

# ABORIGINAL INTERPRETER SERVICE

## First Year Celebrations

The ABC's Morning Program described it as an interesting mix of people; politicians rubbing shoulders with health professionals, lawyers, public servants, media, Aboriginal interpreters — even a magistrate! Everyone was in great spirits.

On 9 April 2001 the Aboriginal Interpreter Service (AIS), located within the Office of Aboriginal Development, celebrated its one year anniversary with a very special party. Some 100-150 invited guests enjoyed the hospitality of the Chief Minister Denis Burke who, with the Minister for Aboriginal Development Peter Adamson and Commonwealth Attorney-General Daryl Williams, addressed the gathering.

There are so many challenges in Aboriginal affairs that it is often the case that we focus on the problem areas at the expense of celebrating the positives, the successes, the gains that are made. And the AIS is definitely a success story.

All of the speakers at the function acknowledged the importance of the partnership between the Northern Territory Government and the



Commonwealth Attorney General Mr Daryl Williams and Ms Barbara Weis, Office of Aboriginal Development

Commonwealth Government, which contributes funding to meet half the cost of the AIS and has made a commitment to do so for five years at least.

### Training:

The Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department contributed an extra \$250,000 for training in 2000/01 which, together with our annual \$175,000 training budget, has allowed the AIS to organise the development and delivery of the most ambitious Aboriginal interpreter intensive training program ever delivered in Australia (details in *Balance*, October 2000).

The training program has also included clients of the Service. In late January — early February, Darwin based lawyers from NT Legal Aid Commission, Office of the Director of Public Prosecution and the North Australian Aboriginal Legal Aid Service attended mixed training sessions aimed at improving the use of interpreters in court. Similar training is being made available in other parts of the Territory.

Police and health practitioners from around the Territory have also attended three hour training modules targeting their needs.

### Recent initiatives:

In delivering this important service, the AIS works with Aboriginal health and legal organisations, Government officers, linguists and education professionals. Striving to provide the best service possible, the AIS has sought the constructive input of clients and, wherever possible, met expressed needs.

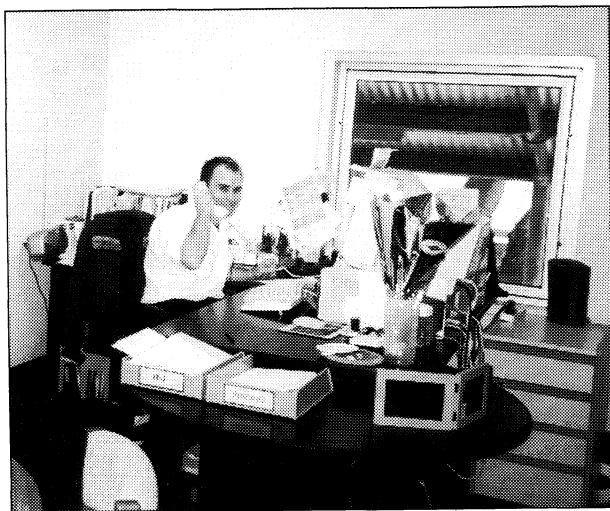
The AIS provides an on-site and telephone Interpreter Service which is unique in Australia. The Service is available throughout the Northern Territory and can be accessed on a 24 hour on-call basis. The on-call initiative was implemented in December 2000 following requests from Police and health professionals.

In addition to the booking system the AIS provides three interpreters at Royal Darwin Hospital on each weekday morning. This operates on a rolling-roster basis so that the interpreters stationed there each week are speakers of the three main Aboriginal languages spoken by patients in the Hospital at the time. Since this initiative commenced in October 2000 interpreters have been used for approximately 1000 separate sessions!

In a similar vein, responding to requests from the Aboriginal Legal Aid Services, the AIS provides two interpreters for Interpreter Duty Day — three days per week in the Darwin and Alice Springs magistrates courts. These interpreters are used for cases where notice of the appearance of Aboriginal clients is not possible. The response to this initiative has been largely encouraging. Negotiations for an office space at the two courts have commenced with Office of Courts Administration.

### Current statistical profile:

In the year since it commenced operation the AIS has registered 185 Aboriginal Interpreters who are directly employed



John Sheldon, NAALAS, taking phone requests during the birthday celebrations

as casual Northern Territory Public Servants. Another 100 or so people are working through the Territory's Aboriginal Language Centres — to which the AIS sub-contracts a significant amount of work. Together these interpreters cover 104 Aboriginal languages. At the end of April the Service had logged 1,063 job requests.

**Thanks:**

Every day the AIS makes a direct and tangible difference for Aboriginal people and for legal and health professionals working with them. Aboriginal Interpreters are, de facto, performing an educative role too. Instead of walking through the legal process or medical treatment, unaware of the complexity or detail involved, Aboriginal people are learning about what is happening to and around them. Often family members are also learning. There is a wider benefit to the community than just the individual interpreting assignment might indicate.

All three Ministers who spoke at the one year celebration acknowledged the incredible work done by the dedicated staff of the AIS:

**Coordinator:**

Colleen Rosas

**Booking Officer:**

Ann Vincent

**Administrative Officer:**

Karlene Savage

**Booking Coordinator (Central Australia):**

Nora Kempster

There is also a need to express our thanks to our clients, administrative officers from around the public service and others in the wider community who encourage and support AIS staff and Aboriginal interpreters.

**Barbara Weis**

Manager Coordination and Research  
Office of Aboriginal Development

**Aboriginal Interpreter Service**

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# ICJ WELCOME TO MR SEV OZDOWSKI

The Northern Territory Branch of the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ) hosted a dinner to welcome the Commonwealth Human Rights Commissioner and Disability Commissioner Mr Sev Ozdowski to Darwin on 7 April 2001.

Guests included Ms Diana Bryant, Chief Magistrate of the Federal Court, Justice of the Appeal Court of East Timor Mr Frederick Engondo Entende and the Co-convenor of the East Timor Jurists Association Mr Aderito deJesus Soares.

Mr Sev Ozdowski spoke to dinner guests about the future direction and challenges facing the Human Rights Commission.



*From left: Rob Wesley Smith, Sev Ozdowski, Frederick Engondo Entende, Tom Stodulka, Diana Bryant, Colin McDonald QC, Richard Coates and Aderito deJesus Soares*



*Peter McNab, Damien Moriaty, Paul Walsh, Thelma Schwartz and Ian Reid*



*Commonwealth Human Rights Commissioner and Disability Commissioner Sev Ozdowski presented an address to about 45 dinner guests*