

# Australian Government Submission to the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

## Repatriation of the Ceremonial Objects and Human Remains of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Australia acknowledges the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as one of the world's oldest continuous living civilisations, spanning at least 65,000 years. The strong connections of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders to family, land, water, language and cultures form the foundation for social, economic, and individual wellbeing.

The repatriation of Ceremonial Objects and Human Remains helps promote healing, justice and reconciliation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and recognises customary obligations, traditional practices and the unbreakable bond between the people, the land, waters and spirituality.

The Australian Government welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the study, and looks forward to discussing it at the next possible session of the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples under the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples to practise, maintain and protect their cultures. Furthermore, the Australian Government is pleased to share five good practices developed through its work on the return of cultural heritage material and would welcome an opportunity to discuss them more broadly:

- Partnerships are key – between Indigenous communities, collecting institutions and governments – to support the return of cultural heritage material;
- Indigenous communities must be at the heart of the repatriation process;
- Returning cultural heritage material supports cultural maintenance, restoration and revitalisation;
- Returning cultural heritage material is an important mechanism for reconciliation and healing; and
- Partnerships between Indigenous communities and overseas collecting institutions are key to ensure the ongoing access to and appropriate presentation of cultural heritage material.

## Introduction

Australia reaffirms its support for the Universal Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (the Declaration) and its encapsulation of the economic, social, cultural and political rights of the world's indigenous peoples.<sup>1</sup> Australian Government policies, programs and legislation give practical effect to Articles 11-13 of the Declaration including:

- The Australian Government Policy on Indigenous Repatriation and the Indigenous Repatriation Program, both administered by the Office for the Arts (OFTA) within the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications,<sup>2</sup>
- The Return of Cultural Heritage Project administered by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS),<sup>3</sup> an Australian Government statutory authority, and
- A scoping study and consultations by AIATSIS on a National Resting Place for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders.

### Australia's recognition of Indigenous cultures

The cultures of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are complex and diverse. They are one of the oldest living cultures in the world, dating back at least 65,000 years, and are kept alive by the passing of knowledge, arts, ceremonies and performances from one generation to another, speaking and teaching languages, and protecting cultural materials, sacred and significant sites, and objects.<sup>4</sup>

The Australian Government recognises the role the expression of culture plays in an Indigenous person's identity and the significant impact this can have, along with strong connections to family, land and water, on a variety of outcomes such as health, social and emotional wellbeing, and education.

The Australian Government acknowledges the right of Indigenous peoples to maintain, control, protect and develop their cultural heritage, traditional knowledge, and intellectual property. It is committed to working in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, service

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<sup>1</sup> Australia notes the Declaration is not binding as a matter of international law.

<sup>2</sup> See [arts.gov.au/what-we-do/cultural-heritage/indigenous-repatriation](https://arts.gov.au/what-we-do/cultural-heritage/indigenous-repatriation) for further information.

<sup>3</sup> AIATSIS is an Australian Government independent statutory authority focused on the diverse history, cultures and heritage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australia. AIATSIS was established to (1) develop, preserve and provide access to a national collection of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and heritage; (2) use that national collection to strengthen and promote knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and heritage; (3) provide leadership in the fields of: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research; ethics and protocols for research, and other activities relating to collections, related to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples; and use (including use for research) of that national collection and other collections containing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and heritage; (4) lead and promote collaborations and partnerships among the academic, research, non-government, business and government sectors and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in support of the other functions of the Institute; and (5) provide advice to the Commonwealth on the situation and status of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and heritage.

<sup>4</sup> Taken from a statement attributed to Ngunnawal Elder, Tina Brown, quoted in Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, *Closing the Gap Report 2018*, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra, p23.

providers and representative bodies. Place-based programs and activities are co-designed in consultation with regional governance bodies to support the delivery of activities, programs and services, including on Country,<sup>5</sup> that meet the needs and aspirations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

### **Australia's Federal System of Government and Repatriation**

Under Australia's federal system of government, law-making powers in relation to Indigenous culture and heritage lie with both the Federal and State governments. While primary responsibility for the protection of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural heritage rests with the states, the Australian Federal Government also has legislative powers with respect to Indigenous cultural and heritage issues including:

- The Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 enables the Australian Government to work with the states to provide, inter alia, a national scheme for the protection and management of important cultural places and to engage Indigenous peoples in various roles.
- The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Heritage Protection Act 1984 protects areas and objects of particular significance to Indigenous people. It allows the Environment Minister, on the application of an Indigenous person or group of persons, to make a declaration to protect an area, object or class of objects from a threat of injury or desecration.
- The Protection of Movable Cultural Heritage Act 1986 ensures that objects with cultural significance remain in Australia. It also provides for the return to the country of origin of foreign cultural property which has been illegally imported into Australia.

