico, Octavio Murillo Álvarez de la Cadena, Director of Collections at the Instituto Nacional de los Pueblos Indígenas (National Institute of Indigenous Peoples), contributed his deep expertise.



International delegation including AIATSIS CEO, Leonard Hill, at Uluru. Photo: AIATSIS



International delegation welcome on Sydney Harbour. Photo: AIATSIS



AIATSIS CEO Leonard Hill, Octavio Murillo Álvarez de la Cadena and Ambassador Justin Mohamed at DFAT hosted panel event. Photo: © 2025 DFAT, all rights reserved.

Laura and Octavio were joined by DFAT supported delegates, including fellow Mexican Almandina Cárdenas Demay, General Coordinator of Language Policies at the Instituto Nacional de Lenguas Indígenas (National Institute of Indigenous Languages) and, from the United States, Christina Snider-Ashtari, a First Nations member of the Dry Creek Rancheria Band of Pomo Indians and Tribal Affairs Secretary to California Governor Gavin Newsom.

Together, these leaders engaged in meaningful dialogue and cultural exchange, fostering international collaboration and deepening the understanding of Indigenous heritage and policy across borders. As Octavio reflected, 'To walk on Larrakia Country, to share stories with Aboriginal communities, it reminded me that we are not alone. Our colonial histories are different, but our fight is the same'.

The international delegates each presented at the AIATSIS Summit 2025 in Garramilla/Darwin, sharing insights from their respective areas of expertise. During the week, Laura reflected, 'To be welcomed onto Larrakia land, to see the way you honour your connection to Country, to water – it was magical. In Guatemala, we are the daughters of the corn. Here, you are the children of the water. And both are sacred'.

Our experience with the delegation was far more than a series of meetings and significant Australian cultural or landmark visits – it was a journey of shared wisdom, cultural pride and enduring relationships.

The delegation's activities spanned cultural institutions; urban, regional and remote communities; and policy discussions.

A recurring theme throughout was the importance of language and cultural continuity. As Almandina powerfully stated, 'Ninety-five percent of the world's languages are Indigenous. And yet so many are disappearing. When we lose a language, we lose a way of seeing the world'.

While the delegates have now returned to their home countries, the connections forged and the knowledge exchanged will continue to grow and, in doing so, strengthen us all.



AIATSIS Central Australia staff and international delegation at the Smoking Ceremony in Mparntwe/Alice Springs. Photo: AIATSIS.

Looking Ahead

The AIATSIS International Delegation to Australia 2025 served as a powerful reminder of the strength found in cultural exchange and Indigenous solidarity across oceans and borders. It brought together leaders from diverse nations who, despite different colonial histories, share common struggles and aspirations for the preservation and flourishing of their cultures, languages and communities.

Through every conversation, site visit and shared experience – from Warrane and Uluru to Garramilla and Canberra – the delegation deepened not only institutional partnerships but also relationships grounded in respect, reciprocity, shared purpose and friendship. These bonds will continue to inform and inspire Australia and AIATSIS' international engagement, strengthening our collective efforts to support Indigenous peoples to speak for and celebrate their cultures. Stoking the campfire for continued collaboration and cultural diplomacy for years to come.

Sponsorship

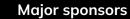
AIATSIS extends its sincere thanks to each of the 24 sponsors whose generous contributions were instrumental in the success of the 2025 AIATSIS Summit.

With the support of our sponsors, we were able to raise more than \$815,000, helping to deliver a culturally rich, inclusive and impactful five-day program.

Sponsors received recognition throughout the Summit including promotion during plenary sessions, welcome functions, the social evening and the Gala Dinner. They were also promoted across all stages of the event through the delegate app, event signage, and printed and online materials.

Principal sponsor





Champion sponsors

Youth delegate sponsors











Gala dinner sponsor















Exclusive airline sponsor

















Merchandise sponsors













Coffee cart sponsors



Sponsored Delegates

With support from the National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA) and additional funding from BHP, Batchelor Institute, The Healing Foundation, Reconciliation Australia, Lendlease, Inpex and National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Education Corporation, a total of 62 sponsored delegates were financially supported by our sponsors.

