



AIATSIS

AUSTRALIAN INSTITUTE OF ABORIGINAL
AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER STUDIES

ADDITIONAL ESTIMATES

OPENING STATEMENT

6 March 2020

Good morning,

Firstly I would also like to acknowledge and recognise that we are on Ngunnawal land today. I pay my respects to elders past and present.

Thank you for the opportunity to make a short opening statement. It has been some time since the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) has appeared before this committee, and I would like to use this opportunity to highlight the role that AIATSIS plays in government and identify some of the important work our institution is undertaking.

AIATSIS sits at a unique nexus of government, Indigenous communities, and academic and cultural expertise. We are seen as a trusted advisor by government, but at the same time we are trusted by community to speak with authority about Indigenous cultures, societies, policy and rights.

AIATSIS provides an independent voice based on research and evidence by enabling a forum for dialogue and bringing people together to share perspectives, interrogate issues and seek solutions.

We are Australia's only national institution focused exclusively on the diverse history, cultures, and heritage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australia. We house the world's most important and extensive collection of cultural information and material and we provide leadership, publish and promote greater understanding and appreciation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. We create opportunities for people the world over to engage with and be transformed by the knowledge, the culture and the story of Australia's Indigenous peoples. We are Australia's national institution for leadership in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research.

We care for a priceless collection, including films, photographs, video and audio recordings as well as the world's largest collection of printed and other resource materials for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander studies. We undertake and encourage scholarly, ethical, community-based research in a variety of sectors, including health, native title, languages and education. Our publishing house, Aboriginal Studies Press, regularly publishes outstanding writing that promotes Australian Indigenous cultures. Our activities affirm and raise awareness of the richness and diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and histories.

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Our functions are established under the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies Act 1989.

Our mission is to:

1. Tell the story of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australia.
2. Create opportunities for people to encounter, engage with and be transformed by that story.
3. Support and facilitate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural resurgence.
4. Shape our national narrative.

One of the unique projects we currently have underway which demonstrates the AIATSIS functions and strategic objectives delivering practical outcomes is the Return of Cultural Heritage project.

Through this project AIATSIS has partnered with Indigenous communities throughout Australia to return Aboriginal cultural heritage material back to its traditional owners and custodians.

Over the past 12 months, this project has successfully secured the repatriation of 85 objects (including secret/sacred and secular objects) from the Illinois State Museum and the Manchester Museum to five nations: Aranda, Bardi Jawi, Nyamal, Gangalidda Garawa, and Yawuru.

This project has supported the restoration of culture and strengthened communities, as well as assisting in the building of healthy relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities.

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Some of the other important work this institution is currently undertaking includes:

- participating in the 2019 International Year of Indigenous Languages to help promote and protect indigenous languages and improve the lives of those who speak them.
- leading the development of an Initial Business Case for the establishment of a National Resting Place - a centrally located culturally appropriate place for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ancestral remains. This Initial Business Case has been provided to the National Indigenous Australians Agency, who are coordinating responses for Government to the recommendations of the Joint Select Committee on Constitutional Recognition.

We are the only national institution with an exclusive focus on the first story of this nation, an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander story that it is 65,000 years old.

I thank the Committee for the opportunity to provide this opening statement and I am happy to answer any questions.