

# National Native Title Conference 2009

## Spirit of Country: Land, Water, Life

By Amy Williams, Communications Officer, NTRU

This year the Annual National Native Title Conference attracted a record number of conference delegates, with over 700 conference registrations. The conference was hosted by the Wurundjeri people, and co-convened by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) and Native Title Services Victoria (NTSV).

The Conference was held at the Melbourne Cricket Ground from 3-5 June, 2009. The Melbourne Cricket Ground is a significant location for the Wurundjeri people and it was also a very popular venue with conference delegates.

The Wurundjeri people gave conference delegates a warm welcome to country which included performances from the Jindi Worabak dance group. The cultural program also included performances from the Eip Karem Beizam Dancers, a group of 25 performers from the Torres Strait. The performance of the Torres Strait dancers was applauded by conference delegates who gave them a double standing ovation. One conference delegate said that 'the Torres Strait Indigenous Culture Group traditional song and dance was a real treat'.



As in previous years, the first day of the program was reserved for native title claimants, native title holders and their representatives. Conference sessions addressed several themes including: strengthening communities; respectful engagement; rivers, lakes and sea country; economies, ecologies and ideologies; and connecting throughout diversity.

During the Conference, Indigenous Talking Circles provided an opportunity for Indigenous delegates to discuss how native title has impacted on their communities. There were Indigenous Talking Circles for women and youth.

The 2009 Mabo Lecture was given by Mr Les Malezer, founder and Chair of the Foundation for Aboriginal and Islander Research Action. Throughout the Conference keynote addresses were given by: Tom Calma, Social Justice Commissioner; Mr Graham Atkinson, Chair Victorian Land Justice Group, Victorian Attorney-General the Hon. Robert Hulls MP, and Federal Attorney General, the Hon Robert McClelland MP.

The Conference received generous support from the primary sponsor the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, and major sponsors such as Department of Justice Victoria, the Attorney-General's Department and the Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations, Newmont Asia Pacific and the Department of Sustainability and Environment Victoria. Other sponsors and supporters included the National Native Title Tribunal, Minerals Council of Australia, City of Melbourne, Land & Water Australia, Torres Strait Regional Authority, CSIRO, AFL, Santos and Hilton Hotels.

The Native Title Conference is a very important opportunity for a variety of stakeholders within the native title system to engage in conversations. We are all looking forward to the Annual National Native Title Conference 2010.

Selected Conference papers are available online at:

<http://ntru.aiatsis.gov.au/conf2009/NativeTitleConferenceWebsite/papers.html>