

AUSTRALIAN INSTITUTE OF ABORIGINAL STUDIES



Acton House
Marcus Clarke Street
Acton, ACT

Postal address:
GPO Box 553
Canberra
ACT 2601

Telephone:
(062)46 1111

Telegraphic address:
ABINST

Fax:
(062) 46 1125

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Mr Ken Colbung
Chairman
Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies
CANBERRA ACT 2601

Dear Ken,

I have read your letter to AIAS members and wish to express my deep concern over the Government's announcement. It seems that the Institute stands to lose not only its independence but its special and unique attributes.

As one of the Institute's founding members, I well remember the Conference in 1961 and the recommendations to establish a permanent national research organisation. (Professor W. E. H. Stanner's other goal of a Gallery of Aboriginal Australia was a primary motivation for many of us, especially because of the needed focus - from the public eye - on the decline of Aboriginal culture). Those of us who attended that Conference 26 years ago were keenly aware of the urgency of obtaining more knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal life and culture. Our concern was to promote relevant studies, to draw them to the attention of the largest forum of scholars, to preserve certain aspects of the culture in publications and other media and especially for the benefit of later generations of Aboriginal people.

During my own fieldwork for the Institute, which commenced in 1962, my initial approach when recording music was to explain to singers that the collected recordings would be safely kept in Canberra and that they would be available for their children and grandchildren whenever they wanted to hear them. It is interesting to note, now, that the sons and daughters, grandsons and granddaughters of these Aboriginal music-makers are among the increasing number of people requesting tape copies of song collections from the Institute's sound archive.

The Sound Archive of the Institute of Aboriginal Studies is in fact one of its most valuable - and quite irreplaceable - assets. Any loss or damage to the Institute's tape holdings could never be rectified. In this section of the Institute a tape copying and cataloguing system has been developed which is equal to that of the main ethnomusicological archives in the United States of America and Europe. The number of researchers in Aboriginal music now working in Australian universities has steadily increased over the past 15 to 20 years, many of them attracted by the extraordinary comprehensiveness of the field collections.

I wholeheartedly endorse Council's view that the Institute's cultural materials are a "crucial part of the national heritage". This aspect of the Institute's many achievements is of outstanding importance not only to Aboriginal Australia but to all Australians, especially the youngest of them.

I am concerned that the implementation of the "new Commissions" plans could create a situation in which the Institute's special attributes - those not shared by the ADC, DAA nor the Hostels - would ultimately become submerged and go unnoticed. It is too late then to stress to the Government, particularly at this time, that there is a need for a national monument to our "first Australian"? We need a prominent building, which could stand with dignity in an appropriate place as do the National Library of Australia and the Australian National Gallery. We need such a building to house a centre for information and research on Aboriginal culture and - to quote from the first brochure issued by the AIAS - we need a place "where performances of songs and dances, demonstrations and craft activities, dioramas of traditional life and displays of art and artefacts can be held in the best possible conditions". Since the plans to house the Institute in the proposed Museum of Australia appear to have lapsed, a building of this kind would seem to have become an imperative.

There is no other institution in Australia better fitted than the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies to pay tribute to the true inheritors of the ancient culture of this land.

It is time, it would seem, for the AIAS to move into a new, less passive phase. It has an unmatched role as a custodian of Aboriginal culture and repository of cultural materials. Perhaps it is time that its Council began to promote our achievements and special functions more vigorously. The last six words in the Act 1964 - 1973, Part 11, section 6 (3), namely "before they cease to be available" should be amended as follows: "The Institute shall endeavour to ensure that materials presently available for the purposes of Aboriginal studies should be tended and preserved, with the Institute fulfilling the role of national custodian".

THE OPTIONS

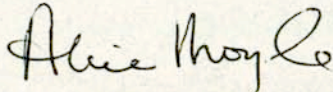
My choice of Option, which would be No. 4, would resemble Option 2 to some extent but without the word "Aboriginal".

Members of the Institute are well aware of the fact that, for its perpetuation the AIAS needs the participation of dedicated Australians whether they are Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal Australians. And non-Aboriginal Australian members will always need the guidance and good will of the Aboriginal members, as well as of Aboriginal people everywhere. Attempts made to fabricate a majority in Council of one of the other - whether it be an Aboriginal or a non-Aboriginal majority (or 50/50) - seem to me to be of no consequence in the face of the more important issue at hand.

My Option 4 would read therefore:

The Act to be amended to reduce size of Council to 12 members, namely - Principal, one member of Senate; one member of the House of Representatives; two persons appointed by the Governor General; a Commission appointee (or one other Governor General's appointee if the Institute can evade the present proposal); and six members of the Institute. The establishment of a Research Committee (council plus seven members). Council to meet twice a year, Research Committee three times a year.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Alice Moyle". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the typed name.

Alice Moyle
Honorary Visiting Fellow