



Professor Mick Dodson,  
Chairman, AIATSIS

## Chairperson's message

The last year has been one of change for AIATSIS and for Indigenous Affairs generally. Following the Government's announcement in April 2004 that the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Services (ATSIS) would be abolished and program responsibilities would be transferred to mainstream departments and agencies, on 24 June 2004 AIATSIS was transferred to the Education, Science and Training portfolio. We anticipate that this decision will improve the Institute's ability to fulfill its responsibilities in our core areas of Indigenous research, collecting, dissemination and publishing.

As the leading national research institution in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, AIATSIS has responsibility for a plethora of research programs and services, most of which are undertaken jointly with Indigenous communities and many of which are undertaken in partnership with other research institutions. The research being undertaken by the AIATSIS Research Program — including its Research Grant Program — covers areas as diverse as social health, regional organisation and governance, intellectual property, Indigenous knowledge, history, arts, education and cultural transmission, language, anthropology, public policy, politics and law, archaeology and cultural tourism, native title, agreement making and mediation and decision making. I would like to draw attention, in particular, to the work being undertaken by AIATSIS in the area of Indigenous health.

The involvement of AIATSIS as a core partner in the Cooperative Research Centre (CRC) for Aboriginal Health builds upon the Institute's long-standing commitment to this area. AIATSIS is represented on the Board of Management of the CRC by the Principal, Mr Steve Larkin. The Institute's commitment to the area of health includes the ongoing work of two AIATSIS Health Research Fellows, Dr Graham Henderson and Dr Heather McDonald. Dr Henderson is addressing the social determinants of health and, in particular, the area of social and emotional wellbeing and resilience (with Ms Jo Victoria). His case studies focus on the Indigenous communities in Canberra, ACT and Wagga, Narooma and Armidale, NSW. He is also continuing his work (with Dr Maggie Brady) looking at the effect of alcohol abuse on Indigenous communities. Dr Heather McDonald's research in Halls Creek, WA, focuses on the little researched area of Indigenous concepts of

health and illness in remote Australia. Other initiatives in the health area being carried out at AIATSIS focus on youth suicide (Professor Colin Tatz); Aboriginal health and the physical environment — including issues of water quality in remote communities and social capital (Dr Graham Henderson); evidence-based policy-making in Indigenous Health (Mr Steve Larkin, Dr Graham Henderson and Ms Leila Smith); the history of the trachoma program (Drs. Gordon Briscoe and Graham Henderson and Ms Jilpia Nappaljarri Jones); and governance as a social determinant of health outcomes for Aboriginal people (Dr Patrick Sullivan). Research has also been carried out by Dr Julie Finlayson to profile the elements of success in two Indigenous organisations, including a regional Aboriginal medical service. A number of other research initiatives at AIATSIS have implications for the health area, such as the National Drug Law Enforcement Research Fund project being carried out by Mr Brendan Delahunty (with Dr Judy Putt from the Australian Institute of Criminology) under the direction of the Acting Deputy Principal, Research, Dr Peter Veth, which is looking at the policing implications of cannabis, amphetamine and other illicit drug use in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Study sites include Laverton, Kalgoorlie and Warburton, WA, Rockhampton and Woorabinda, Qld, the Tiwi Islands, NT, the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Lands, SA, and Queanbeyan, NSW. The research aims not only to improve the law enforcement sector's understanding of illicit drug use but to develop best policing practices that will help prevent and minimise harm from illicit drug use in Indigenous communities.

The issue of Indigenous health was also the subject of a seminar series held at AIATSIS during the year entitled *Health and Society: an Australian Indigenous Context*. The papers from that series, as well as publications from the research I have referred to above are or will be made available, either on the Institute's website ([www.aiatsis.gov.au](http://www.aiatsis.gov.au)) or in hard copy. They are complemented by two publications in the health area produced this year by the AIATSIS publishing arm, Aboriginal Studies Press, *Something Special: the inside story of the Katherine West Health Board*, by the Katherine West Health Board, and *Reading Doctors' Writing*, by David Piers Thomas. I am optimistic that the high quality research in the area of health being carried out by AIATSIS will underpin improvements in this area of crucial importance for Indigenous Australians.

