NativeTitle16 was used 3000 times and reached over 1 million unique users.

Significant anniversaries celebrated in 2016.

- 40th anniversary of the Aboriginal Land Rights Act 1976
- 50th Anniversary of the Wave Hill Walk off
- 70th anniversary of the Pilbara strike
About this year’s conference

The National Native Title Conference 2016 was co-convened by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) and the Northern Land Council (NLC) and hosted by the Larrakia people in Darwin, Northern Territory.

The conference attracted 800 delegates including traditional owners, Native Title Representative Bodies (NTRBs) and service providers, the Federal Court, the National Native Title Tribunal, government agencies, academics, native title practitioners, consultants, industry representatives and international delegates.

The program included one day of closed workshops for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their NTRB or service provider, followed by a two day public program. The public program was open to all delegates and included keynote speeches, forums and workshops, Indigenous Talking Circles and presentations from experts in their fields and community.

This year’s conference attracted more than 150 speakers throughout the three-day program and addressed the following themes:

**Being on country**

Having access to opportunities, resources and infrastructure to be back on land and sea country is a critical part of strengthening culture as well as health and wellbeing. Being on Country focuses on the multiple ways in which traditional owners are reasserting culture and community on country.

**Practising and learning culture**

Reconnecting younger generations with knowledge from senior elders is a key priority for many traditional owner groups. Practising and learning culture focuses on transmission and practice as not only a key native title right but also a way of strengthening connection to family and country.

**Holding title; being sovereign**

As we move into the `post-determination era` many questions are being asked about what holding native title means in the context of competing legal and policy regimes. Holding title; being sovereign is about strengthening the ability of traditional owners to assert their rights and interests through everyday practice.

**Community and commerce**

Native title is both a commercial opportunity and a non-commercial bundle of rights. An emerging challenge is how commercial opportunities can be pursued in a way that is consistent with traditional owner priorities and aspirations. Community and commerce focuses on the innovations that traditional owners have pursued in order to bring economic benefit to their communities.

**Just recognition; just settlement**

As momentum builds toward a referendum on constitutional recognition, Indigenous peoples are also seeking local and regional recognition of their cultural, social and economic aspirations. Just recognition; just settlement explores how First Nations and the Australian people can reach a just settlement and forge respectful coexistence.
National PBC Meeting

A national meeting of Prescribed Bodies Corporate (PBC) was held on Tuesday 31 May 2016, the day before the conference. The meeting was attended by 60 participants over the course of the day from at least 28 PBCs from around Australia and the Torres Strait.

Following the meeting, a small group of PBC representatives held successful meetings with the Minister for Indigenous Affairs, the Hon. Nigel Scullion and separately with Glen Kelly, CEO, National Native Title Council to discuss the future of PBCs, focusing on resources and capacity building.

NTRB and PBC Program

This year, the NTRB and PBC day focused on claims issues as well as the post-determination needs of NTRBs and PBCs. The day provided an opportunity for NTRB lawyers and researchers and PBC directors and members to speak confidentially about native title claims issues, such as compensation and the model litigant. Additionally, this year’s NTRB and PBC Day was more interactive with post-determination workshops about using agreements, Indigenous property rights and development, and the storage and return of native title research to PBCs.
Brian Wyatt Memorial Lecture

Glen Kelly, CEO of the National Native Title Council (NNTC) delivered the Brian Wyatt Memorial Lecture. Mr Kelly paid respect to the late Mr Wyatt and his family, and provided the audience with a warm and humorous account of Mr Wyatt’s achievements in native title and land rights, ‘whose life’s work opened doors for all of us.’

Mr Kelly’s lecture captured the recent developments, reforms and strategic direction of the NNTC. The highlight of the lecture for many was the announcement that the NNTC will be opening up their membership to include PBCs, as well as NTRBs/NTSPs. Highlighting the NNTC’s aim to develop the sector in an inclusive and united way, Mr Kelly spoke about the development of three main pillars as part of the NNTC’s agenda:

1. Protecting country and culture
2. Empowerment of traditional owners through economic development
3. Creating a better native title system.
Indigenous Talking Circles

There are few opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to come together in one place and sit and talk about the issues, challenges and triumphs in their communities. The Indigenous Talking Circles at the conference provide an opportunity for Indigenous delegates to talk among themselves about the impact of native title processes on their communities and other important issues.