This report focuses on repatriation measures under the direct control of the Australian Federal Government and its agencies.

### **Australian Government Policy on Indigenous Repatriation**

The Australian Government Policy on Indigenous Repatriation (the Policy) was established in 2011 and covers the repatriation of Indigenous Australian Ancestral Remains and associated notes and data held in overseas collecting institutions and with private holders; and Ancestral Remains and secret/sacred objects from collections within Australia. The objectives of the Policy focus on:

1. Addressing the injustice of Australia's shared past as it relates to the removal of Ancestral Remains and secret/sacred objects to empower Indigenous Australian peoples to meet their cultural obligations and contribute to the wider Australian society.
2. Recognising Indigenous Australian communities as the focal point of Indigenous repatriation.
3. Seeking the voluntary and unconditional return of Ancestral Remains and associated notes and data from overseas collecting institutions and private collectors.

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<sup>5</sup> For the purpose of this submission, the term 'Country' means an area of land or body of water to which a community, organisation or individual has a cultural and/or spiritual connection, and in which they have rights or interests.

4. Seeking the safe return of Ancestral Remains and secret/sacred objects held in eight major Australian museums.
5. Supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to develop the capacity to maintain their cultural rights, knowledge and practices.
6. Achieving a seamless, whole-of-government approach to repatriation.

The Policy also provides for the appointment of an Advisory Committee for Indigenous Repatriation (ACIR). The six member, all-Indigenous Committee is appointed by the Minister for the Arts:

- a) To provide advice to the Australian Government:
  - i. In relation to the Policy;
  - ii. In relation to the repatriation of Ancestral Remains and secret/sacred objects that have limited provenance and no identified community of origin;
  - iii. In relation to repatriation matters that affect all or many communities (as each community advises on its own cultural protocols for Ancestral Remains and secret/sacred objects); and
  - iv. In relation to other relevant matters.
- b) To promote awareness and understanding of the repatriation of Ancestral Remains and secret/sacred objects.

The Australian Government recognises Indigenous Australian communities as the focal point of repatriation, and provides opportunities for them to engage with collecting institutions, private collectors and governments through the repatriation process.

### **Indigenous Repatriation Program**

The Australian Government has supported repatriation for over 30 years, recognising that repatriation helps promote healing and reconciliation for Indigenous Australian peoples. OFTA administers the Indigenous Repatriation Program (the Program) that supports the repatriation of Ancestral Remains held in overseas collections, and domestically, the repatriation of both Ancestral Remains and secret/sacred objects held in the seven Australian major state and territory museums and the National Museum of Australia.

The Program funds a range of activities including engagement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the area of repatriation, inventory and provenance research, domestic and overseas travel for community representatives, repatriation ceremonies overseas and on Country, preparation, packing and transportation of Ancestral Remains and secret/sacred objects, and the work of the Advisory Committee for Indigenous Repatriation. There are two main streams of the Program, which include domestic repatriation and international repatriation.

The ongoing bipartisan support of the Australian Government has seen the return of over 2,700 Ancestral Remains and over 2,240 secret/sacred objects to the custodianship of the Indigenous community of origin from the major Australian museums supported under the Museum Grants; and more than 1,600 Ancestral Remains returned to Australia from collections and private holders from overseas.

Through OFTA, the Australian Government has used past repatriations as a way to raise awareness and advocate on the importance of repatriation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and to demonstrate a global shift in attitudes towards holding Ancestral Remains and objects of significance in institutions. Each repatriation supported by the Program contributes to the advocacy efforts of all First Nations peoples seeking the return of their ancestors.

#### *Domestic repatriation*

There is no Federal Australian Government legislation that compels an Australian collecting institution to return Ancestral Remains or secret/sacred objects to Indigenous Australian communities. However, the Australian Government encourages a consistent national approach where possible. The Australian Government's support for domestic repatriation activities is provided through the Indigenous Repatriation Program – Museum Grants which provides funds to seven major state and territory museums and the National Museum of Australia. Museums are funded up to \$100,000 per annum to undertake repatriation activities and work in partnership with identified communities to return their ancestors and secret/sacred objects.

