

NEWS FROM THE NATIVE TITLE RESEARCH UNIT

An index to the Issues Papers and Regional Agreements Papers is now available from the Native Title Research Unit and will shortly also be available on the Institute's website. The entire set of Issues Papers and Regional Agreements Papers has been collated and bound. It is available through Aboriginal Studies Press for \$19.95 including postage.

The Unit participated in an Open Day sponsored by the National Museum and AIATSIS. The purpose was to give regional residents a tour of the shared construction site and to provide an insight into the activities and functions of the two organisations. The NTRU took the opportunity to present a description of the native title process aimed at the general public and an explanation of the services provided by the Unit for native title researchers.

The Unit was represented at the National Indigenous Working Group which met on 14 to 17 February in Canberra. On the first two days a technical advisers meeting considered strategic legal issues. Political strategy in relation to state regimes and cultural heritage legislation were also high on the agenda. The meeting coincided with the hearings of the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Native Title and the Land Fund CERD Inquiry (reported on in this issue).

Transfer to New Site and Temporary Closure

In October 2000 AIATSIS will be relocating to a new site on Acton Peninsula. The new building will provide improved facilities for clients and better storage conditions for the Institute's collections.

To allow for the transfer and setting up of collections, the Library and Archives will be closed to the general public from **Monday 2 October 2000 to Friday 2 February 2001**.

Requests relating to research for native title applications will still be undertaken but clients should note that during this period there may be significant delays. This will be due to the difficulty of physically locating items and the reduced capacity to reproduce any items requested. The production of bibliographies relating to the Institute's holdings will be unaffected.

Wherever possible, clients should aim to have requests for the copying of items sent in no later than **Friday 1 September 2000**.

Unfortunately, visits will not be possible during the closure period as full access to the Institute's collections can not be guaranteed.

Should you have any questions please do not hesitate to ring David Leigh on (02) 6246 1103.

CURRENT ISSUES

Native Title and Australia's International Reporting Obligations

In March last year the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) criticised Australia's *Native Title Amendment Act 1998* (Cth), under its Early Warning/Urgent Action procedures. The CERD Committee argued that the Act offended the principles of non-discrimination and equality before the law contained in the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination* (See Report Newsletter 5/99). The Australian Parliament is currently conducting an inquiry into the veracity of the CERD Committee's findings and is due to report in April 2000 (The inquiry is being conducted by the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Native Title and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Land Fund).

The Institute prepared a submission and appeared before the Committee on 22 February. The submission argued that the decision of the CERD Committee was justifiable according to international law, in particular when contrasting the different understandings of equality and non-discrimination employed by the Australian government in the *Native Title Amendment Act* and those required by international standards.

Before the Parliamentary Joint Committee reports in April, the CERD Committee will again meet and will consider Australia's Periodic Report on their compliance with the Convention during the period July 1992 to June 1998. This does not specifically include the *Native Title Amendment Act* (passed in August 1998). It is likely, however, that the CERD Committee will again comment on Australia's response to the Early Warning procedures.

In addition to the CERD Committee meeting, there are a number of other United Nations Human Rights Committees that will consider reports from Australia in the coming year. First, in March and April the Commission on Human Rights will meet. Racial Discrimination and Indigenous Issues are specific items on the agenda.