



AIATSIS

**Australian Institute of Aboriginal
and Torres Strait Islander Studies
Strategic Plan**

2024 – 2029

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Cover photo: Family fishing using a cast net on Mer (Murray Island) in the Torres Strait.



The AIATSIS building in Canberra, named Maraga – a Ngunnawal word for a strong and robust shield.



1 Message from the Chair

This, *The Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies Strategic Plan 2024–2029* reimagines the Institutes vision, revisits and uplifts our purpose, and sets the strategic focus areas for the next five years.

Commencing in 2024, we celebrate a significant milestone, our 60-year anniversary. We reflect on how far we have come and look towards our future – the next five years and beyond with a strategic focus on: our national collection; Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research; partnerships and networks; and investing in our resources to create a world in which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' rights, knowledges, cultures and stories are recognised, respected, celebrated and valued.

The Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) was established in 1964, through an Act of Parliament, as a place for research and preservation of Indigenous culture and heritage – to record Australia's First Nations people before they disappeared. Over the course of the past 60 years, Australia's First Nations People however have not disappeared, we have continued to reclaim our rights, practice and celebrate our culture, the oldest living culture in the world.

As an Institute we are privileged to undertake our leading facilitation role working closely with our traditional owners, our communities and broader sector partners.

AIATSIS has evolved into a world class organisation, focusing on telling the story of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australia. It continues to transform and create opportunities for all people to encounter and engage with cultures that are thousands of years old. AIATSIS supports and facilitates Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander resurgence through our vast array of cultural programs, such as the Return of Cultural Heritage Program, our Family History Unit and extends to research, education and discovery of our Collection of over one million items.

Over the past six decades, AIATSIS, now proudly Indigenous-led, has remained a highly respected organisation for advice in relation to Ethics; has established a Centre of Excellence for Indigenous languages, boasts an ever growing presence in the Education sector; and in 2024, for the first time has expanded its presence outside of Canberra, opening AIATSIS Central Australia in Mparntwe (Alice Springs).



The AIATSIS Council and Executive share a desire to tell the story of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australia and to care for our unique collection, a collection at the heart of that storytelling. This desire is what underpins this Strategic Plan and I present this to each of you.

In my last year as Chairperson of the AIATSIS Council, I am extremely proud to present our 2024–2029 Strategic Plan. I leave the position knowing, through this Strategic Plan, that AIATSIS is prepared for a future where it will continue to invite all Australians, international partners and other stakeholders to acknowledge and celebrate Australia's First Peoples and their significant contribution to the life of this nation.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jodie Sizer".

Jodie Sizer
Chairperson

Deb Stiles teaching her daughter about Country using the AIATSIS Map of Indigenous Australia.



2 Our ambition

Our vision

To create a world in which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' rights, knowledge, cultures and stories are recognised, respected, celebrated and valued.

Our purpose

We are the only national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural institution solely dedicated to telling the story of Australia's First Nations peoples.

We collect, steward and appropriately share Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' knowledge through our collection, our leadership in research and our network of collaborations and partnerships by:

- creating opportunities for everyone to encounter, engage with and be transformed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' rights, knowledge, cultures and stories;
- enhancing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural vitality; and
- shaping our national narrative.

Our strategic focus areas

1. Steward a national collection that is regularly used and enjoyed by all Australians.
2. Foster quality and innovation in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research.
3. Promote understanding of diverse Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' rights, knowledge, cultures and stories.
4. Deepen local connections and strengthen our global reputation.
5. Invest in our capability and capacity to deliver on our ambition.

Our vision, purpose and strategic focus areas reflect the functions we are legislated to deliver under the Australian Institute of *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies Act 1989*.

**AIATSIS embodies
Yindyamarra¹ in
everything we do.**

1 Yindyamarra is a shared Wiradjuri and Ngunnawal word meaning honour and respect. More broadly it implies thoughtfulness, graciousness and kindness.

Kabi Kabi artist Lyndon Davis performing at the opening plenary.



3 Our journey and our future

AIATSIS has a proud identity as Australia's only Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led national cultural institution that celebrates, educates and inspires people from all walks of life to connect with the rights, knowledge, cultures and stories of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples'. We play a vital role in developing deeper and shared understandings of our Nation's history and future on Australia's truth-telling journey, working towards collective healing.

In 2024, AIATSIS celebrates our 60th anniversary and reflects on our evolution as an organisation during that time. Over the next five years, our operating environment will continue to change, and we must position ourselves to respond to this change.

