2017 AIATSIS National Indigenous Research Conference

21 - 23 March 2017

383 delegates
Over 40% of delegates identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait islander people

96 Indigenous nations

171 Speakers

44 Sessions

96 Presentations

5 Exhibitors

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8 Sponsors
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18 Indigenous sponsored delegates

1,789 tweets
ABOUT THIS YEAR’S AIATSIS NATIONAL INDIGENOUS RESEARCH CONFERENCE

AIATSIS and the University of Canberra co-convened the AIATSIS National Indigenous Research Conference 2017.

The conference, structured around the theme ‘Impact, Engagement and Transformation’ and brought together researchers, policymakers, cultural and collecting institutions, the corporate sector and Indigenous organisations and communities. It examined how we can more effectively target research efforts to achieve better policy outcomes and practice with lasting impact through transformative change.

Research plays a central role in creating transformative change in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Questions of impact and engagement in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research are front and centre in this change. So too is the way in which the Indigenous research effort innovates to inform policy and practice around Indigenous development.

Over 150 speakers discussed a broad range of issues including collections infrastructure and access, health, community development, governance, research and cultural capability, education, partnership and engagement models, research ethics and assessment, communication and storytelling.

The conference was held at Hotel Realm, Barton ACT from Tuesday 21 - Thursday 23 March 2017.

Julie Walker, Maryanne Jebb, Lisa Strelein and Nora Cooke

Building Indigenous data sovereignty workshop

Photo credits: Andrew Turner
ABOUT THE CO-CONVENORS

AUSTRALIAN INSTITUTE OF ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER STUDIES

The Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) is at the forefront of research led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, who are involved as researchers, partners and drivers of our research priorities and projects. We lead by example in conducting research to the highest ethical standards and we have a genuine commitment to building pathways for knowledge exchange.

Our research is not only high quality, but more importantly, contributes to the wellbeing of Indigenous Australians and has direct benefit to the communities we work with. Our work allows us to build upon and contribute to the knowledge contained within our collections.

Our partnerships are essential. They connect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations with researchers, policy makers and practitioners to address the questions they want answered, with outcomes that can be implemented, shared and built upon.

It is the grounded nature of our research that places us in a position to influence and inform policies and practices of importance to Indigenous Australians in the areas of languages and cultural expression, native title and traditional ownership, education and cultural transmission, governance development and public policy, health and wellbeing, and land and water.
UNIVERSITY OF CANBERRA

The University of Canberra is a young, up-and-coming university nestled in the nation’s capital. It aims to be recognised as one of Australia’s most innovative tertiary institutions, as it continues to reach new heights in world rankings and further its reach regionally, nationally and internationally. The Times Higher Education World University Rankings and the QS World University Rankings place the University of Canberra in the top four per cent of universities worldwide, and among the top 100 universities in the world under the age of 50.

The University’s teaching is enriched by a research culture that focuses on outcomes that lead to early improvements in the world around us. Both reflect the institution’s dynamic, innovative and collaborative intellectual environment. The University’s strong emphasis on work integrated learning gives its nearly 17,000 students valuable experience to develop key skills in the workplace.

Its graduates are in high demand and many of its more than 77,000 alumni occupy senior positions in public and private enterprise in Australia and around the world. Its vibrant, friendly campus is home to a wide array of cafés, eateries and fitness facilities. The natural park-like environment teems with native birds and a small mob of kangaroos. It also plays host to the famous touring music festival – Groovin’ the Moo. The University of Canberra has embarked on a comprehensive development plan that will see its campus transform into an integrated learning community where academics, students and the public come together in a seamless knowledge sharing space.

The project is already coming to life with the opening of a multi-service Health Hub and the University’s Sporting Commons, home to the Research Institute for Sport and Exercise. The construction of the new University of Canberra Public Hospital – a central facility for our health teaching and research activity – is underway and further developments in the health, residential and innovation district are being planned. These rapidly expanding facilities are delivering an integrated teaching and research environment, providing exciting new avenues for the University to serve its community.
DAY 1 – IMPACT

The conference opened with the Lee Darroch presenting the AIATSIS Possum Skin Cloak and providing insight into the cloak’s significance and the story it tells.

Following this, Professor Mick Dodson AM gave the first keynote on the history of Indigenous research. He spoke about the transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders from being outsiders to being considered as owners of research; from Indigenous people being considered to be merely informants, to Indigenous people reclaiming their ownership of research and setting the expectations for researchers in their communities. Professor Dodson posited the AIATSIS Guidelines for Ethical Research in Australian Indigenous Studies as exemplary of ethical research, as it emphasises the importance of engaging with Indigenous people as partners in research, and considers the impact of research.

Pat Anderson AO presented an engaging argument on the need for constitutional reform, premised on how such a reform could address two needs. First, it would contribute to the need for a stable approach to policy which is driven by evidence-based research and Indigenous perspectives. Second, it would help to improve the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. However, Ms Anderson stressed that this reform must be a substantial, structural change, not symbolic or minimal change.

