



***Developing Indigenous Social Capital and
Opportunity in the Digital Economy***

**A Response by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and
Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) to the
*Digital Economy Future Directions Consultation Paper***

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1. Executive Summary

The Australian Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) is Australia's leading centre for quality, community-based research about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and lifestyles – past and present. It plays a unique role as the keeping place of the world's largest collection of materials relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples including films, images, recordings and printed materials. Through its work, AIATSIS raises awareness among all Australians of the richness and diversity of Australian Indigenous cultures and histories, recognised as the oldest surviving cultures in the world.

AIATSIS welcomes the opportunity to provide input to the Department of Broadband, Communications and Digital Economy's (DBCDE) Digital Economy Future Directions Consultation Paper. Our response is focused primarily on social capital initiatives that aim to increase the participation of Indigenous Australians in the digital economy and to promote to the Australian public the richness and diversity of Australia's Indigenous cultural heritage. These issues inevitably raise fundamental matters of access to computers, training and broadband, especially in remote areas, that provide that first entry point into the "Digital Economy" or in other words, "Closing the Digital Gap".

Success of Indigenous Australians in the Digital Economy is best measured in the creation of enhanced social capital through activities that promote greater access for and participation by Indigenous Australians in the digital economy made possible through:

- The establishment of a National Indigenous Knowledge Centre Network, coordinated by AIATSIS. The establishment of such a Network is a key recommendation arising from the Australia 2020 Summit. The Network would utilise new and emerging technologies to enable uniform access to and knowledge of all materials relating to Indigenous Australia;
- The acquisition and uptake of skills by Indigenous Australians enabling use of new and emerging technologies in remote, regional and urban Indigenous communities;
- A coordinated, standardised and streamlined approach to the use of online content, language and protocols by government agencies in relation to Indigenous Australians; and,
- Increased access to free or low-cost resources for educators and students in remote, regional and urban Indigenous communities to enable improved skills in research and analysis.

2. Introduction – AIATSIS and the Digital Economy

AIATSIS is an active participant in the digital economy, specifically in relation to Australia's knowledge base relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander studies. AIATSIS is responsible for the safekeeping, preservation, digitisation and access of materials relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander studies.

Many of these materials are unique, irreplaceable and at risk. The prime enabler for archiving such materials is digitally based. As a result, the AIATSIS Audiovisual Archive has re-oriented its operations to utilise digital technology at every level. This encompasses collection preservation, client access, interoperability between institutions and communications across both the private and public sectors.

Examples of AIATSIS Digital Initiatives:

i) Audiovisual Archive – Digital Repatriation of Collections

The AIATSIS Audiovisual Archive has worked with Indigenous individuals, communities, Knowledge and Language Centres to both repatriate large amounts of collection material and to better identify and document those collection items. AIATSIS is currently trialling a software-based collaboration tool that will enable the direct involvement of Indigenous individuals and communities with the collections, more detailed item information and acceptable availability of these items to the wider Australian population. This tool can then be utilised to provide copies of materials, delivered digitally. This access system will provide for the complete and transparent involvement of Indigenous individuals and communities with the items that relate to them. It will not be restricted to those items held in the AIATSIS collections, but will extend to any participating collecting institution or Knowledge Centre, anywhere in Australia or overseas. In this way, AIATSIS demonstrates a commitment to 'bringing culture back home.'

ii) Online Exhibitions for all Australians

The AIATSIS Library has developed a range of online exhibitions that demonstrates in practical terms the value of providing quality online content that positively celebrates Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures. The exhibitions are designed for all Australians, but they are of deep interest to Indigenous Australians. During 2005-08, the online exhibition web pages attracted more than 6.25 million hits. The exhibitions provide social and educational benefits, encouraging usage of the Internet by Indigenous Australians and promoting social inclusiveness.

In particular, the examples given below convey the social and research capital of cultural agencies enabling research on the Internet:

We Say Sorry – The National Apology: - This online exhibition by the AIATSIS library draws together many of the videos, photos, music and documents which are online into one resource. It gives a brief history of the Apology. It also

provides a teachers' resource page and a reading list of stories by members of the Stolen Generations.