AIATSIS is increasingly providing services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

We continue to play a significant role in supporting cultural revival and resurgence. We are recognised as the leading national cultural institution for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge, and we are pivotal to Indigenous research nationally. In the coming years, we will continue to be responsive to community needs and expectations, including the changing nature of Native Title arrangements and how AIATSIS supports and engages with nation building efforts. Our role in empowering and supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' to tell their own stories and speak their own languages, and in providing access to the collection for all Australians, will only grow as we expand our facilities.

The nature and volume of demand for services is changing.

Driven by growing interest and expectations from communities, and by the resurgence of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and society, there is an increased demand for AIATSIS' expertise in Indigenous research, education, cultural heritage and collection management. We support an ever-increasing number of community-based researchers to conduct research relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' rights, knowledge, cultures and stories, which requires an evolving approach to service delivery. We are acutely aware of the need to provide access to services across all of Australia, including the Torres Strait. This represents a shift from our physical presence previously being centred in Canberra and requires us to carefully navigate the complexities and challenges of geography.

To keep abreast of recent and anticipated change, AIATSIS needs to secure sustainable resources and infrastructure.

AIATSIS' internal operating environment is changing. Over the coming years, AIATSIS' funding and staffing profile will grow and change to reflect the needs of stakeholders. We will focus on exploring avenues for sustainable and diversified funding sources and opportunities to partner with industry and the corporate sector. We face workforce challenges, impacted by the continued pressure and salary competition in the labour market across the public sector. We are focused on attraction and retention strategies and maintaining a reputation as an employer of choice, particularly for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff.

Digitising our collection is also becoming increasingly important.

Information in our collection that is held on older storage formats is at risk, with specialised playback equipment becoming obsolete and fewer technicians and engineers entering these fields. We need to continue our digitisation, maintenance and preservation efforts in order to guarantee the long-term sustainability and accessibility of the collection.

Our journey presents a need and an opportunity to take a bold step forward into our future – and realise our ambition to create a world in which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' rights, knowledge, cultures and stories are recognised, respected, celebrated and valued.

Family standing in water near fishing boat on Mer (Murray Island) in the Torres Strait.



4 The value we bring

We work closely with our stakeholders to deliver ongoing value to all Australians and an increasing international audience. We partner and work collaboratively with the following stakeholders, and others to achieve equitable outcomes:

- **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, communities, authors, businesses and organisations** | We work to deliver better outcomes for Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' and tell their stories. We support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses and organisations through our publishing arm, our collection infrastructure and our convening power. Our partnerships and relationships with communities give us the credibility to continue our work.
- **Our members** | We provide our members with access to a community of people committed to preserving, strengthening and sharing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' rights, knowledge, cultures and stories. We make sure they are supported by access to our resources and our collection. Our members make important contributions to the work of AIATSIS, including through their influence over memberships of the AIATSIS Council.
- **Education providers and academics** | We work alongside Australian universities, researchers, schools and other education providers to progress our research priorities, improve ethical research outcomes, provide access to the collection, support capability uplift through qualifications, and raise awareness about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' rights, knowledge, cultures and stories.
- **Cultural Institutions, Language Centres and the broader Galleries, Libraries, Archives, and Museum (GLAM) sector** | We are the leading expert on the appropriate management and curation of First Nations heritage collections, and we support the GLAM sector through our reputation, our collections expertise and our reliable advice as an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led organisation. Our work with language centres and the National Indigenous Languages Survey supports the revitalisation and reactivation of language and culture across Australia. We also advocate and provide policy advice internationally for the return of cultural heritage material to Australia and back to Country.
- **The corporate and philanthropic sectors** | We are building our relationships with the corporate and philanthropic sectors to support our work in a more sustainable manner and build the knowledge and capability of organisations looking to understand Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' rights, knowledge, cultures and stories.
- **Governments** | We work with governments at all levels, as well as the Minister for Indigenous Australians and the National Indigenous Australians Agency, to provide apolitical national advice on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' rights, knowledge, cultures and stories. Our status as an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led organisation existing at the interface between communities and government allows us to speak from a place of authority. We also draw on our international reputation and expertise to work with foreign governments and international peak governance and advisory bodies.

National Agreement on Closing the Gap

AIATSIS contributes to the progress of all four Priority Reforms under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, and our work is relevant to the delivery of many of its targets.