Women’s Indigenous Talking Circle

The Women’s Indigenous Talking Circle Was led by Mary Graham, Tracey Currie, Amelia Kunoth-Monks, Cheryl Kitchner and Joann Schimder, who represent ‘The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women’s Alliance (NATSIWA)’.

Tracey Currie, CEO of NATSIWA, talked about the outcomes that the talking circle would like to harness from the session by sharing their own experiences. They were asked to sit in groups of state and territory areas so they could discuss issues of their land and sea with each other.

The women shared their perspective on what are communal rights, and how women as cultural rights holders have the authority to speak for country. The talking circle was very inspiring and strongly encouraged Indigenous women throughout all generations to step up as leaders in their communities.

Delegates touched on confidence, leadership, strength and resilience and the agendas of women’s roles in native title.

Some delegates were returning to the 2016 conference and where happy to participate in the talking circle again and reconnect with attendees.

Men’s Indigenous Talking Circle

The Men’s Indigenous Talking Circle was led by Craig Allen a Yandruwandha Yawarrawarrka man, whose traditional country is located in central desert Australia. Craig is an Assistant Professor with the Centre of Aboriginal Medical and Dental Health at the University of Western Australia.

This year’s Men’s Indigenous Talking Circle covered these key areas:

- Education
- The lack of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers in schools is having a significant impact on Indigenous children, particularly young boys.
- Young men
- Lacking guidance and not getting access to opportunities to develop themselves to become strong leaders of the future.
- Law or Lore

The most significant outcome of the Men’s Indigenous Talking Circle was the initial idea of a National Men’s Council. The National Men’s Council would be a body of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men who endeavour to meet annually for the purposes of discussing and developing strategies and making recommendations in relation to matters for which men have a particular responsibility.
Indigenous Youth Talking Circle

The inaugural Indigenous Youth Talking Circles were developed in response to the growing recognition of the importance and value of Indigenous youth voices to the native title sector. This year, the sessions were facilitated by Natalie Rotumah, CEO of NTSCORP, and attended by 24 delegates who travelled from the Northern Territory, Western Australia, Queensland and Canberra to attend. Participants discussed their native title experiences, with a strong focus on identifying the barriers to participation experienced by Indigenous youth and how they might be overcome. The delegates also had the opportunity to discuss youth issues with Professor Gerald Taiaiake Alfred from the University of Victoria, British Columbia.

Welcome reception

This year’s Welcome Reception was held outside along the Darwin Waterfront on the evening of the NTRB and PBC Day. Delegates were treated to a cultural performance by the Kenbi Dancers from the Belyuen community and entertainment from local Larrakia ladies, The Mills Sisters.

AIATSIS Chairperson, Professor Mick Dodson AM welcomed delegates to Darwin and acknowledged three significant anniversaries for 2016 - The 40th anniversary of the Aboriginal Land Rights Act 1976, the 50th Anniversary of the Wave Hill Walk off and the 70th anniversary of the Pilbara strike - the first Aboriginal strike in Australia, all of which have contributed to the history of native title and land rights in the Northern Territory.

AIATSIS Chairperson Professor Mick Dodson AM welcoming delegates at the Welcome Reception.

The Mills Sisters performing at the Welcome Reception.

Hamid Binsaad, Henry Park, Ruth Gilbert and Joseph Edgar at the welcome reception.
Public Program - Day 1

Public Program Day 1 of the conference included a keynote address from Professor Gerald Taiaiake Alfred who spoke about reframing colonization as the disconnection between people and their lands, culture, communities, each other and within themselves. The relationships that Indigenous peoples have to their country (or territories) are at the crux of Indigeneity and identities. Taiaiake shared his personal struggle to ensure the restoration of cultural practices in a practical and lived manner and warned about the reality of power as well as the limits of legal and political processes. He spoke about falling for the ‘politics of distraction’ and noted that the measure of success – of land rights, native title and any other form of reconciliation – is whether Indigeneity is restored and maintained.

