

## Two Suggestions About How To Make Cultural Heritage Materials Available

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In the last five years or so there has been a great upsurge of interest in and requests for copies of maps, genealogies and connection reports compiled for land and native title claims from Aboriginal people. For good reasons ranging from privacy issues to protecting Aboriginal interests in mining and other negotiations the various bodies holding these and other materials have found it difficult to meet these requests.



Grace Koch speaking at the 2011 AIATSIS Conference

On 22 September, the last day of the AIATSIS conference, Grace Koch and Nic Peterson organised a workshop to discuss some of the issues preventing the distribution of these materials and how they could be dealt with, in order to go some way towards meeting these requests. There was a wide range of participants including staff from universities, land councils, site protection authorities, representative bodies and the Federal Court of Australia's Native Title Registry and records section. A number of short but very informative papers were given outlining a range of problems and some suggested solutions.

The background to this recent upsurge in requests for the consolidated materials produced for reports about land, sites, family relationships, historical connections to country and the like, are the substantial demographic and social transformations taking place across Australia, but particularly in remote regions. These transformations, which are seeing an increase in the ratio of young to old and a decline in the health of old people, are important factors having a large impact on the transmission of cultural information between generations. As a consequence these kinds of reports now comprise the repository of a huge body of rich cultural information about sites, land, people and their history that are central to the Aboriginal heritage of the regions they relate to. For many Indigenous groups it is no longer possible to get additional

information on some of these topics, so that these reports have a crucial part to play in reproducing cultural knowledge and assisting senior people in transmitting it to the upcoming generations.

The issues around making all of this material available are complex and will not be completely resolved for a long time, but at least two things could be done immediately by representative bodies, land councils and other institutions that would start things off.

### Connection and land claim reports

These reports often contain very interesting, well and expensively researched information, particularly, but not exclusively, in the historical sections, that would be an enormous resource for community organisations and schools. In the past some claim books prepared by the Northern Territory land councils were freely available for purchase by any member of the public. Limitations on the availability of reports like

these arose partly because of the inclusion of small amounts of restricted information in the reports or because they included genealogies.

Thus people at the workshop were agreed that it would be a very important contribution if land council and native title representative bodies could ensure that the main reports are free of restricted information, so that once proceedings have been completed, the main reports can be made freely available especially to the relevant communities. But it is also important that they are available more generally, to assist other researchers to draw upon each other's experiences so that they might prepare better reports. At present this is very difficult, especially between organisations. To get these kinds of reports more freely available could be easily organised by raising the issue at the final authorization meeting. It would also require the legal representatives for the various bodies not to automatically seek to make all material submitted to the courts, tribunals etc restricted, except within the period when the claim is being heard. Unrestricting material is nearly always an extremely difficult and protracted process.

### Maps

Considerable discussion was held around the issue of making the maps created for claims and reports more widely available. This complex topic is affected by factors ranging from the requirements of legislation, as in the case of the Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority in the Northern Territory, to strategic considerations in negotiating with non-Aboriginal interests and a range of matters in between. While some maps have been supplied to individuals and families in a few areas, this was relatively uncommon. Yet such maps are enormously important not just in helping reproduce knowledge about country between the generations, especially about country that is hard to access, but just as importantly to remind non-Aboriginal people that they are living in rich Aboriginal cultural landscapes. Without such maps it's all undifferentiated bush but with the many place names that are still part of people's everyday knowledge the extent to which the bush is in fact a highly domesticated cultural environment becomes immediately obvious. This can only work to the benefit of Aboriginal people.

The workshop heard about an interesting new approach being trialed by the Central Land Council (CLC). In response to requests for a regional site map from residents at Lajamanu a meeting of senior people was held to work out what sites should be shown on a map that could be made freely available. Interestingly this was achieved without great difficulty and the CLC produced one of its highly professional maps for display in their office at Lajamanu in large format. Small versions of the map, such as might be distributed in the school and elsewhere have not been produced as yet but it is important that they will be.

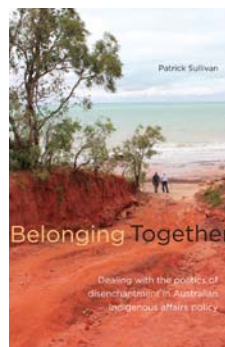
This idea of abridged maps is really an excellent way to meet most of the problems associated with the circulation of very detailed maps. Again, it seems that it would not require much extra time or effort at the proofing stage of a map, to work on a version for public release and to have that agreed to at an authorization meeting. The map should be clearly labelled as an 'Abridged Map showing selected places' and it was generally agreed that it was probably not appropriate to show dreaming tracks on the maps. Over time, of course, what can and cannot be shown, and how comprehensive the maps become in depicting a wide range of spatial information, will undoubtedly change.

### Conclusion

A great deal of money, time, skill and energy has gone into recording and consolidating huge bodies

of Aboriginal cultural information across the continent. Much of this material is no longer part of living knowledge, or where it is the holders of the knowledge are often frail and unwell. It is of huge cultural significance and now is the time to begin to find ways to provide access to it, recognising the very real problems and difficulties involved. The two suggestions above, building on what has already been shown to be possible, seem very doable and could be immediately implemented by a wide range of organisations. We urge active consideration and adoption of these as soon as possible.

#### Just released from Aboriginal Studies Press



Belonging Together: Dealing with the politics of disenchantment in Australian Indigenous Policy

Patrick Sullivan

RRP \$39.95  
ISBN 9780855757809

Belonging Together describes current Indigenous affairs policy in Australia, concentrating on the period since the end of ATSIC in 2004. It provides a unique overview of the trajectory of current policy, with Sullivan advancing a new consolidated approach to Indigenous policy which moves beyond the debate over self-determination and assimilation. Sullivan suggests that the interests of Indigenous peoples, settlers and immigrants are fundamentally shared, proposing adaptation on both sides, but particularly for the descendants of settlers and immigrants. Sullivan is also critical of the remote control of Indigenous lives from metropolitan centres, with long lines of bureaucratic oversight that are inherently maladaptive and inefficient, and he proposes regional measures for policy implementation and accountability.

Available from Aboriginal Studies Press or all good booksellers

<http://aiatsis.gov.au/asp/aspbooks/belongingtogether.html>