Report on workshop for NTRBs on databases and access and use issues held at AIATSIS 29-30 June 2006

Executive Summary:
A workshop for Native Title Representative Bodies on databases, access and use was held at AIATSIS 29-30 June 2006. It grew out of a session at the 2006 Native Title conference in Darwin where two databases were demonstrated - one from Native Title Services NSW and the other by the National Native Title Tribunal. Because time was limited for discussion, they requested that a workshop be held at AIATSIS in Canberra before the end of the financial year in order to construct a best practice document addressing database structure and content, and ethics and protocols for access and use of connection materials. The OIPC provided a grant to cover airfares for one delegate from each NTRB and accommodation costs for all. Twenty-three representatives from thirteen NTRBs attended the meeting.

Aims of the workshop:
- To establish a network of NTRB staff who have designed databases, are looking to improve what they already have or create new databases
- To compile lists of software used for administrative and research databases
- To compile a list of recommendations for fields to be included on a generic database that will be useful for all NTRBs
- To make general recommendations on best practice for database structure and maintenance

The program
AIATSIS staff presented information on the Agreements, Treaties and Negotiated Settlements database (ATNS), the AIATSIS Aboriginal Biographical Index, and issues arising from state requirements for reporting . These were followed by powerpoint demonstrations of the new Ngaanytyara database, concentrating upon sites, and the relational database used by NSW Native Title Services. Originally, the National Native Title Tribunal had planned to be present to demonstrate their geospatial program, but they decided to organise a workshop in August to concentrate on their findings and to provide training for their system.

Delegates then described the databases in use in their own organisations, referring to descriptive files sent to AIATSIS before the workshop. Four working groups then formed to draft best practice guidelines. These were presented the second day and recorded. After a brief presentation on issues for copyright and the ethics of access and use of connection material, three discussion groups assembled findings and presented them to the entire group. Finally, the group completed evaluation forms and expressed opinions for further steps to be taken as a result of the workshop.

Delegates were able to attend the launch of the AIATSIS Digitisation program and the Wentworth Lecture given by Bob Tonkinson. Also, they were given copies of a compilation of all fields of information used by all NTRBs, a description of the Aboriginal Biographical Index and the AIATSIS Research Service in Native Title, and a booklet on legal issues for digitisation.

The findings:
Delegates stated the importance of having the strong support of their management for database functions so that there will be adequate and ongoing funding. A useful list of fields of information for Research and Administrative databases was compiled and circulated for comment, with several delegates offering additions/corrections. (ATTACHMENT A). There were 18 recommendations for best practice for database structure, with security, user-friendliness, standardisation of file formats, and proper authority structure for amending the database heading the list. (See ATTACHMENT B). All aspects of the database must be documented properly. It was agreed that there needs to be a set of protocols, both for entering data and how to use the database.

A set of recommendations was drafted also in the area of ethics and access issues. They centered around the importance of access to the proper owners of the intellectual property, keeping material accessible 'on country', and proper consultation mechanisms. See ATTACHMENT C.

Further steps:
All delegates agreed that the workshop was worthwhile because, in the past, they have felt isolated and now they have established an effective working group. The timing was especially good for the Goldfields representative as they are just beginning to establish a database and for the NLC, who are planning to change from a paper-based system.

There was interest in having a follow-up to this workshop towards the end of the year. Delegates would like more meetings/workshops to explore the following issues:
- Testing of the generic database format proposed by this workshop
- Preservation and storage of materials
- Assessment of software and examination of options
- Practical training in designing and using databases and in data input
- Training in digitising materials, including audiovisual holdings
- Exploration of protocols and policy amongst NTRBs for sharing material
- An investigation of duplicate systems within NTRBs
- Workshops focussed on discipline-based research issues, such as linguistics, genealogy, etc.
- Policy and legislative regime for the protection of materials
- Creation of a central database (NTRBs) of public documents (eg. library catalogues) and the sharing of public electronic documents
- Information on effective funding strategies for database creation and maintenance
- Workshop on access, copyright and moral rights

ATTACHMENT A

Fields of information for an ideal research database for NTRBs
- Register of Consultants, qualifications and contact details;
- Claim group lists;
- Claimants (Community) list and their contact details;
- Applicants list and their contact details;
- Working group list and their contact details;

- Personal history information;
- Claimants testimonies (evidence);
- Claim area boundaries;
- Geospatial site information;
- Genealogies;
- Minutes of meetings (one for Anthropology and one for Legal);
- Records of reports;
  - Report number
  - Author
  - Title of Report
  - Date of Report
  - Borrowed by (in/out)
- Correspondence with the State regarding connection material (including State's Peer Review);
- Federal Court Orders;
- Land tenure information;
- Researchers' note books;
- Consultants' agreements/Contracts and correspondence with Consultants;
- Report may be inputted directly;
- Research related material;
- Audiovisual research material; and
- NNTT research bricks.
  - Form 1
  - General correspondence (one for Anthropology and another for Legal)
  - Future Acts Notices (FAN), recipients, address, etc.
  - Respondent Parties, their interests and contact details
  - Calendar of events so as to keep track of the history, present stasis and important future dates of a claim.

