



**AIATSIS**

Australian Institute of Aboriginal  
and Torres Strait Islander Studies

**Submission 034**  
**Date received: 29/07/2011**



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*Further understanding of Australian Indigenous cultures, past and present through undertaking  
and publishing research, and providing access to print and audiovisual collections*

29 July 2011

Ms Julia Morris  
Secretary  
House of Representatives Standing Committee on  
Climate Change, Environment and the Arts  
PO Box 6021  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Ms Morris,

**Re: Submission to the Inquiry into Australia's Biodiversity in a Changing Climate**

We draw your attention to our research in Indigenous country and governance, and Indigenous social and cultural wellbeing, and its relevance to your inquiry.

In particular:

*1. The effects of climate change on biodiversity will affect Indigenous communities, their cultures and their economies*

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' laws and cultures are embedded in their traditional country, and are thus profoundly connected to biodiversity. Changes in climate that affect biodiversity have implications for the expression, maintenance, revival, enjoyment and transmission of Indigenous peoples' laws, cultures and knowledge. This includes their language, ceremonies, arts, crafts, music, and caring for country. All these activities are relevant to greater or lesser degrees to their subsistence and actual or potential commercial economies.

Research Fellow Dr Jessica Weir has conducted research into the experience of Aboriginal people from the Murray-Darling Basin, which has been described as an early experience of climate change. The effects of the loss of biodiversity from prolonged drought and the over allocation of water has been to diminish the cultural practices of hunting, gathering and fishing. This has affected cultural economies, such as the renown basket weaving tradition, and the health and wellbeing that accompanies healthy, thriving ecologies. Aboriginal people have expressed the loss of biodiversity as a fundamental challenge to their identity and ability to continue to practice their culture. Please refer to the published book Weir, J.K. *Murray River Country: An Ecological Dialogue with Traditional Owners*, Aboriginal Studies Press, 2009. Also, see attached Weir 2011 and Weir 2009.

The language team at AIATSIS – Dr Sarah Cutfield, Dr Kazuko Obata and Dr Doug Marmion – conducts research into language maintenance and endangered languages, including ethnobiology. The affects of climate change on reducing the presence of species and their diversity also diminishes language maintenance, and thereby the knowledge that language holds. This provides another challenge to intergenerational language and knowledge transmission already under pressure from cultural change.

*2. Current governance arrangements on native title lands and waters are not adequate to meet the challenges of conserving biodiversity in a changing climate.*

Dr Strelein, Dr Weir, and Ms Bauman have conducted research into the governance of native title lands. Recognised native title lands now comprise 12% of Australia, including nationally important ecosystems. Native title holders hold formal statutory responsibilities for these lands and waters, including land management and community development. Our research has revealed how the absence of State, Territory and Federal policies and funding to support the statutory roles of Registered Native Title Bodies Corporate is undermining the resilience of native title holders to manage their responsibilities today and plan for the future, as well as the workability of the native title sector for all parties. An edited book on this topic is forthcoming; we have attached a sample of our relevant publications: Bauman and Tran 2007; Bauman and Ganesharajah 2009; Weir 2011.

The breadth of our research into the governance of native title lands has generated two additional research projects: weeds management and climate change adaptation. With funding from the Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation we are researching the implications of native title for land management, with a focus on weeds. With funding from the Department of Climate Change and Energy Efficiency we are researching how institutional arrangements on native title lands can better facilitate Indigenous participation and decision-making in climate change adaptation. Both areas of research are in progress, but may have timely outcomes depending on the inquiry's schedule.

*3. Mechanisms to enhance community engagement*

AIATSIS researchers have expertise in research ethics with Indigenous communities, including engaging communities in research projects. Attached are our Guidelines for Ethical Research (AIATSIS 2011). Research Fellow Ms Toni Bauman has extensive expertise in mediation and facilitation with Indigenous communities (see attached Bauman and Pope 2008, and Bauman 2006). Visiting Indigenous Research Fellow Ms Samia Goudie is researching community engagement models and the use of digital media (see attached Davey and Goudie 2009).

To follow up any aspect of this submission, please contact Dr Lisa Strelein, Director of Indigenous Country and Governance Research Program on \_\_\_\_\_ or

Yours Sincerely,

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Russell Taylor

Principal