



## Chapter 1

# Research

### Highlights 2007–08

- Efforts to seek research funding from external sources resulted in an eight-fold increase in revenue, to \$2.22 million
- Researchers worked on some thirty projects involving partners and sponsors in academia, government and industry
- Twenty-five new research grants were approved, totalling \$620,000
- An Indigenous governance handbook was published, providing guidance on achieving better outcomes in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations
- The final report on the Yarrabah family violence project focused on a prevention program in recommendations to the Yarrabah community and the Queensland Government
- Funding of nearly \$1 million over three years provided for a new Indigenous Fellowship program

## Overview of AIATSIS Research Program

AIATSIS is the premier national, multidisciplinary research institution focusing on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander studies. Its mission is to increase understanding of Indigenous cultures and societies within Australia and internationally.

AIATSIS has responsibility for a multitude of research programs and services, and engages in numerous partnerships with research institutions and Indigenous regional alliances, communities and individuals. Research activities are conducted by the Research Program and the Native Title Research Unit, and are mainly carried out by staff researchers who are experts in their fields of study and practice. A research grants program provides funding for external researchers to conduct their own research.

AIATSIS offers an attractive research environment, increasingly for early- to mid-career Indigenous scholars. In June 2008, the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations and the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs agreed to contribute nearly \$1 million over the period 2008–11 to enhance our ability to engage Indigenous visiting scholars.

The Research Program maintains wide-ranging expertise in Indigenous studies and policy research. We focus on six areas of research under two thematic headings:

- Indigenous social and cultural wellbeing
  - Indigenous health and wellbeing
  - education and cultural transmission
  - Indigenous language and cultural expression
- Indigenous country and governance
  - Indigenous governance and government
  - Indigenous country management
  - native title and traditional ownership.

In 2006 the Institute allocated additional resources to seeking research funding

from external sources. This policy was spectacularly successful in 2007–08, with revenue increasing eight-fold over the previous year.

In order to reallocate funding in the short term, the Director of Research position was left vacant during the year. Dr Lisa Strelein was appointed to the position Director, Research Programs to oversee both the Research and Native Title Research Unit staff. Restructuring of staff positions will see the program budget in balance in 2008–09. Revenue will be used to support additional positions when it is available.

Total expenditure by the Research Program in 2007–08 was \$2.77 million, offset by revenue of \$2.22 million.

## Research activities for the year

This chapter summarises the research activities that AIATSIS staff undertook during the year. A list of publications and presentations by research staff during the year is provided at Appendix 1. More detailed information can be obtained by contacting individual researchers.

### Indigenous social and cultural wellbeing

#### Indigenous health and wellbeing

Research Fellows **Ms Kerry Arabena** and **Dr Graham Henderson** and the Principal, **Mr Steve Larkin**, worked on several collaborative projects with Indigenous communities, including through the Cooperative Research Centre for Aboriginal Health (CRAH). Dr Henderson was on leave for four months during the year undertaking emergency humanitarian work in Uganda.

#### Universal Citizen Project

This project, undertaken by Ms Arabena, outlines a model of the 'Universal Citizen', and uses a framework that connects Indigenous philosophies with ecological perspectives to underpin strategies for living

into the twenty-first century. The framework synthesises the relationships between Indigenous and ecological knowledge, place and sustainable citizen states in Australia. Ms Arabena published preliminary results in a paper entitled 'The Universal Citizen: An Indigenous citizenship framework for the twenty-first century' in a peer-reviewed journal and was invited to present this work at a conference on ecological sustainability and sustainable societies in Halifax, Canada in June 2007.

Ms Arabena continued her PhD thesis writing and maintained her academic links with fellow postgraduate students and staff of the science faculty at the Australian National University. She was a keynote speaker at the Asia-Pacific EcoHealth Conference held in Melbourne from 30 November to 3 December 2007.

#### **Torres Strait Islander Symposium — Rehoboth**

The Zenadeth Kes Rehoboth Torres Strait Islander Free Thinking Symposium was held on Thursday Island in December 2007. The symposium brought together Torres Strait Islander Elders and academics to review the scholarly activities undertaken by Torres Strait Islanders and to consider the foundations for a Torres Strait Islander Institute. AIATSIS supported this project with staff from the Native Title Research Unit and the Audiovisual Archive. Queensland Health has provided funding to develop a journal of this event.

#### **Family Violence Project**

The final report on this project, titled *Yarrabah Family Violence Report*, was received by AIATSIS in March 2008. The report focused on the formative stages of a violence prevention program, implemented through a crime prevention project in the Yarrabah community. The report made five recommendations to the Yarrabah community, and a further seven to the Queensland Government more broadly,

around community solutions to local domestic and family violence problems.