These delegates were selected to attend, and priority was given to applicants who met one or more of the following categories:

- Had an abstract to present at Summit accepted;
- A Chair/Director of a Prescribed Body Corporate (PBC);
- Participating in the Youth Stream.

Sponsored delegates were provided with full registration, including the social events, flights, accommodation, meals and a travel allowance for the week.







Sponsored delegates enjoying attending the sponsored delegate breakfast on day three of the 2025 AIATSIS Summit. Photos: Jacinta Keefe Photography.

Social Media Snapshot

Organic Posts (posts, reels, stories)



POSTS

258 total posts across Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn

85 (includes 14 reels and 19 stories)

120 (includes 13 reels and 83 stories

in 53 (includes 5 videos)

IMPRESSIONS/REACH

Total: 304,623

f 176,654 reach*

56,075 reach*

2056

71,894 impressions*

REACTIONS	COMMENIS	CLICKS
Total: 8771	Total: 373	Total: 5130
f 4382	f 328	f 0 781#
2333	10	in 4757

Paid Advertising (Ads were optimised for reach or website click throughs)

RESULTS (link clicks) 2251

REACH (f) (o) 132,182

IMPRESSIONS in 14,595



2025 AIATSIS Summit delegates in the plenary hall. Photo: Jacinta Keefe Photography.

^{*}Doesn't include organic posts that were boosted

^{*}Doesn't include links on organic posts that were boosted

Social Media Snapshot (cont.)

The highest performing organic post across all platforms was a carousel image post announcing the winners of the AIATSIS Summit 2025 Awards. Its reach was 6400 on Facebook, 4000 on Instagram, 4015 on LinkedIn (a total of 14,415). It attracted 113 likes/reactions/comments/ shares on Facebook. 179 on Instagram, 155 on LinkedIn (a total of 447).

Our social media campaign for Summit 2025 delivered strong results, with a total of 258 organic posts shared across Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn. This included a diverse mix of content types:

- Facebook: 85 posts, including 14 reels and 19 stories
- Instagram: 120 posts, including 13 reels and 83 stories
- LinkedIn: 53 posts, including 5 videos

Together, these posts generated a combined 304,623 impressions/reach.

- Facebook: 176,654 reach (excluding boosted posts)
- Instagram: 56,075 reach (excluding boosted posts)
- LinkedIn: 71,894 impressions (excluding boosted posts)

Audience engagement remained high across platforms, with a total of 8,771 reactions, 373 comments, and 5,130 link clicks:

- Reactions: 4,382 (Facebook),
 2,333 (Instagram), 2,056 (LinkedIn)
- Comments: 328 (Facebook),
 10 (Instagram), 35 (LinkedIn)
- Clicks: 781 (Facebook & Instagram), 4,757 (LinkedIn)

We also ran targeted paid advertising campaigns optimised for reach, website traffic and niche audience targeting.
These campaigns achieved:

- 2,251 link clicks
- 132,182 reach across Facebook and Instagram
- 14,595 impressions on LinkedIn



Kaleb Mabo delivering the introduction to the 2025 Mabo Lecture. Photo: Jacinta Keefe Photography.

Social Media Snapshot (cont.)

Media engagement was also strong with total audience reach of 9,669,330 over a 3-month period directly leading up to, during and directly after Summit.

Several media organisations attended Summit with several TV journalists (NITV, ABC Darwin) conducting interviews with AIATSIS CEO

and keynote speakers. There was significant coverage as well by the National Indigenous Times and National Indigenous Radio Service as well as the NT News, Torres News and The Australian. A total of 127 news items were published. Around 50% of the news items were posted within 2.5 weeks of Summit.



2025 Summit delegates. Photo: Jacinta Keefe Photography.



Cultural performance at the 2025 AIATSIS Summit Awards and Gala Dinner. Photo: Jacinta Keefe Photography.

The AIATSIS Shop

The Shop at Summit experienced high sales of \$10,617.96 with 346 units sold across 43 different titles.

The Top Sellers were:

- Australia (hardback): 11 units, \$1,099.45
- AIATSIS Indigenous Languages Map: 63 units, \$932.13
- Yawulyu: 11 units, \$611.91
- Little Red, Yellow, Black Book: 26 units, \$556.55
- Australian Aboriginal Studies Journal, Issue 1, 2025: 11 units, \$495.00.