Governance arrangements for domestic repatriations in each jurisdiction are determined by the relevant state or territory government as they also provide funding direct to museums to assist with this responsibility. Many Australian museums have been active in repatriation, which culminated in the establishment of *Continuous Cultures, Ongoing Responsibilities: Principles and guidelines for Australian museums working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural heritage, 2005* which has been broadly adopted by the Australian collecting sector. Australian museums may also return Ancestral Remains and objects of significance in response to requests from a foreign government or community of origin. Where a museum does not have a specific policy on this, it is guided by the Declaration.

#### *International repatriation*

Under the international component of the Program, OFTA advocates and negotiates directly with foreign governments, collecting institutions and private holders to secure the voluntary and unconditional return of any Ancestral Remains and accompanying notes and data they hold. While there is no international legal framework that mandates collecting institutions or private holders to repatriate, OFTA maintains ongoing advocacy to facilitate repatriation discussions supported by the positive global change in collection ethics and practice.

OFTA's role involves working closely with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and overseas stakeholders to educate and demonstrate that repatriation is an important way of recognising and addressing the injustices of the past. Where communities are known, they are closely involved in the repatriation process. When Ancestral Remains cannot be identified to a community, it is the view of the Advisory Committee for Indigenous Repatriation that these Ancestral Remains are returned to Australia to be cared for and brought closer to home.

OFTA has established collaborative working relationships with overseas and domestic stakeholders to build ongoing support for negotiations and advocacy, and also works closely with the Australia's overseas diplomatic missions. In some cases, countries may request a government to government

approach. Taking a collaborative approach strengthens negotiations and demonstrates the Australian Government's commitment to repatriation.

OFTA seeks to maintain an ongoing conversation to positively influence global attitudes on repatriation matters, such as exercising influence through soft power assets. This may include working on collaborative research projects, staff and members of the Advisory Committee for Indigenous Repatriation participating in forums on related topics both in Australian and overseas, and promoting Indigenous voices. Through research and working in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, OFTA can demonstrate the continuing impact of past injustices, creating a deeper understanding of the outcomes Australia seeks to achieve through repatriation, such as healing and reconciliation.

#### **Case study**

OFTA works closely with Indigenous Australian communities to inform the way in which the return of ancestors to Country is conducted and acknowledges there is no single approach as each community is different. Some communities may choose to send a representative overseas to perform ceremony and accompany their ancestors to their home on Country, whereas others may choose to focus on repatriation activities on Country. In recent years, there has been increased interest from communities in using technology to record or livestream ceremonies as a way to transfer knowledge.

This was demonstrated by the Lama Lama family group, who are the traditional owners of lands extending for several hundred kilometres around Princess Charlotte Bay on the Cape York Peninsula in Far North Queensland.

In 2017, the State Museum of Hannover hosted the ceremony to return an ancestor to her community. The use of livestream signalled a new approach of working with community members and using technology as a method to tell their story of the importance of repatriation and returning their ancestors to Country. The use of technology also supported community elders to pass down traditional knowledge to the younger generations.

Family members were able to watch the overseas ceremony in Coen, Cape York with their children and explain what was happening and why, and prepare their children for their role when their ancestor was returned to Country. In subsequent returns, communities have also engaged videographers to record the various stages of the repatriation process to document the process for later knowledge transfer and to tell what it means to communities to return their ancestors home and stories of their ancestors.

#### **The Return of Cultural Heritage Project**

The Return of Cultural Heritage (RoCH) Project is part of a range of initiatives funded by the Australian Government to mark the 250th anniversary of Captain James Cook's voyage to the east coast of Australia. AIATSIS has led the RoCH project on behalf of the Australian Government to return material (including but not limited to objects, photographs, manuscripts and audio visual records) held overseas for the purpose of cultural renewal, revival, support and maintenance. To date, the RoCH Project has:

- Conducted a number of returns of cultural heritage material to Country and, from this, developed and documented protocols, processes and practices for international overseas cultural heritage material repatriation;
- Brokered and supported relationships between overseas institutions and originating Indigenous communities;
- Developed an appropriately accessible database of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural heritage materials held in overseas collecting institutions; and
- Developed options for a possible future work program.