Dawn and New Dawn magazines: Dawn and New Dawn were magazines published from 1952 to 1975 by the New South Wales Aborigines Welfare Board. While they reflected the governmental attitudes of the times, they became an effective way for people to keep in contact. Today the magazines are an invaluable source of family history information as they include details of births, deaths, marriages and baptisms, as well as thousands of photographs. The AIATSIS Library has meticulously digitised the entire set. People can search by keyword or just browse any issue. By placing content such as the Dawn magazines online, AIATSIS has encouraged older users to go online to access content that is meaningful to them.

Other Online Exhibitions include:

- NAIDOC Posters, 1972 to 2007;
- Sorry Books: An Online Exhibition with selected messages from the Sorry Books held in the Library manuscript collection;
- To Remove and Protect:- State Laws identified in the Bringing Them Home report that enabled the forced removal of Aboriginal Children, annual reports of all state and territory 'Protection Boards' and subsequent government agencies;
- Treaty: - An overview of the history of the debates about a Treaty; and,
- YES! The 1967 Referendum: - Newspapers, reports and campaign material relating to the 1967 Referendum.

iii) Australian Indigenous Language Portal

AIATSIS recently launched AUSTLANG, a comprehensive online resource on Australian Indigenous languages, enabling search including geospatial browsing by Google Maps, language name and number of speakers - <http://austlang.aiatsis.gov.au>

iv) New AIATSIS Website

The new AIATSIS website, currently under development, is considering: The use of geo-location navigation to enable improved search and discovery of the AIATSIS website and catalogue. This will include review of geo-spatial parameters in text search tools for html pages. The use of interactive media formats to simplify presentation of complex data through interactive tutorials for web-users. The use of RSS feeds to enable third party newsreader tools to track the AIATSIS website.

v) Preserving Indigenous Websites

AIATSIS is a partner agency for PANDORA, <http://pandora.nla.gov.au> – the Australian Internet Archive that was developed and is hosted by the National Library of Australia (NLA). The archive consists of online publications and complete websites containing thousands of pages of text, sound recordings, and moving images. PANDORA is a selective archive - the NLA and its partners select those that they consider are of significance and which have long-term

research value. As a partner agency, AIATSIS selects titles for archiving according to our own selection guidelines. AIATSIS adheres to the Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Act 1989 and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Protocols for Libraries, Archives and Information Services when selecting material for inclusion in the archive.

AIATSIS recognises the importance of Digital Economy and utilises the digital economy to:

- Enable remote, regional and urban Indigenous individuals and communities to connect with each other as well as with other organisations and bodies;
- Provide online resources accessible to all Australians seeking to learn more about the rich and diverse cultural heritage of the First Australians; and,
- Create training and employment opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people working in cultural institutions.

3. AIATSIS Response to Consultation Topics

3.1 Open Access to Public Sector Information

The cultural heritage of the First Australians is recognised as the oldest continuing culture in human history. Throughout Australia libraries, archives, museums, historical societies and many private collections hold tangible and intangible cultural materials, which are the cultural property of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Indigenous Information Online

AIATSIS recommends that it be given responsibility for the complete redevelopment of the Indigenous Portal. The current 'Portal' is a text-only list of press releases and index to government web sites. This could be developed as a complete portal and could include all levels of government, representing a multi-platform content delivery system. AIATSIS could greatly improve this resource by broadening content for the portal, achieving a more useful and dynamic tool for users seeking information relating to Indigenous Australia.

The Encyclopaedia of Aboriginal Australia, last published by AIATSIS in 1994, is regarded as the definitive publication on Australian Indigenous cultures. The changing nature of publications means that it is unlikely that further printed editions will ever be created. The Encyclopaedia could be updated and redeveloped in conjunction with material developed for schools curricula, using multimedia technology to provide online access. Once completed, it would incorporate access to a much wider range of materials held by AIATSIS and other organisations. There is no commercial market for a publication of this nature, due to the size of the investment needed and the limited sales revenue.

Its value is in providing a definitive source of material on Indigenous affairs that would be continuously updated for all Australians.

National Indigenous Knowledge Centre Network

The creation of a National Indigenous Knowledge Centre Network will provide for coordination, standardisation and streamlined access for documenting and repatriating cultural heritage materials to Indigenous Australia and will have a one-stop web portal for all stakeholders and users. AIATSIS proposes to establish and host the network in partnership with key stakeholders; and, in doing so implement a key recommendation from the Australia 2020 Summit (Recommendation 7.38, 'Options for the future of Indigenous Australia').

