FROM THE DIRECTOR’S OFFICE

I missed filing a report for our October edition of our newsletter due to extensive travel commitments in the lead up to publication so I wish to report on a few events that took place before that newsletter.

I spent much of August and some of September visiting the Australian Indigenous Governance Awards, in Melbourne on 12 October. The winners were announced the Yiriman Project took out Category B: Outstanding examples of Indigenous governance in a non-incorporated initiative or project. In Category A the Highly Commended award went to the Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC) and in Category B to the Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly.

In this period I also attended the first World Indigenous Lawyers Conference in Hamilton New Zealand at Waikato University hosted by Te Hunga Rauia Maori o Aotearoa. I delivered a paper on the recognition of Indigenous peoples rights and also participated on a panel on the law as a tool for Indigenous peoples development.

I participated in a panel in Sydney the ABC during July together with Alison Page, Professors Megan Davis & Frank Brennan moderated by Paul Barclay presenter & series producer of ABC Radio National’s Big Ideas. We addressed the question: A Constitution for all Australians – where to next for Indigenous recognition? I was also involved in a similar forum in Canberra with Masepah Banu organised by ANTaR & ACT COSSA.

Perhaps the greatest honour during that period was to be involved in ‘A Way through’ A forum for Rick Farley. It was a privilege to join with Susan Boden, Nicholas Brown, John Kerin, Penny Spoelder and Phillip Toyne to remember Rick and his lasting contribution the country.

In the months since our last newsletter I have been very busy indeed. I was involved in the judging of the winners of the Vice Chancellor’s Reconciliation Awards for students and would like to congratulate Bhiamie Williamson for his sketch Two Journeys, One Path. The sketch depicts Bhiamie’s journey as an Indigenous undergraduate being mentored by an older non-Indigenous man, Professor Richard Baker, on a cross-cultural community-based research project with a remote NT Indigenous community.

The Postgraduate award winner was Laura Rademaker for her essay Language, History, Land Stories of Anindilyakwa and English. Laura, a Canberra currently residing in Darwin and speaking of her experiences on Groote Island, NT, describes herself as a “bewildered student from Canberra in a foreign place.” Her essay talks of how crucial Indigenous Australian languages are and how acknowledging this is an important act of reconciliation.

Additionally the judges Highly Commended another undergraduate entry: the musical score Luni by Jeffrey Chean.

I met also during the period met a delegation of Metis peoples from Manitoba, Canada lead by the President of the Manitoba Metis Federation Mr David Chartrand.

I was delighted to attend the Tjabal end of year students’ dinner at Vivaldi’s and rather than be the after dinner speaker, I was the after dinner interviewee and one of the students, Jess Fortune did a wonderful job of asking difficult questions and putting me on the spot. I can highly recommend that approach. I would not shed too many tears if the after dinner speaker as an institution passed into oblivion.

We hosted a few events during the period and in particular the Likanimiri exhibition in partnership with the ANU Drill Hall Gallery and the Australian Institute of Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Studies. The Exhibition is a display of rarely publicly seen items from the AIATSIS collections usually packed away in their state of the art vaults.

I took another trip to New Zealand at the invitation of the Law School at Waikato University to open their new Centre for Maori & Indigenous Governance. I greatly appreciated the invitation from the Dean Professor Brad Morse and the Centre’s director Dr Robert Joseph for the opportunity to deliver the keynote address – 3 times! Hamilton, Rotorua & Wellington.

Dr. Bill Fogarty one of our academic staff members and I also gave evidence to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs on their Inquiry into the Contribution of sport to Indigenous wellbeing and mentoring.

I attended and delivered the opening keynote public lecture at the Place & Displacement Conference conducted by Victoria University in Melbourne.
The Annual ANU National Reconciliation Lecture was also delivered during the period by Alison Page who delivered a very different type of lecture based on a personal account of her life experience entitled ‘Fifty Shades of Brown’ thoughtful and provocative it caused me to ponder the future of our quest for reconciliation.

Summer is on us and I welcome our summer scholars Sarah Bourke, Nicole Slight & Jess Fortune who will all spend some time with us over the long break.

Finally I must pay tribute to Anna Damiano who left the ANU after 18 years of dedicated service more than half that time with the NCIS. She approached her tasks with professionalism and determination and I am very grateful for the great contribution she made to the NCIS and our objectives – she will be missed.