It was suggested that the above be listed under claim groups with each claim having separate fields of information, and that Anthropological, Legal and FAN sections exist under each claim group.

Elements for an Administrative database:

File tracking and management- research and legal files
Mailing lists, also to be accessible from the Research database
Membership lists
Governing Committee and contact details
Ward

ATTACHMENT B

General recommendations for database structure:
1. Security of information and various levels needed. There is a dilemma with "knowledge being power." All information should be on the database but not all information should be accessible to everyone. Security of format—that the database will always remain functional and that there be clear directions for access.

2. All NTRBs need IT specialists-experts to make the database user-friendly, and to ensure that it continues to work. Adequate funding must be set aside for such a position within the NTRBs.
3. Single point of entry for all data
4. Variable and easily-manipulated series of front ends. There is a need for 3 types of databases- research, library and administration. These could exist as front ends for the underlying database with all information.
5. There needs to be a single person to monitor changes at a thesaurus level with proper authorisation and verification procedures.
6. Standardisation of file formats
7. Ensure multiple relationships within genealogical lists- a "point and click" mechanism to allow information at various levels. (Mention of ISIS Knowledge Warehouse, or the facility offered by Acrobat). Genealogical software such as The Master Genealogist, Flow-Charter and I_Graphics—all of which must be able to speak to other databases.
8. Necessity of separating basic data from analysis
9. Ability to store and to link to multimedia
10. A note field for evaluation of data or classification
11. Standardisation of how data is entered and to have standards for connection reports.
12. A field or fields should be included that show who has the intellectual property rights to information.
13. Deceased people should be identified in some way.
14. Executives at NTRBs must be committed to supporting the database and be informed about issues arising with them. Database working groups should have input into Board activities and priorities.
15. The greatest danger is atomization. NTRBs need to be connected and to have a common sense of purpose so that there can be coherent action amongst them.
16. A good spatial front end. Any database should be able to map spatial patterns and to include audio and other material within that can link to spatial data. Would like to see a 3_D image of country.
17. The database should be well-documented, fool-proof and simplified. Drop-down boxes are very helpful for categorization. Helpful software could be TriMagic, TRIMS, Oracle and Oracle Spatial. Whatever is used should have fields of information that allow for ease in creation of a connection report.
18. Proper administration of the collection- file tracking, etc. The database must be able to track draft copies as well as the final reports so that no information is lost. Protocols should govern how to document what happened to the originals and to track the changes.

ATTACHMENT C

Ethics and access issues

1. Information sharing amongst research units of NTRBs. Possibly a central server to which all NTRB-digitised documents (publicly available) could be indexed and located. Would allow swapping of digitised files. Suggestion that AIATSIS hold and manage materials from NTRBs in this way. Material would be restricted only to NTRBs. The major hurdle would be copyright because the status of the documents would change from internal to external.

2. In contrast, many NTRBs insist that original material generated by the claim process remain "on country."
3. Needs to be more connection between legal and research staff sharing of documents.
4. Protocols must be set for access and use, including procedures for dealing with Indigenous people who want isolated bits of reports.
5. Proper consultation mechanisms need to be set between owners of the knowledge and people requesting access to that knowledge.
6. Ensure that all staff observe protocols. When new staff members come, they must know the proper procedures.
7. Ensure a plan to establish procedures for safety of material if deregistration of an NTRB occurs. If insurance policies drafted, suggestion to include AIATSIS as a keeping place.

ATTACHMENT D

List of participants
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Louise Allwood, North Qld. Land Council NTRBAC
Tony Jefferies, Fiona Campbell and Camilla Blackburn-Smith Gurang Land Council
Carol Volker, Goldfields Land & Sea Council Aboriginal Corporation
Lorna Gregory, Carpentaria Land Council Aboriginal Corporation
Carly Talbot, Ngaanyatjarra Council
Amy O'Donoghue, Loyola Gray and Olaf Geerkin Central Land Council
Kim deRijke and Simon Davies, Central Qld. Land Council
Kim Barber, Belinda Oliver and Julie Stokes, Northern Land Council
Belinda Guest, Luke Miller, Native Title Services Victoria, Ltd.
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