



**Submission by the  
National Film and Sound Archive of Australia**

**House of Representatives Standing  
Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait  
Islander Affairs**

**Inquiry into language learning  
in Indigenous communities**

**September 2011**

## Introduction

The National Film and Sound Archive of Australia (NFSA) aspires to be the world's premier archive of Australian film, sound and emerging new media cultural heritage. Our mission is to excite people's curiosity and inspire their creativity through development, preservation and an informed understanding of Australian film, sound and emerging new media heritage, its cultural diversity and significance.

The NFSA is Australia's key cultural institution entrusted with the care of the national audiovisual, documentation and artefact collection. It is a historically significant and culturally rich collection of approximately 1.7 million items relating to film, television, radio and music production from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century to the present day.

## Background

We appreciate the opportunity to make a submission to the *Inquiry into language learning in Indigenous communities*.

Our submission focuses on the first two terms of reference:

- The benefits of giving attention and recognition to Indigenous languages, and
- The contribution of Indigenous languages to Closing the Gap and strengthening Indigenous identity and culture

The NFSA holds an estimated 25 000 works depicting Indigenous peoples and cultures and includes:

- Fanny Cochrane-Smith recordings, Tasmania, 1899 and 1903, and the Haddon Expedition footage, Torres Strait, 1898
- recordings of popular and traditional music by Indigenous artists
- documentaries and feature films by and about Indigenous Australians, 1920s to the present
- newsreels and magazines, 1930s to 1990s
- expeditions and travelogues, 1920s to 1950s
- mission films, 1940s and 1950s
- home movies and home videos, 1940s to the present.

The NFSA acknowledges and addresses the historic complexities of its Indigenous collection within the Indigenous Collections Policy (ICP) as part of its overall Collection Policy. This progressive policy outlines a major commitment by the NFSA to the preservation and transmission of Indigenous memory in audiovisual form and to the ongoing reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.

Through the development of culturally relevant practice in Indigenous audiovisual cultural heritage management, the NFSA values and promotes respect for the rights of Indigenous peoples in relation to the ownership of their knowledge and cultural materials held in the Indigenous Collections. The NFSA will, where appropriate, consult with Indigenous communities to obtain cultural/copyright clearances, and it requires Indigenous Collection users do the same. Protocols have been developed to provide guidance to NFSA staff obtaining cultural clearances.

By these means, the NFSA proactively seeks to address moral and practical issues relating to the ownership and control by Indigenous peoples over their cultural heritage contained within audiovisual recordings held in the NFSA Indigenous Collection. This includes providing curatorial,

information management and preservation expertise to support the maintenance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-based archives.

By establishing and developing on-going partnerships, Indigenous peoples can deposit, access, exhibit, conduct research or have materials returned to their communities. This also facilitates a better understanding of collection materials within an Indigenous cultural context and from Indigenous cultural perspectives. This engagement process supports the development of sound curatorial policies, practices and procedures.

The NFSA stores and preserves Indigenous culturally restricted materials and access to these will be considered on a case by case basis through the Senior Curator, Indigenous Collections Branch (ICB). NFSA Collection Access staff, in consultation with the ICB, provide access to works in the NFSA's Indigenous collection for research, screenings, radio and television broadcast and documentary productions. Access is provided in accordance with NFSA's Indigenous Collection Management Protocols and Guidelines. Screening and audiovisual presentation in Aboriginal communities are also encompassed by the policy, including the exercise of great care in managing sensitivities. This includes the use of a specific disclaimer or prior warning before screening materials in Aboriginal communities or before broadcast or public dissemination.

In 2010, the NFSA introduced an Award for Sound Heritage which was inspired by Fanny Cochrane Smith, an Indigenous Tasmanian woman who recorded songs and stories in 1899 and again in 1903 as part of her lifelong dedication to preserving the culture of her people. The importance of these recordings is recognised by their inclusion on the NFSA Sounds of Australia registry of recorded sound.

The NFSA is committed to the principles of Equal Employment Opportunity. To achieve this, the NFSA implemented special measures to create employment opportunities for Indigenous peoples in the management of Indigenous audiovisual materials. The ICP supports the integration of Indigenous employment across the organisation and provides Indigenous staff with training, support and study opportunities. The policy provides for career pathways for Aboriginal people, enables the participation of Indigenous people in the operation and management of the NFSA, and supports practical reconciliation outcomes.