AIATSIS again held a number of events of significance in the year, many of which are profiled later in this *Annual Report*. I was particularly pleased to be involved, as AIATSIS Chairperson and as Convenor of the Australian National University Institute for Indigenous Australia (ANUIIA), with the *Likan'mirri – Connections* exhibition, an exhibition of many of the important artworks held by AIATSIS. The exhibition, jointly sponsored by ANUIIA, AIATSIS and the Drill Hall Gallery, opened to much acclaim on 19 February at the Drill Hall Gallery, at the Australian National University. *Likan'mirri* is a Yolngu term with a variety of meanings which range from the literal meaning 'elbow' or 'the fork in a tree'

through to connections between the sacred and secular worlds. The exhibition, curated by Mr Wally Caruana, featured a number of renowned artists, including Nym Banduk, Gordon Bennett, Kevin Gilbert and Rover Thomas. It included 19th century sketches, early bark paintings, crayon drawing from the 1950s, feathered poles, photographs and bird sculptures. It was a rare opportunity to view a number of items in the AIATSIS Collection, many of which had been collected by Institute researchers over the past forty years and which had never been seen publicly before. The exhibition was extremely popular and the attendance at the opening broke all previous Drill Hall Gallery records.

I was also delighted and indeed, honoured on 9 June 2004 to name the AIATSIS Audiovisual Access client area after the late Mrs Laura Mandima Dixon. The naming took place in the presence of some forty members of Mrs Dixon's family who had travelled from all over New South Wales to Canberra for the occasion. Laura Mandima Dixon worked with a number of Institute researchers in the early 1970s to record her language Wangkumara and information about her Wangkumara culture. The recordings, which are deposited in the Institute archives, are invaluable and irreplaceable. It was an emotional occasion especially for members of Laura Dixon's family as they listened to her rendition of a song she had recorded in her language in the 1970s. The occasion brought home to all of us the importance, especially to Indigenous peoples, of the work being carried out by AIATSIS to research, record and to make available its unique collections of Indigenous culture.

In my message last year I wrote about the Institute's Digitisation Program, a program aimed at allowing digital access to and preservation of the Institute's collections, particularly audio recordings, print material and photographic images. In my last message I recorded my appreciation to ATSIC for funding this important program. On this occasion I would like to express my appreciation to ATSIC and the Minister for Indigenous Affairs following the decision in May 2004 to award the Institute a grant of \$1.5 million over the 2004–2005 financial year to continue with this program. The grant will enable AIATSIS to continue to make its collections of print and audiovisual material available to its clients, particularly those in remote locations.

Again, the Institute hosted a number of international visitors during the year, including Professor John Borrows from the Cape Croker Indian Reserve, Canada, who holds the Law Foundation Chair in Aboriginal Justice and Governance at the University of Victoria, British Columbia and Assistant Grand Chief Lloyd Phillips of the Mohawk Council, Kahnawake (Canada). Professor Borrows spent time at the Institute under the AIATSIS International Indigenous Visiting Fellowship program. Other visitors included Professor Erica-Irene Daes, the UN Founding Chairperson and Special Rapporteur on the UN Working Group on Indigenous Populations; Ms Dalee Sambo Dorough from Alaska; Ms Nora Sanders, the Deputy Minister for Justice for Nunavut; Mr Jean Fournier the Canadian High Commissioner; a group of South African Land Restitution Commissioners who were undertaking a study

tour in Australia; and a delegation of some twenty Indonesian officials undertaking human rights training in Australia. As always, the visits provided a wonderful opportunity for a diverse range of views and information to be exchanged and discussed about Indigenous and other issues.

The year also saw the resignation of Mr Russell Taylor in October 2003, AIATSIS Principal since January 1997, and the appointment to the position in June 2004 of Mr Steve Larkin, previously the AIATSIS Deputy Principal. I would like to record Council's appreciation to Mr Taylor, for his significant contribution to the Institute, particularly his leadership as the Institute moved into its new building on Acton Peninsula, as well as of his skills in the areas of finance and governance. Mr Taylor is now Chief Executive Officer of the NSW Aboriginal Housing Office in Sydney. I would also like to welcome Mr Larkin to the position of Principal. Mr Larkin, a Kungarkany man from Darwin in the Northern Territory, who holds a Bachelor of Social Work and a Masters degree in Social Science. He has extensive experience in the area of Aboriginal health and in the government sector. I, together with my fellow Council members, look forward to working with him in the coming years.

Against the backdrop of the changes in Indigenous affairs, it is pleasing to be able to report continuity in the membership of the AIATSIS Council. In November 2003 Professor Martin Nakata was reappointed to Council for a further period of two years and in May 2004 Professor Robert Tonkinson, Professor Larissa Behrendt, Mr Michael Williams and I were re-elected to Council again for a further two years. Other Council members whose terms of appointment are continuing are Mr Eric (Dickie) Bedford, Ms Jackie Huggins AM, Ms Natascha McNamara AM, MBE, and Ms Raymattja Marika. Finally, I would like to end my report by paying tribute to my fellow Council members and the staff of AIATSIS. They have worked with cooperation and dedication to ensure yet another excellent and highly productive year for the Institute.



Professor Michael Dodson, AM  
Chairperson