Our vision is to create a world in which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' rights, knowledge, cultures and stories are recognised, respected, celebrated and valued. By protecting and promoting the rights, knowledge, cultures and stories of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples', we are also protecting and promoting their collective cultural strength, health and wellbeing.

Wakka Wakka man Fred Cobbo, one of the participants in the Paper and Talk workshop at AIATSIS in 2019.



5 Strategic focus areas

5.1 Steward a national collection that is regularly used and enjoyed by all Australians

The collection is an invaluable dynamic resource for our stakeholders and the broader community, and it enables us to achieve our vision and purpose. We will deliberately steward the collection and increase availability and access to support greater recognition, respect and celebration of the value of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' rights, knowledge, cultures and stories.

Our goals:

- a. Build and preserve our collection purposefully, to ensure a rich and diverse collection of significant items.
- b. Invest in digital capability and innovation to improve appropriate access for all Australians, international partners and other stakeholders.
- c. Strengthen relationships with communities and demonstrate that we are trusted custodians of their cultural and heritage items.
- d. Strengthen partnerships with other collection institutions, so that we can continue to build an Australia-wide network of collections.
- e. Remove access barriers and build capability among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to access and use the collection.
- f. Enhance metadata and documentation, to increase discoverability and usability of collection items.

Our desired outcome:

Deeper engagement with and use of our collection, and ongoing best practice approaches for its care.

Our measures:²

#	Measure
i	Size of the AIATSIS collection across all collection types
ii	Maintenance and preservation of the physical and digital collection in line with the Australian Institute of Conservation of Cultural Material (AICCM) standard and the Collection Care Policy
iii	Proportion of the AIATSIS collection digitised <ul style="list-style-type: none">Amount of content digitised that includes descriptive data
iv	Ease of access to the collection – <i>aggregated from</i> : <ul style="list-style-type: none">Number of engagements with the collectionProportion of requests actioned within 60 daysNumber of requests completed for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals, community groups and organisationsPercentage of collection made available through Trove
v	Number of formal agreements with stakeholders in cultural and collecting fields – <i>aggregated from</i> : <ul style="list-style-type: none">With Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communitiesWith other collecting institutions and the broader cultural, educational, and GLAM sectors

² Some of the measures that appear throughout this Strategic Plan apply across multiple strategic focus areas and goals. Each measure has been listed under the most relevant strategic focus area to avoid repetition.



Wagga Torres Strait Islander dancer performing on Mabo Day during the 2022 AIATSIS Summit.

5.2 Foster quality and innovation in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research

Research is at the core of AIATSIS and we will continue to provide leadership and stewardship. We will undertake participatory research embedded in communities while facilitating and enabling best practice and innovation, leveraging our reputation, convening power and long history in Indigenous research.

Our goals:

- a. Convene Indigenous research, share ideas, promote cohesion and consistency, and improve access to resources.
- b. Build capacity among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander academics and researchers and support them to expand knowledge and awareness through their research.
- c. Undertake specialised research to address critical gaps and maximise AIATSIS' expertise.
- d. Support participatory, collaborative and interdisciplinary research models to enable better research outcomes for and with communities.
- e. Define, lead and educate on ethical best practices in research to ensure cultural integrity, safety and quality.

Our desired outcome:

Enhanced quality of research that improves outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Our measures:

#	Measure
i	<p>Number and reach of publications – <i>aggregated from:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Books, journal editions, and other publications through Aboriginal Studies Press Research publications and presentations by AIATSIS staff Number of citations of AIATSIS works
ii	<p>Number of formal agreements with stakeholders in research fields – <i>aggregated from:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> With Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities With researchers and research institutions
iii	<p>Number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers and academics engaging with AIATSIS and the collection – <i>aggregated from:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander authors published in Aboriginal Studies Press Number of requests completed for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals, community groups and organisations Uptake of training and resources for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers and academics
iv	<p>Enabling ethical research – <i>aggregated from:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of downloads of the AIATSIS Code of Ethics Number of ethics clearances by external clients through the Research Ethics Committee



Josie from Waiben (Thursday Island) in the Torres Strait, one of the young authors of *Our Land, Our Stories*.

5.3 Promote understanding of diverse Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' rights, knowledge, cultures and stories

Truth-telling, sharing stories and passing on knowledge are essential components of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, and AIATSIS is proud to support this at local, national and international levels. We will create opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' to build and share their knowledge, as well as to use our infrastructure and resources to promote their rights, knowledge, cultures and stories.