## **Response to terms of reference**

### **The benefits of giving attention and recognition to Indigenous languages**

For Indigenous people, language is the current through which life, land, history, culture, song and story are transmitted. Languages truly are the voices of the land, so when languages are under threat, Indigenous people feel their ability to connect to, and care for country is also under threat.

To Indigenous people, losing languages means losing the ability to speak for that country and about that country to others. At present, UNESCO estimates that of all Indigenous languages still spoken in Australia, almost half are *critically endangered*<sup>1</sup>.

Indigenous languages are part of the world's intangible heritage. The NFSA is pleased to be able to support the preservation and enrichment of that intangible heritage, for the benefit of all Australians now and in the future.

Aboriginal people have identified 'Knowing about my family's history and culture' as the second most important factor in enhancing their wellbeing after 'Spirituality'<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> See <http://www.unesco.org/culture/languages-atlas/index.php?hl=en&page=atlasmap>

The NFSA, with its considerable holding of items that pertain to Indigenous people, can play an active role in achieving the aims of governments in assisting Australia's Indigenous people to recover from the colonial takeover of their lands and knowledge that formed part of their existence, and to take their place as part of the nation.

Thus the NFSA Collection Development Strategy enables Indigenous peoples, in accordance with their customary laws, to define, protect, maintain, own and control their intellectual property, most importantly their secret, sacred and traditional knowledge contained within collections material. In this capacity, Indigenous custodians of these materials will guide the NFSA in the culturally appropriate preservation, care, protection, management and control of their audio-visual heritage; in the development of standards for consent procedures; and the appropriate access and use of Indigenous materials including attribution and benefit-sharing arrangements.

Indigenous curatorship and management of the NFSA Indigenous collection exemplifies cultural leadership both nationally and internationally. It demonstrates an institutional awareness of the principle of self-determination and the importance of Indigenous self-representation. This insight extends to Indigenous cultural custodian's access to and reinterpretation of their cultural heritage; to Indigenous researcher's investigation of these works; and to Indigenous cultural producers creative reuse of these materials into new cultural heritage items. Non-Indigenous people represented Indigenous peoples and their cultures, to the nation and to the world, for over a century through a sense of conquest and thus ownership. The NFSA Indigenous collection stand as testament to this pursuit and the maintenance of non-Indigenous representation of Indigenous peoples and cultures, projects a colonially archaic Australian national identity. The re-contextualisation of these archival audiovisual works, from an Indigenous perspective, offers a contemporary understanding of this historic document.

## **The contribution of Indigenous languages to Closing the Gap and strengthening Indigenous identity and culture**

In light of eighty percent of social indicators on Indigenous health, housing and employment disadvantage showing no sign of change, The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) meeting on the 2 September 2009 reaffirmed the requirement by all governments to undertake decisive measures over the next decade and beyond, to close the socio-economic gap between Indigenous and other Australians. The NFSA as an agency of government may support the long-term realisation of this important government objective by continuing to refine our approach to the development and management of the Indigenous collection. The value to the Australian people includes a wealth of Indigenous cultural material and leadership in the management of Indigenous collections of local, national and international significance.

## **Specific NFSA policies, strategies and protocols**

[NFSA Collection Policy \(PDF 400.8 KB\)](#)

<sup>2</sup> see Grieves, V *Indigenous wellbeing – a framework for governments' Aboriginal cultural heritage activities* at <http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/conservation/IndigenousWellbeingFramework.htm>

[NFSA Collection Development Strategy \(PDF 245.5 KB\)](#)

[Indigenous collection protocols and guidelines \(PDF 267.3 KB\)](#)

[Indigenous restricted materials \(PDF 296.4 KB\)](#)

[Indigenous fact sheet 1 \(PDF 166.8 KB\)](#)

[Indigenous fact sheet 2 \(PDF 523.9 KB\)](#)

[Indigenous fact sheet 3 \(PDF 236.3 KB\)](#)

## Research

The NFSA offers an annual Indigenous Research Fellowship. The Fellowship offers facilitated access and research into the national collection, collaboration with NFSA curatorial and technical experts including support from Indigenous staff, accommodation in the NFSA Residence, a well equipped onsite work space and a grant of \$10 000, which includes travel and living expenses. The NFSA would welcome future research proposals for the Indigenous fellowship that focus on researching the national collection in relation to Indigenous languages.

