

# Exploring indigenous library and archive trends

**W**ays in which Australian libraries, archives and other 'institutions of memory' treat and can help advance indigenous knowledge were explored at a conference in Canberra in August.

*Deadly Directions\**: current and emerging trends in libraries, archives and information services for indigenous knowledge was hosted by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS).

More than 80 delegates from libraries, archives, resource centres, government agencies and universities attended the event which commenced with tours of the world's most extensive collection of materials on Australian indigenous topics, held in the AIATSIS Library and Audiovisual Archives.

Keynote speaker and historian Jackie Huggins urged institutions represented at the forum to train indigenous people in the collection, preservation and dissemination of their materials. 'An important aspect of managing records is to ensure that indigenous peoples are among the librarians, historians and archivists looking after and interpreting the records. This surely must be a priority,' she said.

An underlying theme of the conference, touched on by many speakers, was the reinvigoration of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Library Information Network (ATSILIRN), which provides support and an information network for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people working in libraries. Executive director of ALIA, Jennefer Nicholson, spoke on the importance of ATSILIRN, its possible relationship with ALIA and its future role in the library world.

The acting director of the AIATSIS Library, Rod Stroud, told delegates that the work of the Institute's Family History Unit (FHU) in reuniting families demonstrated the value of information being

made available to indigenous individuals and communities: 'The demand for such services is huge and ever-increasing, as are the many avenues where Indigenous peoples require access to information to further their aims and to address indigenous disadvantage,' he said.

FHU officers Rebecca Stubbs and Joanne Taylor gave an overview of the AIATSIS Library's digitisation of the historic *Dawn* and *New Dawn* magazines, which were published from 1952 to 1975 and are a key source of family history information for Aboriginal people separated from their families.

International perspectives were provided by New Zealanders Huria Robens, from the National Library of New Zealand, and David Kukutai Jones, president of Te Rōpu Whakahaau, the Maori Library Workers Network.

Mr Kukutai Jones highlighted the benefits that could flow from institutions incorporating indigenous language and perspectives, whether in the construction of repositories or the representation of materials on the worldwide web. He told how Maori people became much more comfortable in using archival records when they were involved in the naming of the records.

Chair of the Assessment Subcommittee of the Australian Memory of the World Committee, Roslyn Russell, encouraged delegates to consider nominating indigenous material for inscription on the international and Australian registers of Memory of the World. A collection of 461 *Sorry Books*, held at AIATSIS, is one of five inscriptions on the Australian register.

There was also considerable discussion during the conference about the impacts of new technologies on indigenous knowledge. Director of the AIATSIS Audiovisual Archive, Di Hosking, said the digital age had pre-empted decisions about access to indigenous materials held in archives, libraries and museums: what is possible has far outstripped ethical debate and the legislators. She stated: 'There are culturally appropriate methods in which we can make indigenous materials accessible without being guilty of perpetuating the exploitation and commoditisation of someone else's culture.'



L-R: Conference delegates included AIATSIS library staff Rosemary Hotchkiss and Alana Garwood-Houng, keynote speaker and historian Jackie Huggins, and Ngannawal elder Matilda House

Koorie reference and indexing officer at the Victorian Archives Centre, Simon Flagg, identified a number of activities planned by the National Archives in 2005–2006. These include development of a new interface for the Bringing Them Home Index and publication of a list of indigenous service personnel in World War I.

Librarian of University of Technology Sydney, and now president of IFLA, Alex Byrne facilitated a lively workshop on the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Protocols for Libraries, Archives and Information Services which address sensitive issues in regard to collection of and access to indigenous knowledge. The workshop explored ways in which library and archive personnel could advance the protocols, including examining their own practice and how their organisation's policies and procedures approached professional practice, organisation strategy and community engagement.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Protocols for Libraries, Archives and Information Services can be viewed on the Charles Darwin University website at <http://www.cdu.edu.au/library/protocol.html>.

The conference concluded with a session about ATSILIRN. The network's annual general meeting will be held at AIATSIS on 21 November 2005. For more information, contact secretary Pat Brady, e-mail [pat.brady@aiatsis.gov.au](mailto:pat.brady@aiatsis.gov.au).

Papers from the *Deadly Directions* conference are on the AIATSIS website at <http://www.aiatsis.gov.au/lbry/conferences/libconf05/conferenceindex.htm>.

\* Contemporary indigenous use of the word 'deadly' has come to mean excellent, fabulous and all things good.

**Kirstie Parker, manager, Media and Communications, Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies**



Conference delegates took the opportunity to peruse the AIATSIS Library's digital exhibitions including *Dawn* and *New Dawn*