#### **Queensland Social and Emotional Wellbeing Project**

This project commenced in March 2008, and is funded by Queensland Health through the Centre for Rural and Remote Mental Health Queensland, based in Cairns. The two major outputs from this project will be framework documents for suicide prevention and promotion of social and emotional wellbeing in Indigenous communities in Queensland. Ms Arabena and Dr Henderson participated as expert working group members.

#### **Indigenous Prison Health Project**

This project is a collaboration among Winnunga Nimmityjah Aboriginal Health Service (WNAHS), AIATSIS, Australian National University, University of Canberra, ACT Connection and CRCAH. The resulting *WNAHS Prison Health Report* was presented to the ACT Government in August 2007. ACT Health is reviewing the findings with a view to implementing recommendations arising from the research. ACT Health will work with WNAHS to deliver a dedicated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health service at the Alexander Maconochie Centre in Canberra when it opens in August 2008.

One outcome of this project was an Aboriginal Prisoner Health Research Roundtable, held at AIATSIS in November 2007. The event was co-hosted by the CRCAH, AIATSIS and the Public Health Association of Australia. The roundtable identified priority areas of research to improve Indigenous prison health, to reduce recidivism and incarceration rates, and to use the opportunities prisons provide to improve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and wellbeing. Attendees included health researchers, corrections staff, prison advocates and health service providers. A framework document arising from the meeting is planned for launch in August 2008. The media release for the

roundtable is available at <[www.crcah.org.au/communication/downloads/Aboriginal\\_PrisonersMedia\\_Release.pdf](http://www.crcah.org.au/communication/downloads/Aboriginal_PrisonersMedia_Release.pdf)>.

This project and the roundtable led to the submission of a 2008 National Health and Medical Research Council capacity building grant application on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander prison health, managed through Curtin University but with a national focus, including nine Canberra-based researchers from WNAHS, ANU, AIATSIS, the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, and ACT Health.

### **Winnunga Nimmitjiah Aboriginal Health Service Spirituality Project**

This project is a collaboration among WNAHS, AIATSIS and CRCAH. The research is a review of local, regional, national and international literature about spirituality and Indigenous health. The research arose from findings of a CRCAH workshop in 2004 on the social determinants of Indigenous health, and a CRCAH Social and Emotional Wellbeing Roundtable in 2006 in Cairns. The review is expected to be completed in October 2008.

### **Muuji Regional Centre for Social and Emotional Wellbeing Project**

Dr Henderson continued work on this project — a collaboration among AIATSIS, CRCAH, WNAHS, Riverina Medical and Dental Aboriginal Corporation (Wagga Wagga) and Katungul Aboriginal Corporation Community and Medical Services (Narooma). It has involved a survey of fifty-six mainstream services impacting on the social and emotional wellbeing of Indigenous peoples living in the 'Muuji Region' of south-east Australia. The survey covered the domains of health, social health, education, employment and training, law and justice, and local government. The four reports arising from this project, to be published by the Muuji Regional Centre for Social and Emotional

Wellbeing, are scheduled for completion in August 2008.

### **Gugan Gulwan Youth Aboriginal Corporation Adolescent Fathers Project**

Ms Arabena and Dr Henderson have continued work on this project, a collaboration among the Gugan Gulwan Youth Aboriginal Corporation, AIATSIS and CRCAH. It involves conducting face-to-face interviews with a sample of up to thirty adolescent Indigenous fathers living in the ACT–Queanbeyan region. The project will develop a better understanding of the circumstances that impact upon the health and wellbeing of this poorly understood group. The Department of Health and Ageing has contributed \$16,000 towards this project, which is scheduled for completion in December 2008.

### **Other activities**

Ms Arabena completed a guide on palliative care options in the ACT, as a conclusion to the ACT Palliative Care Program steered by the AIATSIS team. She participated in a judging panel to assess applications for the national Excellence Awards for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health; the panel undertook a number of assessment processes between August and November 2007.

Papers from the CRCAH Social Determinants of Aboriginal Health Workshop held in Adelaide in 2004 were formally launched at the 38th Public Health Association of Australia Annual Conference in Mparntwe (Alice Springs) in September 2007. The collection is titled *Beyond Band-aids: Exploring the underlying social determinants of Aboriginal health 2007*. AIATSIS researchers co-authored four chapters in this publication, covering culture, governance, social capital, social and emotional wellbeing, and environmental health.

## Education and cultural transmission

During 2007 and early 2008, **Dr Anthea Jo Taylor** continued her ethnographic project tracking a group of Indigenous children in urban settings as they made the transition through kindergarten, pre-primary and into their first year of formal schooling. Observation was undertaken in various classrooms in four Western Australian government primary schools, and a field presence maintained in the feeder kindergartens studied in 2006.

