



Mr Steve Larkin
Principal, AIATSIS

Principal's report

Change has been a major hallmark of the past year in both Indigenous affairs generally and for the Institute. With this change came new opportunities for AIATSIS.

New governmental arrangements saw responsibility for AIATSIS transferred on 24 June from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs portfolio to the Education, Science and Training portfolio.

I am greatly encouraged by the keen interest and early support shown for AIATSIS's activities by our new Minister, the Hon. Brendan Nelson, and the Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST). Our move to DEST was not inappropriate given that AIATSIS is Australia's premier research organisation focusing on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, has many forms of research outputs, and provides a range of valuable resources on a range of priority research topics.

AIATSIS stakeholders can be confident of the efforts of Institute staff during the year and their success in balancing budget restraints against the pressures of increasing client demands.

There were significant increases in demand for collaborative research, access to Library and Audiovisual resources, Aboriginal Studies Press initiatives and Corporate Services support. Nevertheless, staff have strived to realise efficiencies, enabling savings and freed resources to be reinvested in improved service delivery and outputs. For example, corporate expenses for 2003–2004 were 33 per cent lower than in 2000–2001. Moves to upgrade and/or outsource information technology services and management systems are expected to deliver further savings in the future.

The growth in demand for Indigenous research outputs and industry requests for collaborative research is likely to be due to AIATSIS engaging in research thematics seen by both the wider community and stakeholder agencies as both relevant and of a high standard, as well as the restructuring of service delivery in the Indigenous portfolio.

The Institute continued to build its strategic alliances, for example, through its membership of the Cooperative Research Centre for Aboriginal Health (CRAH) and collaboration with the Federation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

Languages (FATSIL) on the National Indigenous Languages Survey. The Indigenous Facilitation and Mediation Project (IFaMP) commenced with significant external funding.

The Institute hosted the inaugural AIATSIS International Indigenous Fellow, Professor John Borrows, a member of the Chippewa of the Nawash First Nation in Ontario in Canada and Professor and Law Foundation Chair of Aboriginal Justice and Governance at the University of Victoria, British Columbia. Professor Borrows presented in the AIATSIS seminar series on Regionalism, Indigenous Governance and Decision Making (March–May) and delivered the annual Mabo Lecture at the 2004 Native Title Conference in June. The conference, co-hosted by the Institute's Native Title Research Unit (NTRU) and the Aboriginal Legal Rights Movement (ALRM) in Adelaide, attracted more than 450 delegates and reinforced the event as the pre-eminent annual conference in Australia on native title and Indigenous policy.

The Institute continued to build its reputation as a national and, arguably, world leader in the digital management of Indigenous materials. The AIATSIS digitisation program has begun the task of preserving and transferring the Institute's vast archive of written material and audio and visual recordings to digital format. The Institute was delighted, in May, to receive a new \$1.5 million Federal Government grant to enable our staff to continue to preserve and transfer these records and materials to digital format to ensure their long-term protection.

The Institute is using cutting-edge technology to rescue recorded aspects of our ancient cultures from deterioration, significantly increase the materials' accessibility by Indigenous Australians, and enable a better understanding of our collective history.

Under the digitisation program, more than 60 audiovisual collections have already been digitised, creating more than 75,000 digital objects, including language compilations. Some of the extensive library material undergoing digitisation has also been captured in online exhibitions including the historic *Dawn* and *New Dawn* magazines, 30 years of NAIDOC posters and a selection of rare books. An extensive suite of policies, procedures and technical standards dealing with digital objects within AIATSIS has been established for every stage of the digitisation process, and will culminate in the development of a secure, digital storage device and an effective digital asset management product.

Use of the AIATSIS Library has increased significantly during the year, as evidenced by a 30 per cent increase in reference desk enquiries, a 9 per cent increase in enquiries requiring a written response, and a 26 per cent increase in phone enquiries. The Library collection has grown through a range of acquisitions, gifts and donations such as the papers of former Director of the Office of Aboriginal Affairs and Secretary of the Department of Aboriginal Affairs, Barrie Dexter, and research print materials, photographs and audio tapes relating to the Freedom Ride of 1965 donated by Professor Ann Curthoys. Much of the latter was included in

Professor Curthoy's book *Freedom Ride: A Freedom Rider Remembers* which won the AIATSIS 2003 Stanner Award.

Aboriginal Studies Press continued to develop its publishing list, releasing seven books, including *Paddy's Road* on the life of Patrick Dodson, and two editions of the AIATSIS journal *Australian Aboriginal Studies*. A new management structure of a part-time Director and full-time Deputy Director has enabled the Press to finesse the publication schedule, develop new marketing opportunities, and launch an exciting new online publishing initiative *Our Tracks*.

To improve internal and external communications, Corporate Services initiated the *Insights* staff newsletter, whilst the new full-time Manager of Media and Communications worked to develop tools to lift the Institute's public profile. The proposed redevelopment of the AIATSIS website, which attracted 344,616 visits and 6,940,215 hits during the year, was also progressed.

Institute staff were active in planning activities including workshops with Council members to update the AIATSIS Corporate Plan, and participated in an internal governance review.

I was delighted to see the AIATSIS Indigenous Staff Caucus revitalised during the year. Of the Institute's 108 staff, 29 identify as Indigenous. The Caucus is contributing to the development of a number of Institute policies and procedures, including amendment of our Indigenous Training and Career Development Plan and the introduction of new staff induction procedures and cross-cultural awareness training.

As Principal, I express my appreciation of the support of the former and current Ministers for Immigration, Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs, the Hon. Philip Ruddock and the Hon. Senator Amanda Vanstone respectively, as well as the staff of AIATSIS and the elected representatives of AIATSIC.

I pay tribute to the leadership of my predecessor, Mr Russ Taylor. I also thank sincerely the AIATSIS Council, our committees, members and staff for their dedication, hard work and warm welcome to me in my new role as Principal. It is one that I relish.



Mr Steve Larkin
Principal