Our goals:

- a. Establish nationally significant Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural infrastructure.
- b. Build new and strengthen existing relationships and partnerships, to facilitate appropriate knowledge sharing across the system.
- c. Create platforms and spaces to support collaboration and build and share knowledge.
- d. Activate and provide experiences with the collection to promote knowledge and awareness.
- e. Advocate for all Australians to understand Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' rights, knowledge, cultures and stories.

Our desired outcome:

A greater understanding of and respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' rights, knowledge, cultures and stories across the Australian population.

Our measures:

#	Measure
i	Progress and reporting regarding the establishment of new cultural infrastructure
ii	Number and satisfaction of attendees at AIATSIS exhibitions and events
iii	Number of respondents indicating an increased understanding of issues relevant to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Culture and Heritage after an experience with AIATSIS
iv	AIATSIS Education activities: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Number and type of activities with an education focus• Number/percentage of educators indicating that they felt more confident in building a culturally responsive classroom after attending an AIATSIS professional development workshop
v	Number and quality of communications, education and engagement for the general public

Smoking ceremony performed by Maurice Mickelo on the lawns of the Sunshine Coast Convention Centre, Kabi Kabi Country at the 2022 AIATSIS Summit.



5.4 Deepen local connections and strengthen our global reputation

Our partnerships and collaborations are fundamental to achieving our goals. Connections with local communities are essential to our core business, and expanding our global reputation increases our ability to deliver positive outcomes. We will increase the depth and scope of our relationships to deliver mutual benefits.

Our goals:

- a. Continue fostering genuine, respectful relationships with community organisations and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples', to improve outcomes for communities and support them to build knowledge.
- b. Increase membership and engagement to build a strong AIATSIS community that delivers benefits.
- c. Strengthen reciprocal relationships across the cultural, educational and GLAM sectors in Australia and internationally, to promote innovation in collections and research and enhance visitor experiences.
- d. Provide high quality advice across the Australian Government to ensure government policy and programs are fit for purpose for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities.
- e. Provide international advice and advocacy to support First Nations communities globally, enhance our global reputation and learn from international best practice.
- f. Enhance partnerships with the philanthropic and corporate sectors, to build their knowledge and awareness and support our financial sustainability.

Our desired outcome:

Deep two-way relationships with our partners, particularly with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Our measures:

#	Measure
i	Number of engagements with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities
ii	Number and satisfaction of AIATSIS members
iii	Number of mutual knowledge exchange initiatives with domestic and international institutions
iv	Provision of high-quality advice across the Commonwealth

Warlpiri artist Tess Napaljarri Ross with granddaughter Bethalia Kelly in Yuendumu, NT.



5.5 Invest in our capability and capacity to deliver on our ambition

Our people, resources and infrastructure enable us to achieve our goals. Our people and organisation must continue to transform to meet current, emerging and future needs. We will support our people, promote innovative processes and build our reputation, resources and brand, so that we are able to deliver on our ambition.

Our goals:

- a. Grow our reputation as an employer of choice for all potential staff particularly for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, to continue to attract talent and provide opportunities for our communities.
- b. Build, invest in and retain high performing people and teams – including by working with communities and building partnerships to deliver excellent outcomes for the communities we serve.
- c. Enhance our workplace to provide a culturally safe and respectful environment for all staff and a great employee experience.
- d. Invest in new and emerging technology to lift our digital infrastructure.
- e. Build sustainable revenue streams to support our long-term ambitions.
- f. Promote the AIATSIS brand so that we continue to grow in influence.

Our desired outcome:

A culturally safe, flexible, innovative and well-resourced organisation.

Our measures:

#	Measure
i	Employee Engagement Index Score in APS Employee Census
ii	Number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people applying for and working at AIATSIS
iii	Cultural safety of AIATSIS workplaces
iv	Delivery and upkeep of digital and technological infrastructure
v	Number and diversity of revenue streams, notably: Revenue stream from donations and corporate and philanthropic support

The AIATSIS building in Canberra, named Maraga – a Ngunnawal word for a strong and robust shield.





Previous page: Josie, one of the contributors to the *Our Land, Our Stories* series practicing the ukulele with her grandmother.

Back cover: Dancers at the National Native Title Conference, Broome 2018.



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