Dr Taylor is currently working to complete a project report and various papers on aspects of the early childhood education project, prior to completing her AIATSIS Visiting Fellowship during 2008.

Preliminary results have been presented in several forums including the AIATSIS Seminar Series in first semester 2008 and to a visiting delegation of ACT school principals from the Dare to Lead Project.

In October 2007, Dr Taylor was invited to participate in a National Think Tank on Indigenous Education, convened by the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth and the Telethon Institute Kulunga Research Network. The purpose was to develop recommendations regarding Indigenous education for consideration by the Commonwealth government.

She has maintained an involvement in a large Edith Cowan University project examining the relationship between literacy and numeracy benchmarking scores, and students' engagement with middle primary to lower secondary school in Western Australia.

## Aboriginal Child Language Acquisition Project

**Dr Patrick McConvell** is involved in this project, gathering data on young children learning languages in multilingual Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory and

Western Australia, funded by the Australian Research Council and AIATSIS. The first phase ended in 2007 with submission of three PhD theses and development of a large audio-visual database with linked transcriptions. A book reporting on the project and related issues is due for publication in July 2008.

## National Family Relationship Competencies

AIATSIS was commissioned by the Attorney-General's Department to review the National Family Relationship Competencies to examine the applicability of the skills competencies developed for practitioners in family counselling, family dispute resolution, children's contact services, and family relationship education to Indigenous practitioners, and non-Indigenous practitioners working with Indigenous clients.

**Ms Marg Cranney** commenced this project in June 2008.

## Indigenous language and cultural expression

### Online Language Community Access Pilot

The Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts (DEWHA) provided \$203,000 for stage 1 of this study. The project, managed by Dr McConvell and **Mr Jason Lee**, is assessing the feasibility of providing remote communities with online access to language materials in AIATSIS archives. While the project successfully demonstrated that the internet can be used to distribute language-oriented material, there are problems with:

- download speeds — language files are usually very large, and are not handled well by slow connection speeds
- software complexity — the software used in the pilot was developed for professional linguists, and extensive training is required to use all of the features.



Noongar Elders at the Welcome Ceremony.

## Vision and cultural passion at Native Title conference

*Koorah, Yira, Boordah:* past, present, future — under this theme set by their hosts, the Noongar people, more than 600 delegates gathered in Perth for the 2008 National Native Title Conference, now the largest Indigenous policy conference in Australia.

Delivering the annual Mabo Lecture, Chairperson of the Waitangi Tribunal and head of the Maori Land Court, Chief Judge Joe Williams, told the conference that Indigenous people must build a vision of their destiny. 'Vision is the great challenge of leadership, and it will be for Indigenous leaders to build the vision and convince the people to travel with them,' he said.

The conference was convened by AIATSIS and the South West Aboriginal Land and Sea Council (SWALSC) at the Perth Convention Centre in June. 'We want to look at how government policy can work with the aspirations of our community,' said Mr Glen Kelly, Chief Executive Officer, SWALSC. 'Noongar native title is not simply about land, it is an historic opportunity for the state and Commonwealth to turn a new page in history in relation to Noongar people. It provides a vehicle to resolve many of the quests and challenges that exist with the Noongar community'. AIATSIS Research Programs Director Dr Lisa Strelein said, 'This conference gives traditional owners, representative bodies, law and policy makers the chance to get together and talk about the latest ideas and issues in native title. We have an opportunity, in this new political environment, for non-Indigenous parties to come to the table to reach resolution — not because we must, or for what we might gain, but because of the rightness of the idea.'

More than 150 speakers included Western Australian Deputy Premier, Mr Eric Ripper, who delivered the keynote address, and AIATSIS Chairperson, Professor Mick Dodson. Before the conference, three hundred young Noongar students from Bunbury, Merredin, Narrogin and Balga senior high schools, impressed elders with their passion for issues such as cultural survival, respect for elders, greater community involvement in schools and an end to racism.



The project has potential to improve community access to archives held across Australia, with appropriate access controls, while resolving some of the difficulties faced by local archives such as lack of resources, maintenance and backup.

DEWHA has agreed to extend the project to stage 2 in 2008–09. This will include developing a more useable software interface for entering and extracting data; adding information about the material, including who may access it; developing material to produce new products, such as educational materials, where appropriate; and uploading new information and material to the repository.

The Katherine Language Centre and Lockhart River Council agreed to participate in the project.

## AUSTLANG

The AUSTLANG web-based Australian Indigenous languages database brings together information from a number of sources to provide a comprehensive listing of Australian Indigenous languages and dialects, including alternative names and spellings, documentation and resources, researchers and programs, locations, and classifications.

