



20 YEARS OF THE NATIVE TITLE RESEARCH UNIT

By Pamela McGrath, NTRU

The Native Title Research Unit (NTRU) in the Indigenous Country and Governance Research program of AIATSIS was established in 1993 in response to the Mabo High Court decision. Originally a collaboration between AIATSIS and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC), the NTRU's activities are currently supported through a funding agreement with the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA).

For the past two decades the NTRU has provided high quality independent research and policy advice to promote the recognition and protection of the native title of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The NTRU was established through the efforts and advocacy of a number of people, most significantly the then Chair of AIATSIS Board, Professor Marcia Langton and AIATSIS' current Chair Professor Mick Dodson, who at the time was a member of the Council.

Shortly after it was established, the NTRU published the first of our research series, *Land, Rights, Laws: Issues of Native Title*. This peer-reviewed title,

now in its fifth volume, has published over 90 articles by leading academics, Indigenous leaders and public intellectuals. They have made a major contribution to public debate and have significantly influenced broad understandings of the real world impacts of native title and its potential to act as a vehicle for social change. In addition, the NTRU has published more than 15 monographs and edited books, 25 research discussion papers, and a regular newsletter.

The NTRU facilitates access to the Institute's collections for native title claimants and holders. In the first half of 2013 the NTRU responded to more than 100 inquiries from native title claimants, Aboriginal organisations, government departments and native title researchers.

Over the past 20 years the NTRU has developed important research partnerships with native title claimants and holders around the country. These collaborations create valuable opportunities for all involved for information sharing, learning and influencing of policy development.

The NTRU has adapted its research focus to ensure it remains relevant to the particular concerns of Indigenous groups and responds to what is a rapidly changing socio-political and legal landscape. Current areas of research include investigating native title in relation to water rights, cultural heritage management, housing, co-management of protected areas, corporate governance, climate change, mediation and facilitation, tax and housing.

The NTRU anticipates that the major movements within the sector in the coming years will be prioritising support for Registered Native Title Bodies Corporate as these organisations emerge and develop. It has extended its capabilities in agreement-making to focus on corporate design and the management of decision-making, and we have consolidated our expertise in knowledge and information management. The following photo spread revisits a few significant moments from our history. We look forward to creating many more.



L-R, top-bottom: Eddie Mabo, Jeremy Beckett & Esau Ghesa at his house in Townsville, 1983. Credit: Jeremy Beckett. Protest over the 1993 Native Title Bill, Canberra 1993; Mick Dodson at the protest over the 1993 Native Title Bill, Canberra, 1993; Crowd scene at the protest over the 1993 Native Title Bill, Canberra, 1993. Credit: George Villaflor. The book launch of *A Guide to Overseas Precedents of Relevance to Native Title*, Canberra, 1999; Russel Taylor signing the NTRU funding agreement with ATSIC, Canberra, 1999. Credit: AIATSIS. Photos courtesy of Audiovisual Collection, AIATSIS.



L-R, top-bottom: Bonita Mabo at the Native Title Conference in Adelaide, 2004; Crowd scene at the Native Title Conference in Geraldton, 2002; The AIATSIS conference team at the Native Title Conference in Coffs Harbour, 2005; Marcia Langton at the Native Title Conference in Darwin, 2006; Welcome to country at the Native Title Conference in Perth, 2008; NTRU staff at the Native Title Conference dinner in Townsville, 2012. Credit: NTRU, AIATSIS.