Through the RoCH project, AIATSIS contacted over 200 overseas collecting institutions with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural heritage collections. Of those, 124 institutions shared information regarding their collections and 74 expressed an eagerness to establish a relationship with AIATSIS and/or Indigenous communities in Australia. Significantly, 44 expressed a willingness to consider a repatriation request. AIATSIS is continuing to work with 145 institutions to establish the preliminary geographical provenance and cultural origin of collections/objects. Information gathered will be documented in an appropriately accessible database of overseas-held cultural heritage material (currently under construction).

During the two years of the RoCH Project, AIATSIS has facilitated unconditional returns from two overseas collecting institutions: Illinois State Museum (United States of America), and Manchester Museum - The University of Manchester (United Kingdom). A total of 85 cultural significant objects have been returned to five cultural groups - Arrernte (Central Australia), Bardi Jawi (Kimberly region), Gangalidda and Garawa (North West Queensland), Njamal (Marble Bar) and Yawuru (Broome). The returned material includes secret/sacred, ceremonial and secular items, including but not limited to: boomerangs, shields, spears, clap sticks, body ornaments and necklaces.

AIATSIS has employed a staged engagement approach based on the principles of its *Guidelines for Ethical Research in Australian Indigenous Studies* (GERAIS) and *Ask First*. GERAIS sets out a framework for designing and carrying out ethical engagement in research, including research involving collections. *Ask First* embodies the principal that consultation and negotiation with Indigenous Australian stakeholders is the best means of addressing Indigenous cultural heritage issues.

GERAIS and *Ask First* recognise the importance of working in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples on any processes, projects and activities that may impact on them, including indigenous repatriation programs, whether involving Ancestral Remains, cultural heritage material or data and knowledge. In keeping with these principles, at all times the five Aboriginal communities (Arrernte, Yawuru, Bardi Jawi, Gangalidda and Garawa and Njamal) involved in the RoCH Project were at the centre of the decision-making processes and were engaged at the earliest possible stage of the Project.

The RoCH Project identified a number of good practices and lessons learned:<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> See further at Annex A.

- Partnerships are key – between Indigenous communities, collecting institutions and governments – to support the return of cultural heritage material;
- Indigenous communities must be at the heart of the process;
- Returning cultural heritage material supports cultural maintenance, restoration and revitalisation;
- Returning cultural heritage material is an important mechanism for reconciliation and healing; and
- Partnerships between Indigenous communities and overseas collecting institutions are key to ensure the ongoing access to and appropriate presentation of cultural heritage material.

## **National Resting Place**

Since European colonisation of Australia, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' cultural heritage material and ancestral remains have been collected, traded and removed from Australia. Information about their origins has been lost, making it difficult for those ancestral remains to be repatriated and laid to rest in a manner deemed both sensitive and appropriate.

Under the Indigenous Repatriation Program, ancestral remains are returned to Australia where possible but are often stored in state and territory museums if they are known to originate from that state or territory. The National Museum of Australia also provides storage, care and access arrangements for ancestral remains where information is not available to identify provenance beyond Australia.

Examining this issue in its *2014 Consultation Report on a National Resting Place*, the Advisory Committee on Indigenous Repatriation noted “for some time, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have expressed concern that museums, even with the best of intentions from curatorial staff, are a culturally inappropriate location for these ancestors. However, there is currently no alternative facility that has the capacity, or cultural authority, to care for these ancestral remains”.<sup>7</sup>

The Advisory Committee observed that “since 1993, there have been a number of discussions and consultations that have taken place around establishing a National Keeping/Resting Place that could properly house these poorly provenanced ancestral remains in a way that recognises their deep significance to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples” before recommending that “all ancestral remains provenanced only to Australia should be cared for in a National Resting Place”.<sup>8</sup>

In November 2018, the Australian Parliament’s Joint Select Committee on Constitutional Recognition relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies presented its Final Report.<sup>9</sup> It recommended the Australian Government consider the establishment, in Canberra, of a National Resting Place for

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<sup>7</sup> Advisory Committee for Indigenous Repatriation, *National Resting Place Consultation Report 2014* (2015, Canberra) page 8 available at [arts.gov.au/documents/national-resting-place-consultation-report-2014](https://arts.gov.au/documents/national-resting-place-consultation-report-2014).