In farewelling Anna I welcome Barbara Wallner to the NCIS team in the newly established position of Centre Manager. Barbara will also serve as my EA as did Anna.

Mick Dodson

**NEWS**

**Farewell to NCIS Executive Officer, Anna Damiano**

The opening night of the Likan’mirri II art exhibition also marked the end of an era in NCIS history, with Anna Damiano celebrating the end of nine-and-a-half years as the NCIS Executive Officer. NCIS offers a profound “thank you” to Anna for her outstanding contribution to the Centre and wishes her all the best in her future endeavours.

**NEW S WELCOME . . .**

Barbara Wallner joined the Australian National University in 2011 and has been a staff member at the Joint Administration Group (JAG) Research Office. She joined NCIS as the Centre Administrator in October 2012, and is responsible for the administrative and outreach functions of NCIS.

Barbara worked at the University of Vienna, in the Centre for Translation Studies, as Personal Assistant to the Dean and Project Management Officer until 2010. Prior to this, she worked as a Marketing Assistant in the Boehringer Ingelheim Regional Centre Vienna pharmaceutical company. Barbara has a strong background in project and event management, and also in communications. She loves to network with other people.
The Annual ANU Reconciliation Lecture
Alison Page ‘Fifty shades of brown’

Alison Page delivered a thought-provoking and ground-breaking ANU Reconciliation lecture to a packed audience at the National Film and Sound Archive on 26 November. Daughter of an Aboriginal man and “a ten pound pom”, Alison Page talked about her own identity and family which is not defined by black, white, brown, or any colour. She will talk about pride where there once wasn’t any. Passionate about the living definition of culture, Alison unpacked the values at the heart of Aboriginal culture and the many languages that are used through storytelling to express them. Connecting this with the broader process of reconciliation, she argued why we need to embrace Aboriginal culture and its values as central to our national identity.

If you are interested to listen to the speech, please open the link: http://ncis.anu.edu.au/events/reconciliation_lect.php

Lawrence Hargrave

Sport and improved mental health and wellbeing of Indigenous children

A National Centre for Indigenous Studies researcher says sport plays an integral role in improving mental health and wellbeing of Indigenous children.

Dr Bill Fogarty spoke at a public hearing of Federal Government’s Inquiry into the contribution of sport to Indigenous wellbeing in Melbourne last week.

The Government asked the House Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs to inquire into this issue in September.

He says the inquiry is a good opportunity to have a look at the relationship between sport and Indigenous engagement, wellbeing and mentoring.

“The research shows this as well; that there are some things that really do engage students.

“Things like music, art, learning in and from country, from countrymen and elders, bilingual education programs have an impact on attendance, and, of course, sport.

“Sport’s one of the key vehicles for which to re-engage learners and get kids coming to school.

“So, I see sport, and I don’t just mean football, I mean all sport, as having a really integral role in the development of leaders and the re-engagement of remote Indigenous kids in Australia.

Bill Fogarty

NCIS hosts delegation from Vietnam

On November, 30th, the NCIS hosted a delegation of MPs from Vietnam. There were four MPs including an MP from the Hill Tribes who described himself as an ethnic minority MP but which would likely translate into ‘Indigenous Vietnamese’ in Australian use of the term. They were eager to gain an insight into Australian Indigenous issues, both historical and contemporary. The discussion was lively and the exchange of information was greatly appreciated by the delegation and this was acknowledged by the delegation leader Hon. Mr. Ksor Phuoc. The guests also exchanged gifts and were particularly pleased to receive a map of Aboriginal Australia. The visitors spent most of the morning at the NCIS in wide ranging discussions. The delegation then walked to the Tjabal Centre where they were welcomed by the Head of the Centre Ms Anne Martin. Ms Martin spoke briefly about the role of the centre and in response to a question also explained the function of the Tent Embassy. Tjabal offered the guests a wonderful morning tea. The feedback from the meeting was very positive and they invited NCIS staff to visit the Vietnamese parliament and in particular to visit their electorates.

Thanks to Barbara for organising.