The NFSA's 2011 Indigenous Research Fellow is Brenda Croft, a highly accomplished curator and artist, and most importantly a Gurindji woman whose project seeks to develop a Gurindji-specific visual documentation of landscape, people kinship and culture and produce a unique model of Aboriginal research and community capacity-building. Ms Croft's fellowship is giving her access to NFSA holdings on the Gurindji walk-off and further material relating to the pastoral industry in northern Australia. It's hoped the NFSA material will be used as the trigger for community-driven artworks, a website with interactive documentation, all linked to community networks and to the Kalkarindji School and Art Centre, for the use and enjoyment of the community. The repatriation of material in this collaborative way most significantly contributes to the concept of strong culture – the community feeling of health and well-being generated by community control over material relating to its histories and by extension, its identities, for its own use.

As partner in the ARC Linkage Project *Deepening Histories of Place* the NFSA is further developing an Indigenous Intellectual Property Protocol and suite of related guidelines and permission forms for the purpose of ensuring oral histories and on country recordings are made and used in accordance with the principle of prior informed consent.

## NFSA Indigenous collection highlights

- *1899 Fanny Cochrane Smith's Tasmanian Aboriginal Songs* – These are the only recorded example of Tasmanian Aboriginal songs and the only recorded example of any Tasmanian Aboriginal language.
- *Jailanguru Pakarnu* – The Warumpi Band released the first rock song in an Aboriginal language – Luritja - in 1983. The Warumpi Band originated in the Aboriginal settlement of Papunya in the Central Desert region of the Northern Territory. They toured the Northern Territory and Kimberley region playing to communities, outback stations and isolated townships and developed their distinctive sound whilst writing much of their material on the road. 'Jailanguru Pakarnu' (Out from Jail) was written, recorded and released by the band in 1983.
- *Nganampa Anwernekenhe* means 'ours' in the Pitjantjatjara and Arrernte languages. More than 180 episodes of this series have been produced and the primary aim of *Nganampa Anwernekenhe* is the maintenance of Aboriginal languages and culture. It is broadcast in

Aboriginal languages, and is the only Aboriginal language program produced by and broadcast to Aboriginal people. The series is subtitled so that it is accessible to people who do not speak the Indigenous languages used in each program.

- *The Yirrkala Film Project* is a collection of 22 films made with Yolngu of northeast Arnhem Land, shot by Ian Dunlop over a 30 year period. The films' major theme is the impact on Yolngu life, land and culture of the huge bauxite mine which began in the late 1960's at Gove. The films document the relationship between clans, ritual, art and land and include footage of several major ceremonies. Highlights of the collection include the film *In memory of Mawalan*: in 1971 Wanjuk Marika organised a Djan'kawu ceremony in memory of his father, the respected Rirratjingu elder Mawalan who [passed away at Yirrkala in 1967].
- *PY Media holdings*: a wealth of Pitjantjatjara-Yanguntjatjara language programming, from health and sports videos at Amata, to tjukurpa stories to health messages in language.
- Published popular and contemporary music recordings ranging from the country music of artists such as Dougie Young and Harry & Wilga Williams; to rock music from bands including No Fixed Address, Coloured Stone and the Warumpi Band and the latest Hip Hop from DJs, MCs and rappers such as Brothablack, Ebony Williams and Lez Becket.
- Traditional music by Indigenous artists, from early field recordings through to contemporary recordings from communities ranging from Badu Island in the Torres Strait to Tasmania. The NFSA also holds material resulting from community projects to revive and document language and traditional song, whether on-country or in the studio.

## Community use of the collection

A key focus for the NFSA is our commitment to ongoing and active engagement with Indigenous Australians and to providing Indigenous communities with access to the collection through providing copying services and a high level of technical support for onsite access to fragile and sensitive collection items. The NFSA also employs an identified Indigenous officer to facilitate access to the national collection.

*The Mulka Project* is the Yolngu Multimedia Archive and Production Centre at Buku-Larrnggay Mulka art centre in Yirrkala, north east Arnhem Land. It was established in August 2007 and is the only recognised archiving facility in Arnhem Land. One of its primary tasks is the building of a collection of digital images, sound and video that can be made available to the local community as well as, with certain conditions, outside researchers. The Mulka Project is actively involved in partnerships with academia, museums and individual researchers with collections and projects significant to the region. The NFSA Indigenous Collections Branch has repatriated significant material as well as provided access to material from Arnhem Land by inviting the cultural custodians of several Arnhem Land communities to view their holdings, assess the cultural significance of the titles and to help determine which of these should be returned to the people.