<sup>8</sup> Ibid pp. 8 and 1.

<sup>9</sup> Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, Joint Select Committee on Constitutional Recognition relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, Final Report (November 2018, Canberra) available at [aph.gov.au/Parliamentary\\_Business/Committees/Joint/Former\\_Committees/Constitutional\\_Recognition\\_2018/ConstRecognition/Final\\_Report](https://aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Joint/Former_Committees/Constitutional_Recognition_2018/ConstRecognition/Final_Report).



the remains of Aboriginal and Torres Strait ancestors which could be a place of commemoration, healing and reflection.

In April 2019, the Australian Parliament's Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and External Territories tabled its report *Telling Australia's Story—and why it's important: Report on the inquiry into Canberra's national institutions*.<sup>10</sup> The thirteenth recommendation proposes the Australian Government relocate AIATSIS and expand its remit and facilities to constitute a comprehensive national institution focused on history, culture and heritage of Australia's Indigenous peoples, including a national resting place for repatriated ancestral remains that cannot immediately return to Country.

In June 2019, the Australian Government committed \$5 million to AIATSIS to undertake a scoping study and consultations on a National Resting Place. The Minister for Indigenous Australians, the Hon Ken Wyatt MP, noted in July 2019 that “for more than 150 years, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ancestral remains were removed from Country and placed in museums, universities and private collections in Australia and overseas. The National Resting Place will be a central place for commemoration, reflection and healing. A place for ancestral remains to rest in honour and peace, where all Australians can celebrate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures”.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and External Territories, *Telling Australia's Story and Why it's important* (April 2019, Canberra) available at [aph.gov.au/Parliamentary\\_Business/Committees/Joint/National\\_Capital\\_and\\_External\\_Territories/NationalInstitutions/Report](http://aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Joint/National_Capital_and_External_Territories/NationalInstitutions/Report).

<sup>11</sup> The Hon Ken Wyatt MP, Minister for Indigenous Affairs, Reconciliation WA Speech (Perth, 31 May 2019) available at [ministers.pmc.gov.au/wyatt/2019/reconciliation-wa-speech](http://ministers.pmc.gov.au/wyatt/2019/reconciliation-wa-speech).

## Return of Cultural Heritage Project – Good Practice and Lessons Learned

### Background and methodology

The Return of Cultural Heritage Project ('the ROCH project') leveraged AIATSIS' dual role as a government statutory agency and independent research institution and demonstrated the importance of a partnership approach with Indigenous communities. In broad terms, AIATSIS' engagement with Indigenous communities commenced with two questions: "Is this your material?" and "Do you want it back?" and research took place over the following stages:

- **Initial research phase and correspondence with overseas institutions.** AIATSIS drew upon previous studies of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural heritage material held in overseas collecting institutions and completed an extensive search of public museum catalogues and records. From this, AIATSIS identified and contacted more than 200 overseas collecting institutions about their holdings.
- **Engagement with key stakeholders.** AIATSIS liaised with over 50 peak bodies across Australia. This informed relevant key stakeholders, such as peak bodies and land councils, about the Project and helped to identify the local bodies which represent individual Indigenous communities in matters of culture, heritage and repatriation.
- **Partnered with communities.** AIATSIS partnered with five Indigenous communities for the RoCH Project. The partnerships were culturally appropriate and together AIATSIS and the community analysed material in order to confirm its ownership and develop a repatriation request. These requests were for material that could support that community's cultural maintenance and/or revitalisation.
- **Return of material to Country.** Two delegates from each community – accompanied by AIATSIS – travelled to the overseas collecting institution to collect their material and ensure its safe transport home. This facilitated the relationship and partnership. AIATSIS ensured the material was transported all the way back to the Country of that Indigenous community in order for an appropriate welcome to take place – sometimes this was a private affair where Senior Men and Elders put material into a Keeping Place; other times this was a community celebration with over 100 people at an event with speeches and dances.

### ***Relationships are key: the complexity and difficulty of repatriation***

Repatriation is complex and difficult, with parties separated geographically, socially and culturally and having to negotiate and complete complex administrative and bureaucratic processes. As such, the relationship between the Indigenous community seeking repatriation and the overseas collecting institution is key. AIATSIS – as an independent government statutory authority with cultural authority and mandate – was able to play a bridging role and help establish a relationship between the local Indigenous community and overseas collecting institution. AIATSIS was able to lend its research and curatorial knowledge to facilitate the return of material, act as the requesting government agency (where an official government request was required) and help negotiate the complex, resource and time intensive de-accession process.

