

# Guidelines FOR MANAGING INFORMATION IN NATIVE TITLE

ALEXANDRA ANDRIOLO NATIVE TITLE ACCESS AND INFORMATION OFFICER AIATSIS

**O**VER THE PAST 20 YEARS, THE native title sector has invested millions of dollars into research about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' histories and cultures for use in native title claims. This substantial body of information is of considerable value to present and future generations of native title holders, as well as to the Australian community more generally. The material captures details about the experiences and values of past leaders and elders, sheds light on the logic of their actions, and provides an essential evidence base for future decision-making by the native title holders.

The management, use and return of native title materials are important issues for native title organisations. The AIATSIS Managing Information in Native Title (MINT) project works with native title bodies to ensure the long-term security of valuable native title information assets and build the capacity of Prescribed Bodies Corporate (PBCs) and Native Title Representative Bodies/Native Title Service Providers (NTRB/SPs) to manage their collections.

A workshop at the National Native Title Conference 2016, Darwin, co-presented by AIATSIS and the

South West Aboriginal Land and Sea Council brought together native title organisations to begin the development process of guidelines for the storage, access and use of materials collected and created during the native title process.

The issues raised by workshop attendees highlight the challenges that native title organisations face with the management of material collected for native title, broadly categorised as collection and ownership of material, preservation of material, document management, repatriation and management of material by PBCs.



## Collection and ownership of material

The main issue raised in relation to the collection of materials for the use in native title claims was the ownership of the materials. This issue is one that is continually debated and requires further research. To avoid confusion around ownership, an agreement on the ownership and copyright of the material should be established at the start of the process. At the same time, discussing and agreeing on the future use of the material should also be explored to aid the return of materials process after the claim has been finalised. The guidelines currently in development as part of the MINT project will include recommendations for the collection of material for future native title claims, and how to access and use materials that have already been collected if agreements have not been established previously.

## Document management

The process of identifying what materials are held by the NTRB/SP

relating to each PBC will be a time consuming task, but one that is necessary before repatriation can occur. A strong document management system is crucial to assist effective repatriation. Based on recommendations from participants at the workshop at the National Native Title Conference 2016, the guidelines will provide recommendations for standards for metadata and restriction categories.

## Preservation of material

Digitisation of materials is one of the best ways to preserve material for longevity, although there are issues with digitisation with the evolution of digital technology. In addition, the digitisation process is a long, expensive and specialised field which NTRB/SPs do not have the time, money, or expertise to deal with on a full time basis due to their need to assist with current/ upcoming claims and assist PBCs with capacity building. Based on feedback from workshop attendees, the

guidelines will provide best practice for digitisation and physical storage that are usable by non-specialists.

## Repatriation and management of material by PBCs

There is a strong desire from PBCs to have their native title materials, however currently most do not have the funds or ability to access the materials held at the NTRB/SP easily. In addition, the process of identifying and preparing the materials to be returned and negotiating with native title groups how this will happen is time consuming and resource intensive.

Once the material has been returned to the PBCs the management of the material does not stop. PBCs will be encouraged to set up protocols, prior to the repatriation of the materials, to manage PBC members access to the materials as well as non-members, such as researchers. In addition, NTRB/SPs may, by agreement with PBCs, keep a backup copy which will need to be managed.





A major focus of discussions at the workshop was how the materials will be repatriated. Will the PBCs receive the originals, a physical hard copy, a digital copy, or both? Digital repatriation may be the simpler choice however cloud based storage can pose security issues. In addition, many PBCs do not currently have the capacity to manage their native title materials as they do not have adequate physical and digital storage to enable them to keep them safe. Building the capacity of PBCs is a crucial first step to effective repatriation and use of materials post native title determination. While some groups want their material back as soon as possible, others are willing to leave it with the NTRB/SP until they are in a position to look after it on their own.

The challenges in the management of native title information are vast and complex. The main issue that was highlighted during the workshop was the access to and

management of knowledge and information created and compiled for native title claims, and the need for standards and processes when it comes to supporting traditional owners with their information collections post determination and receiving materials back from the NTRB/SPs. There was a strong call from delegates for national leadership in this area.

It is the aim of the MINT project to provide a set of guidelines for this purpose to assist NTRB/SPs to return native title information and knowledge to PBCs for future use. The guidelines are currently being drafted by AIATSIS and are projected to be released in 2017.

If you are interested in becoming a case study partner of the MINT project, please contact Alexandra Andriolo at [alexandra.andriolo@aiatsis.gov.au](mailto:alexandra.andriolo@aiatsis.gov.au) or on 02 6261 4223.

First Page: Alexandra Andriolo presenting on the guidelines at the National Native Title Conference 2016.

Previous page: Alexandra Andriolo, Janet Osbourne and Melany Laycock discuss the guidelines with workshop participants.

Above: Workshop discussion.

Credit: Andrew Turner, AIATSIS.