In collaboration with the Australian National University, **Dr Kazuko Obata** has nearly completed the administrator and public interfaces. Live release is expected in late 2008. AUSTLANG is linked to the Mura® and OZBIB catalogues to enable automated searches and, there will be links to other authoritative sources. Nearly 600 language boundaries have been drawn, with another 200 boundaries to be drawn. Users can search the database by language name or place name, or by navigating a map of Australia.

The value of AUSTLANG has been recognised both nationally and internationally. ANU may

use the map interface in the development of other databases. The National Library of Australia has requested access to information in AUSTLANG.

AIATSIS is currently seeking funding to maintain AUSTLANG. This effort will focus on AUSTLANG's unique value as a language identification and resource discovery tool, its national and comprehensive scope, and its ability to include minority/marginalised or understudied languages and dialects.

## Endangered languages

Dr McConvell continued work on the Victoria River District Language and Culture Documentation Project funded by DOBES, the endangered languages project of the Volkswagen Foundation based at Max-Planck Institute at Nijmegen, the Netherlands. The work of documenting languages and putting them into archives also feeds into the Online Language Community Access Pilot, which was developed in cooperation with Max-Planck Institute.

## Indigenous country law and governance

### Indigenous governance and government

**Dr Patrick Sullivan** is working with Ngaanyatjarra Council, the Shire of Ngaanyatjarraku and communities to investigate the range of factors that affect, positively or negatively, outcomes in service delivery on the Ngaanyatjarra Lands. The research focuses on the delivery of services by the Aboriginal community and government public sectors. The initial stage conducted in 2007–08 established the governance and land tenure environment of the Ngaanyatjarra lands and assessed the Regional Partnership Agreement's operation in its first two and half years.

Dr Sullivan is well advanced with preparing a book based on his journal articles and

discussion papers as well as unpublished material. The book deals with the role of governments and the Indigenous community sector in service delivery to Indigenous settlements.

Dr Sullivan has also completed two consultancy contracts in collaboration with the ANU's National Centre for Indigenous Studies. These related to:

- creating a representative Indigenous voice at the national level (for the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission)
- governance arrangements for compensation from the Ord Stage 2 irrigation scheme (for the Yawoorroong Miriuwung Gajerrong Yirrgab Noong Dawang Corporation).

The AIATSIS Council commissioned Dr Sullivan to write a research report on policy changes at the Indigenous Land Corporation, which was delivered in May 2008. He has also published a paper on the ethnography of bureaucracy in an international journal and completed another on accountability regimes surrounding Aboriginal development, also for an international journal.

The Australian Collaboration project *Successful Strategies in Indigenous Organisations* resulted in the publication of three reports, which included guidance on achieving better outcomes in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations.

### **Indigenous country management**

**Mr Steve Kinnane's** Living Country, Working Country project investigated avenues by which Indigenous approaches to sustainable development of country through culturally appropriate economies are operating in the Kimberley region.

**Dr Graeme Ward's** research program is in the field of cultural heritage tourism involving Indigenous Australian places. A major part of this is developing awareness

of and assessing the impact of tourism on heritage places, which are the main focus of much tourism. In progress are reports to the Wadeye community, academic articles on management of cultural heritage places, tourism developments in the Wadeye area, archaeological potential and management requirements of sites surveyed, and collaborative conference papers on results of recent research.

Case studies based on field research with Wadeye community members and history papers based in Wadeye and other archival materials have been drafted for discussion with participants in Wadeye.

### **Native title and traditional ownership**

The Institute's activities in this research area are conducted primarily through the Native Title Research Unit (NTRU). The NTRU is chiefly funded through a research partnership with the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, with some specific research projects and activities, such as the Native Title Conference, also attracting funding from other sources. The NTRU completed the second of a three-year research and services program in June 2008. The NTRU has three Fellows who work on a range of research projects, as outlined below.

### **Applicants, authorisation and Indigenous decision making**

AIATSIS commissioned a paper exploring the authorisation and resolution of boundary overlap processes implemented through the Queensland South Native Title Services Strategic Plan. The paper was authored by Ms Valerie Cooms and Mr Tony McAvoy. This innovative land summit-based approach has been applied in a methodical and strategic way to progress claims across southern Queensland.



**Ms Toni Bauman and Ms Tran Tran**

revised existing authorisation resources on the AIATSIS website and published new information about relevant cases, legislation and literature.

Ms Bauman contributed to two editions of the *Indigenous Law Bulletin* relating to Indigenous decision making. She completed a sabbatical at the University of Melbourne during which she drafted a chapter for a proposed publication titled 'Mediation in the Asia-Pacific Region: Transforming conflicts and building peace'.