The NFSA acknowledges the existence of collections relating to Indigenous languages in other cultural institutions. Some of these collections date back to very early colonial times and provide very detailed information in relation to languages used and associated practices.

A key first principle driving NFSA's thinking on a potential future use of the national collection in relation to Indigenous languages is strategic development decisions need to match what the NFSA's national collection can provide.

An opportunity potentially exists for the NFSA's national collection to support work being undertaken in other institutions such as the Mitchell Libraries' *Rediscovery of Indigenous Languages* Project and the work of the Victorian Corporation for Aboriginal Languages.

With external funding support and community and expert engagement, the NFSA could undertake its own project to identify NFSA holdings containing Indigenous languages and associated cultural practices, then work on culturally appropriate strategies to make this work more publicly available in partnership with relevant communities. This could be part of a larger national project that aims to bring together the full identification and registry of Indigenous languages holdings in cultural collections across Australia with organisations and communities committed to the permanent maintenance and sustainability of Indigenous languages.

This work could also lead to the selected cultural repatriation of holdings to communities for their own future use from everything such as bi-lingual signage to community education and learning programs.

## **Collaboration with the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies**

A memorandum of understanding (MOU) between the NFSA and the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) ensures that both organisations work together to facilitate acquisition, preservation and, where appropriate, access to indigenous collections. The MOU ensures that community visits – whether the community comes to the organisation, or outreach visits – are conducted in a coordinated way. The organisations have agreed to advise each other of respective acquisition policies in order to avoid the circumstances of competition for the acquisition of collection items. Both organisations also share information about the development and preservation of collections and associated curatorial issues as well as the digitisation of collections, consider the potential for joint publications, and plan for appropriate development of the australianscreenonline website [<http://www.aso.gov.au>] to increase the availability of Indigenous works on the site according to agreed Indigenous protocols.

## **Online viewing**

A curated selection from the NFSA's Indigenous collection is available to be view on the NFSA's *australianscreen* website:

- [titles produced by Indigenous practitioners](#)
- [titles tagged with 'Indigenous Australians'](#)
- [Indigenous music](#)
- [titles with representations of Indigenous Australian peoples and culture by non-Indigenous producers](#)

The NFSA's Search the Collection on the NFSA website is the central gateway to finding all holdings of Indigenous works in the national audiovisual collection.

## **NFSA outreach: Black Screen**

The NFSA's Black Screen program provides Indigenous communities and the broader Australian public with free access to Indigenous films.

The NFSA's Black Screen program provides access to Indigenous films, including works by renowned directors Warwick Thornton and Ivan Sen. [DVD Compiles](#) of contemporary Indigenous films are

available for loan to individuals and organisations for screening events, festivals and community celebrations.

For National Aborigines and Islanders Day Observance Committee (NAIDOC) celebrations in 2010, there were over 60 screenings of Black Screen titles in 35 communities in almost every state, with total audiences of over 1000. The Consulate-General in Bali, Indonesia, even screened Black Screen films to celebrate NAIDOC Week. For NAIDOC celebrations in July and August 2011 there were 184 screenings with audiences of 3437 people.

Message Sticks Film Festival: The NFSA proudly continues its partnership with [Blackfella Films](#), once again supporting the Message Sticks Indigenous Film Festival's national and regional tour. Message Sticks 2011 kicked off at the [Sydney Opera House](#) on 12 May 2011. The tour this year will go to Blacktown, Brisbane, Canberra, Broome, Perth, Townsville, Woodford, Melbourne, Alice Springs, Garma, Cairns and Darwin.

The program showcases films by acclaimed Indigenous filmmakers Beck Cole (*Here I Am*, 2010) and Ivan Sen (*Tears*, 1998 and *Shifting Shelter 4*, 2010), and features the fascinating documentary (*Crookhat and the Kulunada*, 2010), plus a program of new shorts. The festival includes Q&As with filmmakers and special guests.