### ***Indigenous communities must be at the heart of the process***

The key to the successful repatriations under the ROCH project was the identification by the Indigenous communities of the material that they wanted repatriated and the reason why they wanted the specific material repatriated, i.e. the material identified would help maintain the cultural practices of the community. In the RoCH project, the partnership with the indigenous community and their driving rationale for the repatriation – cultural revitalisation and maintenance – was a key factor in the decision by the overseas collecting institutions to proceed with repatriation.

Importantly, Indigenous communities did not seek the repatriation of all cultural heritage material in overseas collections but material that assisted them to revitalise or maintain their cultural practices. As such, the question “What is suitable for repatriation?” is best directed to the Indigenous community seeking repatriation as it is they who are best placed to understand what material will revitalise or support their continuing cultural practices. The partnership approach acknowledges that Indigenous communities should determine what material should be repatriated and that this cannot be limited only to secret/sacred material.

### ***Returning cultural heritage material supports cultural maintenance, restoration and revitalisation***

The return of cultural heritage material held in overseas collecting institutions back to Country strengthens communities and cultures. As Mark Inkamala, Senior Arrernte Man, said about the return of Arrernte cultural heritage material from Illinois State Museum:

*Returning the material will restore our culture and strengthen community. Young people need to learn about culture and bringing back the material will help us do this. The return of the material will let us reconnect it to Country. It will also help us preserve our culture and pass knowledge onto the young people.*

Returning material enhances the cultural education of young people by bringing old and young people together, instigating inter-generational dialogue about the past.

### ***Returning cultural heritage material is a mechanism for reconciliation and healing***

For many Indigenous communities, repatriation is a mechanism which facilitates and supports a journey of healing, reconciliation and truth telling. Through the RoCH process, it was apparent that the physical return of material is just the beginning of a much larger conversation about self-determination, keeping places and cultural revitalisation. Material repatriated as part of the RoCH Project was transferred to traditional owners/custodians, via on Country handover events. The handover of cultural heritage material from Manchester Museum to the Gangalidda and Garawa peoples was attended by over 100 people. This event brought Indigenous and non-Indigenous people together to celebrate the return of the material and promoted truth telling, healing and reconciliation within the community.

### ***Partnerships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and overseas collecting institutes are key to ensuring appropriate access to and presentation of cultural heritage material***

A key question that arose through the RoCH Project concerned the ongoing management of cultural heritage material that was not repatriated and remained in overseas collecting institutions: How could Indigenous communities retain access to that material and shape an appropriate cultural narrative around its display? The repatriation process offered Indigenous communities and collecting

institutions an opportunity to discuss the material, what should be displayed, how it should be displayed, what it meant and what story it told. It also offered an opportunity to discuss what material was not on display and how it should be managed. The repatriation process facilitated the establishment of a partnership between Indigenous communities and collecting institutions around the ongoing management of material held by the collecting institution and an opportunity for access by the Indigenous community to the material held on display and in storage and a more dynamic, culturally appropriate presentation of that material.

## Glossary

	<b>Definition</b>
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples	An Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander is a person of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander descent who identifies as an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander and is accepted as such by the community in which they live.
Country	For the purpose of this document, the term 'Country' means an area of land or body of water to which a community, organisation or individual has a cultural and/or spiritual connection, and in which they have rights or interests.
Cultural heritage material	All forms of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural heritage material, including but not limited to objects, audio visual, artwork and documentary cultural heritage material.
Elders	Knowledge holders within a community, some of which are Lawmen/Lawwomen and Senior Lawmen/Lawwomen.
Indigenous community	A group of Australian Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people who identify as a cultural unit.
Lawman/Lawwoman (Lore)	A senior male/female knowledge holder within an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander community, who has responsibilities for culture, ceremonies and to make important decision on behalf of the community.
Owners/custodians	Members of an Indigenous community. Within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, some cultural heritage material is owned by individuals, while other material is the responsibility of an Indigenous community, who are stewards of that material to ensure it is looked after for future generations.
Senior Lawman/Lawwoman	The most senior among Lawmen/Lawwomen and the most significant knowledge holders within a community. Senior generally implies a person is an Elder but not necessarily.