Ms Bauman also led a training workshop on Indigenous decision making and dispute management for native title representative bodies (NTRBs) and native title service community and field officers, and facilitated a meeting of Indigenous officers in the Family Relationship Centres.

Ms Bauman is a member of the Attorney-General's Committee for a National Code of Mediation Conduct and an adviser to the Federal Court's Indigenous Dispute Resolution and Conflict Management Case Study Project. **Dr Lisa Strelein** is a member of the steering committee for the project.

**State connection requirements**

AIATSIS, together with the National Native Title Tribunal, hosted the Getting Outcomes Sooner Workshop in July 2007. The workshop focused on the processing of native title connection issues by state governments, with the aim of identifying best practice approaches and exploring options for reaching agreement faster and more efficiently without compromising common law standards. A number of state government participants in the workshop have subsequently reviewed their practices, in conjunction with NTRBs. A report on the workshop is available on the AIATSIS website.

Connection issues, in particular threshold and requirements of proof, were also addressed at the Native Title Conference 2008 through sessions on:

- the subjective nature of connection assessments, and the need for independent management of assessment processes
- the need for reform to the requirements of proof under the Native Title Act that underpin the connection processes, in particular the requirements of section 223.

**Prescribed bodies corporate**

The NTRU continues to lead engagement with the growing native title prescribed bodies corporate (PBC) sector, providing resources, facilitating meetings of government agencies involved in native title issues and commencing several case study partnerships. The case study partnerships are sponsored by the Minerals Council of Australia.

Ms Bauman is working with the Djabugay PBC, examining their native title determination and related agreements. Of particular concern to the Djabugay is the absence of reference to joint management in their consent determination and Indigenous land use agreement over Barron Gorge National Park and in the draft management plan. Ms Bauman conducted fieldwork with the Djabugay in April 2008, and will continue with strategic planning in 2008–09.

**Dr Jessica Weir** is working with the Karajarri Traditional Lands Association PBC in the Kimberley. In April and May 2008, she conducted fieldwork with the association, assisting the PBC to organise their office and identify priorities for action. This fieldwork included conducting a strategic planning workshop and initiating a business planning process. Dr Weir has also held discussions with the Patta PBC in the Northern Territory



about their participation in the NTRU's PBC research project and their planning needs.

At the request of the Torres Strait Regional Authority and Torres Strait native title holders, Dr Strelein and Ms Bauman co-convened two workshops for Torres Strait PBCs in December 2007 and April 2008. The first workshop focused on issues of organisational structuring, governance and the role of PBCs within the context of plans to establish a single regional local government authority. The second workshop focused on issues relating to economic and enterprise development. Outcomes from the workshops were reports in the *Torres News* and a report on the December workshop was completed by Mr Lex Dodd. These workshops will form part of a regional case study to be undertaken by Dr Strelein.

Dr Strelein has given a number of presentations on PBCs to a diverse range of audiences, including to the Australian National University, the Attorney-General's Department, and a claimant group meeting in Western Queensland.

Building on the research base established by the NTRU during 2006–07, Dr Weir published

an issues paper in July 2007 outlining the potential role of PBCs in the post-native title determination landscape. Professor Paul Memmot and Mr Peter Blackwood were commissioned to revise work carried out by Prof. Memmot in relation to native title in Cape York. Their paper, 'Holding Title and Managing Land in Cape York — Two case studies', is being finalised for publication.

Dr Strelein is engaged in a partnership, in collaboration with Dr Manuhua Barcham of Massey University in New Zealand, with the Lhere Artepe PBC in Alice Springs. This research involves comparative case studies in New Zealand, Canada and the United States. Dr Strelein presented on the PBC project to the annual general meeting of the Lhere Artepe PBC and, together with Dr Barcham, gave a presentation as part of the AIATSIS Seminar Series providing a comparative review of post-settlement Indigenous organisations in Australian and New Zealand.

AIATSIS convened two meetings of federal government agencies with responsibilities for programs relevant to PBCs. NTRU staff also provided advice to the Office of the



Registrar of Indigenous Corporations on the development of its Good Governance Guide including requirements specifically relevant to PBCs.

### **Taxation, trusts and the distribution of benefits**

Dr Strelein continued her research on native title taxation issues. She completed a research monograph examining the tax treatment of payments and benefit packages arising from native title agreements. This is an extremely complex area of law and this monograph is the first comprehensive review of the issues, identifying how native title fits within the existing tax system and proposing potential resolutions for the taxation of native title.

AIATSIS has provided leadership within the sector on taxation issues, including advising the Commonwealth Treasury and prompting reform proposals from the Minerals Council of Australia. Dr Strelein provided advice and presentations to the National Native Title Council, NTRBs and other native title stakeholders. She was a co-facilitator for the July 2007 Aurora Legal Master Class, and was the discussion leader on taxation.

