



BY JAYLEE MARTIN, AIATSIS

The *AIATSIS Act* (1989) mandates that AIATSIS provide leadership in the field of ethics and protocols for research related to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and collections. Since its development in 1999, the *AIATSIS Guidelines for Ethical Research in Australian Indigenous Studies* (GERAIS) has represented the highest standards for ethical research. To mark twenty years since the release of the GERAIS, AIATSIS recently undertook a substantial review of the guidelines. On 1st July 2019, AIATSIS CEO Craig Ritchie announced the release of the Consultation Draft of the proposed new *Code for Ethical Conduct in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research* (AIATSIS Code) which will replace the Guidelines. This revision reflects AIATSIS's ongoing

commitment to providing national and international leadership in the ethical practice of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research.

The consultation period has now closed and the final release of the AIATSIS Code is expected to be announced on the AIATSIS website in the near future (<https://aiatsis.gov.au/research/ethical-research>).

The AIATSIS Code forms part of the Australian framework for ethical and responsible conduct of research, which includes the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research* (the National Statement) and the *Australian Code for Responsible Conduct of Research* (the Code of Conduct). The Australian research ethics framework is one of the strongest in the world.

The AIATSIS Code reflects a new era of research that empowers Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to engage with research, not just as participants, but as rights holders with knowledge and skills that contribute to research outcomes — genuine partners in the research rather than subjects or informants of research. Like GERAIS, the AIATSIS Code is founded on recognition and respect for the rights of Indigenous peoples, as articulated in the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*. The AIATSIS Code also embodies Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander values and world views.

When announcing the review of the AIATSIS guidelines, then AIATSIS Council Chairperson, Professor Michael McDaniel, said that engaging

Above: As part of the consultation process for the new Code, and recognising the importance of Indigenous leadership to the project, AIATSIS convened a Pro Vice Chancellor (Indigenous) roundtable on 5 June 2019 to review and provide strategic advice.

Pictured are Dr Lisa Strelein, Prof Colleen Hayward, Mr Braden Hill, Mr Craig Ritchie, Prof Jacinta Elston, Prof Bronwyn Fredericks, Prof Lisa Jackson-Pulver and Mr Kenny Bedford

Credit: Colin MacDougall, AIATSIS

ethically means many things but ultimately it is about respect and honour:

'For me, it is yindyamarra, a Wiradjuri concept which means to act with honour and respect, wisdom, to go slowly and act responsibly, be gentle and polite and honest with each other, be careful of the words and actions you put out to the world and understand the impact they have.'

The Code is underpinned by the AIATSIS research ethics framework, which builds on four key principles drawn from the principles in GERAIS.

At the centre of ethical research practice is Integrity.

Who does the AIATSIS code apply to?

The AIATSIS Code is intended for use by:

- Any person conducting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research
- Human Research Ethics Committees and other review bodies
- Sponsors of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities engaged in research.

Research includes not only academic research carried out in and by universities and publicly funded

research agencies, but also other activities such as archival research, evaluation, quality assurance, social marketing, government policy and program design, and re-use of data for public policy and clinical trials.

When is ethics approval required?

All research projects involving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples require ethical approval from a qualified Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) before the project begins. Ethics approval provides Australian Indigenous communities involved with research, an assurance that their rights, culture and heritage are respected, that there is an understanding of the aims and methods of the research, and there is a guarantee they will share in the results of the work.

AIATSIS ethics products and services

AIATSIS has a registered HREC that specialises in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research. The AIATSIS HREC is responsible for reviewing projects involving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research to ensure the appropriate ethical standards have been met in accordance with the National Statement and the AIATSIS Code.

AIATSIS also provides resources, training, coaching and group workshops for researchers, PhD students, Human Research Ethics Committees, Indigenous communities and anyone else involved in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research.

For more information about the AIATSIS code and ethics services, please contact the AIATSIS Ethics Committee Secretariat

Ethics@aiatsis.gov.au

THE AIATSIS RESEARCH ETHICS FRAMEWORK