Joe Morrison from the Northern Land Council (NLC) reflected on the last 40 years of land rights in the Northern Territory. Mr Morrison spoke about the success of programs such as the IPA program that has supported community based planning and development. He also reflected on the challenges of the intervention as well as upcoming transfers of land in the Wickham River and Cox Peninsula. Mr Morrison was critical of Indigenous affairs and the current minister, highlighting the flaws in funding, administration, governance and decision making. He noted that long term community impacts can only be mitigated through recognising Indigenous rights autonomy.

Day 1 also included discussions about Indigenous fishing business, the implications of freehold land, developing enterprises on country, cultural heritage and knowledge protection, community leadership, governance and development and included a workshop on the role of independent directors.

Milingimbi dancers.

Bilaware Lee welcoming delegates on Public Program Day 1.

Professor Gerald Taiaiake Alfred delivering his keynote address.

Northern Land Council CEO, Joe Morrison delivering his keynote address.
Public Program - Day 2

Mabo Lecture

Melissa George delivered the 2016 Mabo Lecture and spoke about her aspirations for native title. She said that at the time of its inception native title was ‘going to keep our country strong and deliver our communities prosperity and our culture longevity’. She spoke about the unrealized opportunities of land and sea management and how native title has been put up as a ‘barrier’ to achieve these original aspirations. Melissa noted that land and sea management was beyond weeds and ferals and is about reclaiming sovereignty and building the capacity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders to live on country.

Dangerous ideas

Bruce Pascoe, Alison Page, Mick Gooda and Dr Dawn Casey also shared their Dangerous Ideas during the plenary:

- Ancient Indigenous scholars have a role in the present and ‘Indigenous cultures need to become an icon and a token of respect for the rest of the world’.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders will ‘buy back’ Australia to increase the Indigenous estate to 70 per cent by 2050 and carry out their role as custodians.
- Indigenous voices are a risk but these ‘risks’ are currently managed based on deficit thinking rather than the need to ensure that Indigenous people are a part of the decisions that affect them.
- The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander land account belongs to all Indigenous people who need to be strategic, coordinated and focused in order to build strong culture and futures.

Public Program Day 2 also included discussions about constitutional reform, Indigenous agricultural systems, income tax and GST scenarios, water and sea rights, cultural resurgence, learning about country and maintaining cultural practices, research, developing a Land and Sea Managers Network, agreement making and included an Indigenous Youth Forum as well as two workshops on a national caring for country archive and investment case studies.
Conference dinner

Each year the conference concludes with a formal dinner. This is another opportunity for delegates to relax and enjoy themselves after a busy week of discussions, learning and networking. The conference dinner featured local entertainment acts from Constantina Bush, Shellie Morris and David Spry and The Moral High Ground.

AIATSIS Chairperson, took this opportunity to thank the conference co-convenors, hosts and sponsors. He acknowledged their invaluable support and contributions in delivering the conference.

Trade fair

The trade fair is an ideal opportunity for engaging with a large number of native title stakeholders and delegates face to face. Sponsors were given the opportunity to have a stall to promote their organisation and network with the 800 conference delegates. This year’s trade fair featured conference sponsors, media and local Indigenous artists during the three-day program. The trade fair also brings together local Indigenous artists and craftspeople to display and sell local products and promote local services and issues.

Cultural tours

Each year, the conference includes a cultural program that offers an opportunity for delegates to engage with local traditional owners, experience local cultural activities and learn more about economic or business initiatives on country.

This year as part of the cultural program, delegates were invited to attend a specially organised Local Bush Knowledge Walk or Local Bush Knowledge Tour with a Larrakia Bush Knowledge expert. The guided tour took delegates to local spots to learn the significance of key plant life from an authentic cultural perspective.
Sponsors

This year’s conference sponsorship reached $310,000—a new record. With these funds AIATSIS was able to sponsor the cultural program, Youth Forum and 125 Indigenous people to attend the conference as speakers, facilitators and delegates.

The acknowledgement of sponsorship was reflected throughout the conference, during the plenary sessions each morning, the official welcome reception and the conference dinner.

Sponsors were promoted in conference materials such as the conference booklet, program, banners, visual displays in breakout rooms and on the AIATSIS website.

AIATSIS is proud of all of our partnerships with the National Native Title Conference 2016 sponsors, and would like to acknowledge and thank every sponsor:

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