She also participated in the NTRB Senior Professional Officers' Forum in September 2007, contributing a paper on tax incentive schemes.

Dr Strelein is a research partner in an Australian Research Council linkage grant, 'The Implementation of Agreements and Treaties with Indigenous Peoples from Postcolonial States'. She presented at the Mining, Petroleum and Gas Symposium in July 2007, and participated in follow-up meetings of a working group of tax experts convened at the symposium to further investigate native title tax issues. She was a co-convenor and facilitator and gave a presentation at the symposium on Indigenous Communities, Economic Development and Tax Policy, with the Agreements, Treaties and Negotiated Settlements Project, in February 2008. Selected papers from this symposium are being prepared for publication.

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L-R: Daisy Andrews, Dillon Andrews and Fred May at the Old Fitzroy River Crossing, October 2005; AIATSIS Visiting Research Fellow Steve Kinnane in Country; Ju-Ju Wilson and Maureen Martin digging for turtle eggs, Lacrosse Island. Photographs © Steve Kinnane.

## **Kindy to primary school: the Indigenous experience**

Why do so many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children under-perform in national benchmarking tests for reading, writing and numeracy? AIATSIS visiting Fellow Dr Anthea Jo Taylor set out to study a cohort of Indigenous children in kindergarten, then in transition to pre-primary and year one, to find out if the youngsters' early childhood education experience might shed light on the issue.

'If by year three, when the national testing is first applied, so many Indigenous children are already falling behind and losing interest, are there factors embedded in the experience of pre-primary and the first year of schooling that if addressed could help such children reach their potential?' she asked.

Over a period of three years, Dr Taylor tracked particular groups of Indigenous children in metropolitan Perth from two kindergartens and three school pre-primary centres. She sat with the youngsters, observing as they dealt with the learning environment, interacted with teachers and classmates and accomplished the transition from each year to the next.

'Some of these children are very bright and are doing very well,' she recalled. However in some children the study revealed marked changes in motivation and engagement during the pre-school year between kindergarten and Year One.

It is thought that one of the contributing factors is the significant decrease in adult, and particularly Indigenous adult, supervision of children's classroom learning after they leave kindergarten.

The study also threw light on issues relating to the high levels of intermittent attendance by many Indigenous children, particularly a lack of systematic provision in classrooms to 'plug the gaps' in instruction for these children who, through no fault of their own, were missing school. Their struggle to keep up and the difficulty they had establishing and maintaining friendships was likely to be contributing to early frustration in the classroom and playground.

The study is continuing informally over a range of schools.

Together with the Aurora Project, AIATSIS is coordinating the provision of advice requests relating to corporate structuring, commercial arrangements, taxation and trusts issues from NTRBs to a pro bono panel of law firms. The Aurora Project, hosted by Monash University, is funded to provide capacity building and professional development services to native title entities. Dr Strelein convened a workshop for NTRB lawyers in June 2008 to consider advices received from the panel, examine the implications for NTRB practice and identify further issues for consideration.

### **Native Title, Land and Water Project**

This is a new project for 2007–08 with three elements: native title and freshwater; native title and ecology; and native title and the joint management of national parks.

**Native title and freshwater:** As part of a collaborative research partnership with the Murray Lower Darling Rivers Indigenous Nations (MLDRIN), Jessica Weir submitted her manuscript ‘Murray River Country: An ecological dialogue with traditional owners’ for PhD examination in October 2007 and was awarded her PhD in March 2008. Dr Weir also published two book chapters relating to this partnership, gave a presentation in the AIATSIS Seminar Series, and the Seminar Series at the Fenner School of Environment and Society at ANU. She provided research support to MLDRIN with respect to their involvement on the expert advisory group for the UNESCO — International Hydrological Program project on water and cultural diversity.

In December 2007, Ms Weir provided advice to the Western Australia Department of Water and the Fitzroy River Catchment Action Management Project regarding Indigenous interests in water and participation in water management. Synergies have developed between Dr Weir’s strategic planning work with the Karajarri Traditional Lands

Association PBC and the association’s groundwater interests and responsibilities.

**Native title and ecology:** This research work is broadening disciplinary engagement with native title, to extend our understanding of native title within the context of ecological relationships, ecological change and ecological destruction. Dr Weir convened a session titled ‘Native Title and Ecology: political/legal transformations and sustaining ecologies’ for the AIATSIS Conference 2007 and gave a paper on native title and environmental management. Papers from this session, together with other solicited papers, are contributing to an edited volume on native title and ecology that will be edited by Dr Weir.

Dr Weir gave a guest lecture to the ANU’s Crawford School of Economics and Government in April 2008 on balancing conflicting priorities between irrigation, sustainability, Indigenous and recreational interests.

