MANAGING INFORMATION
IN NATIVE TITLE (MINT)

LUDGER DINKLER, NTRU

WITH OVER **20** YEARS OF information being collated and created in the field of native title, it comes as no surprise that the culturally and legally appropriate management, storage and use of this information is an important issue for many native title organisations, but also government organisations, like the National Native Title Tribunal or the Federal Court.

AIATSIS wants to work with native title organisations and the wider native title sector to develop shared solutions to the challenges posed by looking after this vast amount of information and ensuring its accessibility for future generations.

As a first step towards this goal, the Native Title Research Unit (NTRU) at AIATSIS hosted a two day workshop on 16 & 17 March 2015 on Managing Information in Native Title (MINT).

Facilitated by Pam McGrath and Ludger Dinkler from the NTRU, the objective of the workshop was to bring together native title organisations to find out what it is that organisations want to do with their native title information, exchange success stories, identify the challenges standing in the way of achieving their information management aspirations and look at ways in which organisations can work together to overcome some of those hurdles.

The workshop was attended by 42 delegates, comprising 22 representatives from 13 NTRB/SPs, 17 delegates from 12 PBCs/native title groups, a barrister, representatives from the Federal Court and the National Native Title Tribunal and eight AIATSIS staff. A big thanks to everyone for making the —often long— journey to attend and for sharing your personal and organisational experiences with other participants. A big thank you also to all AIATSIS staff who worked hard to make the workshop possible and, as the great feedback suggests, a resounding success.

After a warm welcome by AIATSIS Principal Russell Taylor, delegates introduced themselves and their organisation's successes and aspirations. The remainder of day one was set aside for presentations.

In the first of those, Pam McGrath provided a short summary of the initial findings of a survey most organisations had participated in. With the survey respondents including newly incorporated PBCs as well as longstanding and large land councils, it comes as no surprise that the survey showed that organisations varied widely in age, number of employees and information management capacities. However, it also indicated surprising commonalities like the fact that audio-visual material, maps and field notes were identified as the least organised and most at risk materials held, or that the majority of organisations had an electronic filing system and 50 per cent had digitisation programs.

Next Grace Koch linked the theme of the workshop to the issues arising from AIATSIS' previous collaborative work on the future of connection material. While that work did not focus on PBCs specifically, but more on NTRB/SPs, the issues identified in the project running between 2005 and 2008 were surprisingly similar, including rapid technological change, availability of trained staff and organisational commitment to prioritise information management to name but a few.

The MINT workshop then heard from Tom Eccles on issues regarding the fragility of film and sound materials, with some practical advice on how to counteract or halt destructive chemical processes and other issues. It was a highly topical presentation directly addressing survey findings identifying at risk materials. Tom was followed by Melany Laycock, who shared her expertise in developing record management protocols and made a convincing case for why good record keeping practices are beneficial.

Left: Delegates at the MINT workshop
Photographer: Andrew Turner

Monday afternoon saw presentations from NTRBs/SPs on their journey towards managing information. Damein Bell shared Gunditj Mirring's native title and information management journey, Claire Greer introduced Central Desert Native Title Services' Cultural Geography Database and found that a number of other organisations at the workshop share the same database software, and Nyapuru Rose, Sanna Nalder, and Olivia Norris reported on Yamatji Marlpa Aboriginal Corporation's endeavours to return materials.

The first day of the workshop closed with a session on legal issues in which Angus Frith presented on the use and control of evidence given in native title hearings and Ian Irving informed the audience of the Federal Court's processes and thoughts about managing native title related documents.

Michelle Patterson, AIATSIS Deputy Principal, opened day two of the MINT workshop. She provided an overview over the aims of the soon to be launched AIATSIS Foundation and linked the workshop theme to AIATSIS' efforts to maintain and share the world's largest collection of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander material. For the remainder of day two, the delegates worked on identifying the different challenges standing in the way of native title organisations' information management goals, and developing and prioritising shared solutions to address the shared challenges identified. The last sessions of the workshop focussed on the next steps each organisations are going to take on their information management journey, how they can share their learning and what support and advice AIATSIS might be able to offer for the future of managing native title information.

With opportunities to meet and discuss important issues few and far between, everyone worked extra hard to make the workshop count; an approach reflected in the 100 per cent positive feedback on the workshop's usefulness. Many delegates also used the opportunity to stay on for another day or two to access material relevant to them held in the AIATSIS collection, or to meet with AIATSIS staff or relevant government representatives.
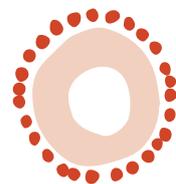
Some immediate outcomes of the workshop, like pooling resources to ask legal advice on a shared matter or planning a session on cultural databases for the National Native Title Conference in June, are already underway.

As requested by delegates, over the coming weeks the NTRU will establish and host an information management network and will make the workshop presentations available on its website. The information provided in the workshop will provide the basis of an extensive report that will be distributed to key stakeholders in an attempt to raise awareness for information management issues and impact future funding decisions. The report will also be provided on the AIATSIS website, with key findings presented in a paper at the National Native Tile Conference in June 2015.

THE AIATSIS FOUNDATION

AIATSIS is in the process of establishing a charitable foundation to assist with the important work it does. The AIATSIS Foundation will raise funds to secure the future of the world's largest and most significant collection of Indigenous Australian culture, history and heritage. Through forging new partnerships in Australia and internationally the AIATSIS Foundation will support innovative projects and new directions that will have, at their core, deep engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The Foundation will assist AIATSIS to meet current and urgent challenges to

- preserve important parts of the audio and visual collection that are threatened by degradation and require urgent preservation
- improve discoverability and usability of the collection especially for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, as well as all Australians and the global community
- find and protect items of unique significance - videos, oral histories, historical records of people and organisations, and digital expressions of cultural life that contain the contemporary stories of Indigenous Australians.

AIATSIS
FOUNDATION

The AIATSIS Foundation will be officially launched in May 2015.

For further information please contact Jonathan Wraith, Director Development, AIATSIS Foundation at jonathan.wraith@aiatsis.gov.au.