

ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER COLLECTIONS COMMITMENTS



Participants and trainer at a Deadly Digital Communities training session at Mabuiai Indigenous Knowledge Centre in 2017

Increasing access to collections is a priority of the State Library of Queensland and making the Indigenous collections accessible in a fast, effective and respectful way was a key challenge, writes ANNA RAUNIK.

The State Library of Queensland introduced its first *Protocols for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Collections* in 2006 (bit.ly/2FVe5LI). The document has acted as a general guide and set of principles for staff working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander collections.

In 2018 we identified the requirement to review and update the protocols. This review, using feedback received by community and staff, acknowledged the changing landscape of technology and access and confirmed our approach to making more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander collections accessible.

The new framework reflects a desire to communicate from a position of positive intent rather than compliance. As a result, our *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Collections Commitments* (bit.ly/2GAeeVX) acknowledge the legislative and policy framework and focus on collecting, description, access, usage and capability.

A key component in implementing the new commitments will be how to ensure efficient and appropriate access to digital content. The most significant change since the development of the initial protocols has been the increased possibilities enabled by digital technology in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural heritage. Digital technology presents opportunities to ensure broader access to content, allows exchange of knowledge from multiple sources, and gives community the chance to tell their own stories. It also presents challenges include inappropriate content being available, false or misleading information being disseminated, content being made accessible without the appropriate context, and loss of control of cultural heritage.


What will change?

The new framework will move us from a restrictive ‘cultural clearance’ approach to an ‘assessment’ approach which places the emphasis on gathering the facts about a collection or item and making a considered decision to make material available. With this approach, consultation would not generally be undertaken on the basis of an individual image or collection item. Dialogue with community would be at the policy level, across a broad range of collections. This assessment approach to making Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander material available online will utilise risk-management, existing take-down request and complaint procedures.

The State Library of Queensland is aware that the public increasingly expect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander content to be available online. Our online user research has found that one of the strongest motivations for online users is to view historic photographs.

In instances where we placed material online, feedback has been overwhelmingly positive.

‘My dad never told us of our Aboriginal ancestry and I only uncovered this truth in 2001, when I was 30. He passed away in 2008 and never once confirmed or denied this but sadly he also would not share what he did know... This process is helping me understand a lot more about Aboriginal experience in colonial Australia and some of our appalling policies and legislation. More importantly it's helping me share with my children the powerful gift of sharing a bloodline to the oldest continuous culture in the world... Many thanks again for your generous assistance.’

The implementation will be ongoing as new opportunities for collecting and access continue to be explored. Visit our website for more (slq.qld.gov.au). 

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