### **Native title and joint management:**

Ms Bauman is contributing to the third element of the project, building on a case study of Nitmiluk National Park which she completed as part of the Australian Collaboration’s Successful Aboriginal Organisations project. Ms Bauman continued to examine joint management issues within the context of native title, and gave a presentation at the AIATSIS Conference 2007 emphasising the need for evaluating joint management as process, partnership and relationship; and considering how native title rights and interests might be realised and evaluated in the native title settlement of parks in the Northern Territory. In June 2008, she facilitated a joint management meeting of staff of the Northern Land Council and Northern Territory Parks and Wildlife and Traditional Owners of Gregory National Park.



### Future of connection material

Many valuable and irreplaceable documents have been created during research for native title claims. While some NTRBs have dedicated staff to manage these documents, most have neither the necessary resources nor the in-house staff expertise to care for them properly.

In 2005, the NTRU commenced research to examine issues of arrangement, preservation and access to connection material. The project involved a series of workshops, surveys and web resources and was directed by requests from NTRBs for information, resources and policy recommendations. The NTRU's Native Title Research and Access Officer, **Ms Grace Koch**, completed a final report on the project. The report made recommendations relating to:

- identification, arrangement and description
- preservation conservation measures
- access and use protocols
- the location of external repositories for connection materials.

These recommendations were presented to and endorsed by NTRB Senior Professional Officers' and Chief Executive Officers' Forums in March 2008 and have in principle support from the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs to be implemented in 2008–09.

### Links with other organisations

Dr Jo Taylor coordinated an AIATSIS staff response to the Australian Bureau of Statistics on its proposed topics for the 2008 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey or (NATSISS). Comments were provided on many questions relating to language and culture.

During 2007–08 AIATSIS researchers worked on around thirty projects involving partners and sponsors in academia, government and industry. A list of projects and sponsors is at [Appendix 2](#).

### Grants

There were 75 applications for grants in the 2008 round, requesting a total of \$2.486 million. At its meeting in May 2008, the AIATSIS Council approved the Research Advisory Committee's recommendations for 25 new grants totalling \$619,980, with funding available from 1 July 2008. A list of these grants is at [Appendix 3](#). Project information is published on the AIATSIS website, and research results will be published in the future when they are available.

Contracts for 33 out of 34 grants from the 2007 round were settled; the remaining offer was withdrawn because the researcher was unable to obtain necessary community clearances. Three grants from previous years were cancelled for non-performance by the grantee.

Grants administration processes have been reviewed to improve internal management and to provide a more comprehensive advisory document to applicants. Applicants' feedback on the new materials was nearly all positive, and administrative effort in processing the 2008 applications was reduced by around 40 per cent. A proposed new grants management system was deferred indefinitely, because the business case did not demonstrate clear benefits over simpler solutions such as spreadsheets.

The grants team has also been active in chasing interim progress reports from grantees; completing old grant files from before 2000; creating new files for 2001–2006 successful and unsuccessful grants; and tracking materials to be deposited in the Library and Audiovisual Archive.



A revised scoring system for applications is being developed, following in-principle agreement at the Research Advisory Committee's November 2007 meeting, and will be completed in time for the committee's September 2008 meeting. This should provide a more transparent method of assessing applications, particularly relating to the 'special emphasis' criteria.

## Visitors program

AIATSIS is a national leader in research in Indigenous studies, with internal expertise being augmented and invigorated by visitors to the program. The AIATSIS Research Visitors Program provides opportunities for visiting scholars and students to participate in the activities of the program and to exchange knowledge.

### Council Honorary Fellows

Adjunct Professor Colin Tatz

Dr Gordon Briscoe

Dr Les Hiatt (1931–2008)

### International visitors

Dr Manuhua Barcham Massey University, New Zealand, October 2007

Professor Paul Chartrand University of Saskatchewan, Canada, December 2007

### Visiting fellows

Dr Sujatha Kalimili School of Education and Community Studies, University of Canberra

Mr David Nash linguist

Mr Phillip Mills CEO of Queensland Health in the Torres Strait Region

Mr Mark Crocombe Cultural coordinator, Thamarurr Regional Council

Ms Jilpia Nappaljari Jones completed her personal reflections on the National Trachoma and Eye Health Project Kanamkek-Yile Ngala Museum (Wadeye) worked on annotations to materials deposited with the Audiovisual Archive and with Dr Ward, and advanced reports and papers being co-authored with Traditional Owners

Ms Leila Smith Completed her master's thesis with the topic, 'Tiddas Taking Action: Political engagement among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women'

Dr Vanessa Johnston Menzies School of Health Research, is exploring the social determinants of smoking among Indigenous people and assessing the impact of Northern Territory Government local tobacco control programs

Mr Steven Ross Visiting Indigenous Research Fellow, was hosted by the NTRU for four weeks in January 2008 to draft a paper on the cultural values of water

Mr Tony Lee Visiting Indigenous Research Fellow, was hosted by the NTRU working on the PBC project.

cont.