AIATSIS recognises the desirability in collecting data and producing content in 'open' file formats, i.e. freely available and free to use. However, AIATSIS has not been able to identify open source products that fulfil all archiving and access requirements. AIATSIS is utilising Software as a Service (SaaS) applications which can be accessed via a web browser in some business areas including human resources and accounting.

3.2 Digital confidence

AIATSIS adheres to a range of strict protocols and procedures to ensure the culturally appropriate, respectful and sensitive use of materials held in its collections at all stages of deposit, archiving, preservation and access. This is fundamental to the ability of AIATSIS to maintain the confidence of the original custodians of the materials.

Digital confidence for Indigenous Australians could be improved by:

- AIATSIS hosting and facilitating discussion forums with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers using existing online technology as well as through its networks at seminars, meetings and conferences; and,
- Relevant agencies within the Australian Government conducting research into the take-up of all online services (e.g. desktop, mobile) by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in remote, regional and urban Australia. AIATSIS proposes the promotion of successful and innovative online programs and measures to be used in the dissemination of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures.

3.3 Developing Australia's knowledge and skills base

Indigenous Australians' digital knowledge and skills base could be assisted by considering the following:

- AIATSIS could in partnership with relevant government agencies conduct research into and promote schemes targeted at Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth in relation to identified industry skills shortages in the Digital Economy;

- AIATSIS recommends that the Australian Government address the need for improved digital and media literacy skills, particularly within remote communities through such measures as providing educators and schoolchildren with free or low-cost resources for developing the skills to effectively research online, develop analytical thinking and contribute to online communities; and,
- AIATSIS recommends that online resources using de-facto and formal online publishing standards be maintained across government to assist in the dissemination of quality information.

AIATSIS is exploring the use of free and low-cost online video hosting and broadcasting tools (e.g. vimeo, ustream.tv), as well as using internal capacity and expertise, to promote and re-distribute content and to facilitate action research using these resources.

3.4 Measuring the Digital Economy and its Impacts

There is potential for AIATSIS to work in partnership with relevant government agencies to define and measure the way in which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people take up Digital Economy benefits. Such measurements could be shared across government, particularly with reference to digital and media literacy in remote communities.

AIATSIS recommends that the Australian Government monitor the effectiveness of ‘Closing the Gap’ initiatives particularly with regard to how education and health programs engage with the Digital Economy.

AIATSIS is well positioned to assist and advise whole-of-government in the areas of knowledge transfer and translation between government departments and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, particularly those evolving into open towns.

4. Conclusion

AIATSIS welcomes this opportunity to respond to the Department’s Digital Economy Future Directions Consultation Paper. It is essential that the needs of Indigenous Australians be fully considered in the development of this policy area, which will include all aspects of people’s lives – including culture, education, employment and social inclusion.

Access to and participation in the Digital Economy represent a critical foundation for measures which seek to effectively address ‘Closing the Gap’. The existing inequities and imbalances in the digital world – in access to computers, training and broadband – must be addressed to enable Indigenous Australians to have the best opportunity to be involved in the Digital Economy.

Success in the Digital Economy must include access to Indigenous content. Collections of materials owned by, created by and about Indigenous Australians

are held in Indigenous organisations such as AIATSIS, libraries, archives and museums all over Australia, away from Country to which it belongs. This material is of profound cultural and historic significance for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders incorporating photographs/film of people, community, family; recordings of the sounds of language, story, song and ritual; publications and manuscripts of anthropologists and linguists. This is largely irreplaceable and represents the world's oldest surviving cultures yet inadequate access to the Digital Economy currently denies many Indigenous Australians access to these materials.

Much of this invaluable cultural heritage can be brought back home physically and digitally, appropriately and sensitively as required, to Indigenous Australians living away from Country, and where appropriate to schools and to the general public.

There is currently no overall strategy or responsibility for a whole of government approach to the preservation, access and return of Indigenous cultural heritage. Collections are held in federal, state and local government funded libraries, archives, museums and other collecting agencies.

Success in the Digital Economy would include a whole of government approach to enabling Indigenous Australians to participate fully through the measures outlined in this response.