

# Cultural survival: cultural revival

The 7th annual Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Library Information and Resource Network (ATSILIRN) conference, Canberra 16–18 October 2000

The theme for the 7th annual Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Library Information and Resource Network (ATSILIRN) conference was *Cultural survival, cultural revival: the role of the information professional* and was held at the National Library of Australia. It was a gathering of professionals from many areas including indigenous education, libraries and native title.

John Dallwitz spoke about the Ara Irititja Archival project and he gave us a demonstration of the computerised photographic database. At present 17 000 photos are available for indigenous communities to view, by means of a mobile kiosk, especially housed in a dustproof 'beetle'. Searching the database is possible by a variety of methods, even clicking on the image of a person or a name for identification.

Geraldine Triffit of Ozlib spoke about indigenous languages, and described how the pronunciation can alter the meaning of a word.

Margaret Reid an archivist, described how her profession has responded to the *Deaths in Custody* report. Part of the response has been to implement an indigenous archivists training plan.

Jennefer Nicholson's topic was 'Protecting our rights — in whose interests?' One point she stressed was that information skills needed to be taken to the communities.

Matiu Baker from the National Library of New Zealand was the final speaker for day one. He demonstrated a Maori database. A problem in New Zealand is a lack of skilled people who can read the Maori language, so that data can be entered and accurate records kept.

Day two started with Doreen Mellor of the National Library of Australia explaining the *Bringing them home* oral history project. In December 1997, in response to the first recommendation of *Bringing them home: Report of the national inquiry into the separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families*, the Commonwealth Government announced that the National Library of Australia would be funded to develop and manage a new oral history project. \$1.6 million was allocated to collect and preserve the stories of indigenous people and others, such as missionaries, police and administrators involved in or affected by the process of child removals. The project is one of enormous historical significance. Doreen described how interviewers were selected, and she also played two tapes for us to listen to.

Following Doreen was Kevin Bradley, also from the National Library, who described the technical aspects of the project, and he explained about the archival qualities of the tapes used.

Louise Bermester then spoke about another government response to the report, which was to give the National Archives \$2 million '...to index, copy and preserve thousands of files so that they are readily accessible'.

Tracy Bugden and Elizabeth Fa'aso of the State Library of Queensland, Cairns then demonstrated the 'Footprints' database.

After lunch and the annual general meeting, John Winterbottom gave a short speech on how to conduct family history

searches. Following this were the tours to the National Archives of Australia, where the staff had prepared an interesting display and to the National Gallery of Australia, where the library-minded had a tour of the library.

To conclude the day, a dinner was held at the Brindabella Restaurant at the Parkroyal Hotel which was enjoyed by all.

The final day started with Terri Janke speaking about indigenous copyright. She explained seven proposals ranging from legal, administrative and education to policies.

David Leith of AIATSIS discussed the area of Native Title and he suggested that libraries and archives could provide the information needed for applications and court proceedings.

Meg Lebrum told us ScreenSound Australia has re-discovered their indigenous collection and about the issues that they are now facing. These include copyright, lack of people with specific skills, and ignorance of indigenous issues. They want to connect with community groups for guidance. ScreenSound Australia has an indigenous support group to help them. Another plan is to develop an indigenous employment strategy.

Fran Wilson from the National Library of Australia gave a talk on reference services and described how the library world is shrinking with seamless access.

The last speaker was Loretta Griffin from Australian Customs Service. Loretta described the mentoring program that Customs has for its indigenous employees. At first the program was informal, but became formalised with a newsletter, charter and an award. One aim is to involve the local community, which in turn protects the environment.

The last item was an activity/workshop in which we discussed indigenous employment issues. We came up with a variety of suggestions that can be viewed at <http://home.vicnet.net.au/~atsilirn/00Conf.htm>

After the closing speeches, afternoon tea was served. Then we started to head for home. We are all looking forward to the Cairns 2001 conference.

**Fairlie Sampson,**  
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*The Library and Information  
Services Industry*

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