The Shop also hosted a successful author signing, which generated significant interest from delegates and prompted many sales.

Helen Napurrurla Mortonand Myfany Turpin, co-authors of Yawulyu, signed books and spoke to delegates about their work, which is a major contribution to understanding Aboriginal women's visual art and women's ceremonial performance in Central Australia.

Yawulyu, Art and song in Warlpiri women's ceremony brings to light meticulous research conducted in the early 1980s and returns this valuable cultural heritage to the Warlpiri community at Willowra in the Northern Territory.

Yawulyu is a joint effort led by ethnochoreologist and teacher Megan Morais in collaboration with the late Lucy Nampijinpa Martin and 11 Warlpiri women with authority and knowledge of yawulyu, and with the support of musicologist/linguist Myfany Turpin.

The book examines the role of Yawulyu in Warlpiri society and culture and presents transcriptions and translations of the songs and reproductions of the body designs painted on Warlpiri women.



Delegates at the AIATSIS Shop. Photo: Jacinta Keefe Photography.



Delegates at the AIATSIS Shop. Photo: Jacinta Keefe Photography.



Book signing – Yawulyu: Art and song in Warlpiri women's ceremony. Myfany Turpin and Helen Napurrurla Morton, two of the co-authors of this landmark book, the latest release from Aboriginal Studies Press.

Photo: Jacinta Keefe Photography.

Summit Merchandise Featured Artist

This year AIATSIS selected the artwork from Jason Lees.

Aboriginal empowerment is a critical pathway to strengthening the future of Indigenous communities. By fostering selfdetermination, cultural pride, and access to resources, Aboriginal peoples can reclaim their sovereignty and drive their own social, political, and economic progress. Empowerment involves supporting Indigenous leaders, enhancing education opportunities, and addressing systemic inequalities that have long held back these communities. By preserving traditional knowledge and ensuring that Indigenous voices are heard and respected in decision-making, we can create a future where Aboriginal communities thrive on their own terms, with a strong sense of identity, resilience, and purpose. Strengthening Aboriginal empowerment is not only about the well-being of Indigenous peoples, but also about enriching society as a whole, creating a more inclusive, just, and sustainable future for everyone.

Jason Lee is a self-taught artist who was born and raised in Darwin, Northern Territory.

Having grown up next to saltwater and learning his Gulumerrdjin (Larrakia) culture from his mother, Uncles, Aunties and brothers and sisters this sparked an interest in art and this interest was cultivated during his teenage years and further developed when he started learning the Larrakia language. Jason's artistic influences come from his Larrakia ancestry and the Larrakia Language and cultural practices.



Feedback from the Delegate Survey

A total of 204 delegates, speakers and exhibitors completed the post-event survey.

The survey was distributed via email to more than 2,000 attendees (online and virtual attendees).

Overall, attendees expressed positive satisfaction with the event:

• 88.72% rated their overall experience as either excellent (60.78%) or very good (27.94%)

Delegates rated the following aspects of Summit:

- Program: 86.14% as either excellent (52.48%) or very good (33.66%)
- Speakers: 94.11% as either excellent (57.35%) or very good (36.76%)
- Networking opportunities: 84.26% as either excellent (48.73%) or very good (35.53%)
- Cultural experiences/activities: 71.35% as either excellent (39.89%) or very good (31.46%)
- Exhibition (trade) area: 73.72% as either excellent (34.54%) or very good (39.18%)
- Merchandise: 70.84% as either excellent (35.94%) and as very good (34.90%)
- Welcome Reception: 84.83% as either excellent (55.86%) or very good (28.97%)
- Summit App: 70% as either excellent (38.42%) or very good (31.58%)

Overall, the highlights encompassed networking opportunities, the exhibition area, program content, and a diverse array of high-quality speakers.

Being able to attend virtually and watch the keynote presentations and plenary sessions was seen as being extremely valuable.

In conclusion, the survey provided valuable insights into attendee experiences. We appreciate the feedback received and will utilise the feedback to enhance future Summit events.





2025 AIATSIS Summit delegates. Photos: Jacinta Keefe Photography.