Films in the Black Screen compiles in Indigenous language include:

- **Wadu Matyidi (2010, G)**



In this short animated film we're taken back to pre-contact times (early 1800s) when Adnyamathanha children of the Flinders Ranges were inspired, schooled and entertained by their interactions with 'country'. Dir: Luke Jurevicius, Arthur Moody; Prod: Sonja Vivienne, Marjo Stroud

- **Wadu Matyidi - Behind the Scenes (2010, G)**



*Wadu Matyidi – Behind the Scenes* presents the background story of the *Wadu Matyidi* animated film project. In a fast-paced light-hearted style we learn how a diverse group of fascinating individuals conceived and developed this exceptional high-tech journey into



ancient knowledge.

Incite Stories/Farda Films Prod: Sonja Vivienne, Marjo Stroud

- ***Sunset to Sunrise* (2006, G)**



An 'Inkata' (senior law man) gives an oration in the desert that begins at sunset and ends with sunrise. A simple but extraordinarily compelling film, in the traditional storytelling style of the desert people. From the series *Nganampa Anwernekenhe* – the longest-running Indigenous created TV show in Australia.

(ingwartentyele – arrerlkeme) Dir: Allan Collins, Australia, 23mins; Writ: Allan Collins

- ***Footprints in the Sand* (2006, G)**



*Footprints in the Sand* tells of the extraordinary search for Warri and Yatungka, believed to be the last of the Gibson Desert people who 'came in' out of the desert for the first time in the late 1970s. This is both a sad love story and an uplifting tale of survival and rescue. (Jinna Mitinu Barnunga) Dir: Glen Stasiuk, Australia, 25mins; Prod: Glen Stasiuk, Paul Roberts, Writ: Glen Stasiuk

## Indigenous Oral Histories

In addition to supporting the repatriation of materials to Indigenous communities, many of whom have never seen the material previously, we record oral histories with Indigenous audiovisual professionals and practitioners across the film and sound industries. Oral history recordings enrich our cultural understanding by providing valuable insights into events and experiences. By conducting and collecting oral histories, we can capture a range of perspectives about a particular time and place, preserving these stories and making them accessible for future generations to appreciate. An aspiration of the NFSA is to partner with Indigenous communities to record interviews in language.

Interviews in the NFSA collection include an interview in language with Bandjigali man George Dutton; Albert Namatijira interviewed in the early 1960s by broadcaster Wilfred Thomas, and many NFSA initiated interviews in English with Indigenous musicians, performers and filmmakers including

Brothablack, Kev Carmody, Essie Coffey, Seaman Dan, Jimmy Little, Palla Masina, Rachel Perkins, Vic Simms, Bart Willoughby and Wilga Williams.

## **NFSA's Film Australia Collection**

The NFSA's Film Australia Collection (FAC) holds internationally acclaimed Indigenous films and stills from the 1940's to present day produced by Film Australia and its predecessor agencies including the Department of Information and the Commonwealth Film Unit. The FAC Library practices the fundamental principles of Indigenous Culture and Intellectual Property (ICIP) rights protocols when managing the preservation, digitisation and access to these materials.

Highlights from the FAC collection:

- *Aborigines of the Seacoast* (1948)
- *Areyonga* (1958)
- *Dances at Aurukun* (1962)
- *People of the Australian Western Desert* series (1966)
- *Not to Lose You, My Language* (1975)
- *The Yirrkala Film Project* (1979)
- *On Sacred Ground* (1981)
- *Women of Utopia* (1983)
- *Uluru - An Anangu Story* (1986)
- *Australian Biography* episodes: Neville Bonner, Faith Bandler, Lowitja O'Donoghue, Rosalie Kunoth-Monks, Ruby Langford Ginibi, Jimmy Little, Charles Perkins, Bill Harney (1991 - 2001)
- *Boomalli - Five Koorie Artists* (1988)
- *Mabo - Life of an Island Man* (1997)
- *Lonely Boy Richard* (2001)
- *Ceremony - The Djungguwan of Northeast Arnhem Land* (2005)

## **Building staff's cultural awareness**

The NFSA recognises the need to actively raise staff awareness of Indigenous culture. Demonstrating respect for and increasing staff knowledge of Australia's Indigenous culture will lead to a better understanding of the curatorial and management needs of our Indigenous collection. Raising cultural awareness will also enhance the NFSA's reputation in and relationships with the Indigenous communities and will increase opportunities for our current and future Indigenous staff. The NFSA has raised cultural awareness through training of staff by a recognised Indigenous trainer, observation and promotion of cultural days of significance, and participation in NAIDOC Week activities.