The two keynote presentations were followed by numerous presentations on the theme of Impact, including discussions about the importance of identifying impact, frameworks for measuring impact, cultural practices improving wellbeing, repatriation and reclaiming cultural heritage and collections spaces, the negative impacts of a deficit discourse, the importance of data sovereignty, and how to increase cultural competency among non-Indigenous people who work with Indigenous Australians.
DAY 1 – OPENING RECEPTION

Rachel Perkins welcomed guests to the Opening Reception. This was followed by a short address from the Opening Reception Sponsor, Andrew Gunstone, of Swinburne University of Technology. AIATSIS Chairperson, Professor Mick Dodson AM and University of Canberra, Deputy-Vice Chancellor Research and Innovation, Professor Frances Shannon also welcomed delegates to the conference on behalf of the co-convenors.

Belle Whyte and Brandon Reed performed while delegates networked in a friendly and relaxed atmosphere.

Photo credits: Andrew Turner
DAY 2 – ENGAGEMENT

Moana Jackson gave a compelling talk on the need to reconsider the notion of research. We need to expand research to make room for methodologies that incorporate Indigenous ways of knowing, understanding and learning. This kind of research is the core of meaningful engagement, where Indigenous perspectives and histories are valued and sought after. Professor Tom Calma reiterated the importance of genuine engagement, arguing research should be done in partnership with Indigenous people, taking into account the importance of cultures, land, and the histories of people before and after colonisation.

Throughout the day there were various presentations on topics such as the importance of Indigenous people in decision-making roles in research, including in evaluations; appreciating different Indigenous conceptual understandings and the value of qualitative methods for capturing these understandings; re-designing collections and archives where Indigenous people are considered to be agents, not subjects; problems in telling stories about Indigenous Australia in the GLAM sector, and the importance of Indigenous perspectives to be the drivers of these stories.
**DAY 3 – TRANSFORMATION**

Virginia Hart, from the Department of Education and Training, delivered the final keynote address, in which she discussed the importance of identifying the transformative effects of research at universities. She described the National Engagement and Impact Assessment tool that will be conducted in universities next year, with Indigenous research treated as its own discipline. She also discussed the need for greater support for Indigenous students and for increased cultural competency of the supervisors of students.

This was followed by a panel, in which Professor Marcia Langton, Dr Lisa Strelein, Joy Savage, and Virginia Hart discussed the key themes of the conference. Dr Strelein emphasised the need to recognise the Indigenous sovereignty of research, where communities are not just consulted, but are seen as research partners. Ms Savage emphasised the importance of research being translated into policy, and the need for research to be presented in ways that policy-makers can quickly digest. Professor Langton argued the ethics processes required to receive grants for research are too focused on risk management rather than ethics, and create an unnecessary burden upon Indigenous researchers.

The presentations on our last day echoed these themes of transformation, particularly in terms of the disjuncture between research and government policies, the need to consider the narratives research tells and interacts with, the need for genuine respect and exchange in research partnerships, the need to transform the ways we conceive of collections so as to grow community control and ownership of research, the transformative power of Indigenous controlled services, the need for education in remote areas to be made more relevant for Indigenous students, and the similarities between the Indigenous people of Taiwan and Australia in their self-determination journeys.

*Photo credits: Andrew Turner*
DAY 3 – CONFERENCE DINNER

The conference closed with a lively and enjoyable dinner. Dr Lisa Strelein thanked the sponsors, supporters and all attendees, and recapped the conference.

We were entertained by Dale Huddleston & The Riverbank Band and Terra Firma, as well as the impressive dance moves of fellow delegates.
TRADE FAIR

The conference trade fair hosted five exhibitors throughout the three day conference. The trade fair provides an ideal opportunity to promote the work of organisations and to speak one on one with a range of stakeholders involved in the Indigenous research sector.

SPONSORS

This year the conference had eight sponsors and we were able to raise $125,000. This funding was used to subsidise the registration fee, making it affordable for attendees to attend and sponsor 18 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to attend the conference as speakers, chairs and delegates.

The AIATSIS National Indigenous Research Conference 2017 Sponsors:

Principal Sponsor: Department of Health
Major Sponsor: Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet
Opening Reception Sponsor: Swinburne University
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Sponsors were acknowledged throughout the three day program, including at the plenary sessions, opening reception and the conference dinner. Sponsors were promoted prior, during and after the conference through printed and online materials.

AIATSIS AND THE UNIVERSITY OF CANBERRA WISH TO THANK ALL OF THIS YEAR’S SPONSORS FOR THEIR SUPPORT AND CONTRIBUTION TOWARDS THE ‘AIATSIS NATIONAL INDIGENOUS RESEARCH CONFERENCE 2017, IMPACT, ENGAGEMENT, TRANSFORMATION’.
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