### Student interns

The NTRU contributes to the development of native title practitioners by participating in a number of student internship programs. During 2007–08 the NTRU hosted the following interns under the Aurora Project

June–July 2007

Ms Corina O'Dowd ANU

Ms Thao Pham Latrobe University

December 2007

Ms Kerry Kennell Griffith University

January–February 2008

Ms Sabine Elvy and ANU

Ms Hilary Jones

Ms Delyna Baxter University of Queensland

June–July 2008

Ms Cynthia Ganesharajah,

Ms Ingrid Hammer and

Ms Grainne Marsden, ANU

### Research advisory bodies

The quality, independence and ethics of AIATSIS research activities and research grants are subject to oversight by the statutory Research Advisory Committee, the Native Title Research Advisory Committee and the Research Ethics Committee, which make recommendations to the AIATSIS Council. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have a major role to play as members of these and other committees (see also [Publishing Advisory Committee, page 22](#)).

#### The Research Advisory Committee

assesses applications made to the Institute for research grants, and makes recommendations to the Council in relation to research matters and applications for membership of the Institute. The committee comprises three members of the Council appointed by the Council; eight members of the Institute, who are elected by members of the Institute in accordance with the Institute's rules. The Principal is ex officio chair.

During 2007–08, the eight elected members of the committee and their areas of expertise were:

Mr Kim Akerman	Archaeology
Ms Jeannie Bell	Linguistics
Dr Gaynor Macdonald	Social anthropology
Dr Colin Pardoe	Health and biological sciences
Dr Kaye Price	History
Associate Professor Lester-Irabinna Rigney	Education and cultural transmission
Mr Russell Taylor	Public policy, politics and law
Ms Christine Watson	Arts

Council representatives on the committee were Mr Bedford, Ms Marika and Mr Williams.

The committee met twice in 2007–08. After the May 2008 meeting, Mr Akerman, Ms Bell and Dr Pardoe each indicated that they would be retiring from the committee. The committee recorded its appreciation of their extensive and substantial work over the past years.



Traditional owners from the Torres Strait hosted Prescribed Bodies Corporate representatives at the Thursday Island workshop on 4–6 December 2007. This was the first of a series of meetings in the Torres Strait providing a rare opportunity to meet and share ideas and gather information from relevant government agencies that would support economic and business development and planning, and build robust corporations with appropriate legal structures.

The members of the Native Title Research Advisory committee at 30 June 2008 were:

#### Council members

Professor Michael Dodson, AM

Mr Michael Williams

#### Ex officio members

Mr Steve Larkin (Principal)

Dr Luke Taylor (Deputy-Principal, Research and Information)

#### Experts in the field of native title

Dr Gaye Sculthorpe, AM (Member, National Native Title Tribunal)

Mr Wayne Bergmann (CEO, Kimberley Land Council)

Dr Kingsley Palmer (Consultant anthropologist)

Mr Robert Blowes (Barrister)

#### FaHCSIA representative

Mr Greg Roche (Manager, Land Branch)



The Research Advisory Committee: (L-R): Michael Williams (Council), Lester-Irabinna Rigney, Eric Bedford (Council), Jeannie Bell, Russell Taylor, Gaynor Macdonald, Kim Ackerman, Christine Watson, Steve Larkin and Colin Pardoe.

The **Native Title Research Advisory Committee** provides advice to the Principal on the NTRU's research program. Committee members are appointed by the Council for terms of two years. The committee met twice in 2007–08.

The **Research Ethics Committee** is concerned with the clearance of ethical aspects of community-based research

proposed by the Institute's staff and by grantees, as well as external collaborative research projects to be carried out with AIATSIS staff under the auspices of the Institute. Members of the committee are appointed by the Council in line with categories established by the National Health and Medical Research Council. The committee met in August 2007 and May 2008.

During 2007–08, the members of the Research Ethics committee were:

Ms Christine Grant	Chair
Bishop George Browning*	Minister of religion, or Aboriginal Elder or equivalent
Mr Graeme Evans	Layperson
Ms Vivienne Holmes	Lawyer
Mr Mark McMillan	Person with knowledge of, and current experience in, areas of research regularly considered by the committee
Dr John Thompson	Person with knowledge of, and current experience in, the care, counselling or treatment of people
Dr Laga Van Beek	Layperson

\* Bishop Browning retired after the August meeting, and was replaced by Mr Bunja Smith.