Asmi Wood
Dr Tom Calma AO
SOCIAL JUSTICE CAMPAIGNER

Respected for his inspirational and inclusive advocacy for human rights and social justice, Dr Tom Calma has dedicated his life to improving the lives of Indigenous Australians. For more than four decades he has championed the importance of empowerment – a passion which runs through his work in education, training, employment, health, justice reinvestment and development. Tom was formerly the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner and Race Discrimination Commissioner. He works to create opportunities for Indigenous voices to be heard and to build partnerships to improve their health, well-being and economic independence. His landmark report calling for the life expectancy gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people to be closed within a generation laid the groundwork for the Close the Gap campaign. As Race Discrimination Commissioner and today, Tom works to advance Australia as an inclusive society including many roles in the community relating to social inclusion, reconciliation, mental health and higher education.

CONGRATULATIONS TO NCIS ADJUNCT, ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR TOM CALMA AO

NCIS sends its warm congratulations to our adjunct scholar, Associate Professor Tom Calma AO, for his receipt of the ACT Australian of the Year award on 21 Nov.

Justice Reinvestment

NCIS Researcher, Dr Jill Guthrie together with colleagues has been successful in obtaining research funding to explore Justice Reinvestment. Justice Reinvestment has been gaining attention among Indigenous, health and offender advocates and is seen as a possible solution to Indigenous over-representation in Australia’s criminal justice system. Justice reinvestment aims to divert funds intended to be spent on criminal justice matters back into local communities to fund services, eg, mental health, drug and alcohol, employment initiatives, housing, that address the underlying causes of crime, thus preventing people from entering the criminal justice system. However, what is missing is the evidence to support Justice Reinvestment beyond appealing rhetoric – evidence that can facilitate public debate and policy attention among politicians.

With colleagues, Professor Mick Dodson, Dr Tom Calma, Professor Michael Levy, Professor Tony Butler, Dr Phyll Dance, Professor Lisa Strelein and Dr Kamalini Lokuje, Jill was successful in obtaining an Australian Research Council 2013 Discovery Indigenous award. Over a three year period, using a Justice Reinvestment framework and working collaboratively with stakeholders, the research – an exploratory case study – aims to identify the conditions, governance structures and cultural appropriateness of reinvesting resources otherwise spent on incarceration, into holistic health services that could enhance juvenile and young offenders’ ability to remain and realise their human potential in their community. It will also undertake cost-effectiveness analysis of current spending on incarceration and cost-benefit analysis of adopting a justice reinvestment approach with the case study community.

The Lowitja Institute, Australia’s National Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Research, is a research body that brings together Aboriginal organisations, academic institutions and government agencies to facilitate collaborative, evidence-based research into Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health. In April 2012, the Lowitja Institute called for application for small project grants. With colleagues from the UNSW’s Kirby Institute – Professor Tony Butler, Professor Gavan Mooney, Mr Michael Doyle – Jill was awarded a research grant for work to be undertaken in the ACT, NSW and WA, which seeks to determine through the use of citizens’ juries, the opinions and views of a critically informed public towards treatment alternatives to incarceration, as well as examine whether policy makers are influenced by the opinions and view of citizens juries. The research will provide important evidence in the offender health area and contribute to the Justice Reinvestment debate among offender health, criminal justice, political and community stakeholders.

Jill Guthrie
Maintaining Indigenous languages: revering a distant past or contributing to a better future?

Special guest Bill Fogarty argues that Indigenous language maintenance and education is not about reverence for some distant past for esoteric reasons. Rather it is an important asset that can play a role both in developing a future for Indigenous communities and in benefiting the socio-economic fabric of the Australian Nation.

Unlike some of my esteemed colleagues here, I am not a linguist. Please don’t hold that against me. I am an educational anthropologist or perhaps I’m an over-anthropologising educationalist. To tell you the truth I don’t really know. What I do know is that I have learned over the last fifteen years so, working as both an educator and a researcher in remote Indigenous communities, that the role of Indigenous language is critical in engaging students and their families in the educational process. I have also learned that Indigenous language maintenance and education is not about revering some distant past for esoteric reasons. Rather it is an important asset that can play a role both in developing a future for Indigenous communities and in benefiting the socio-economic fabric of the Australian Nation.

In the short time I have I want to discuss two points. The first is a quick review of the research findings about Indigenous language education, and in particular bilingual education. The second is the role of Indigenous language in remote development.

Throughout most of the last century, education policy that was aimed at disenfranchising the cultural fabric of Indigenous communities dominated school language policy. Key components of cultural production such as language and cosmology were deliberately subverted through education as a vehicle for indoctrinating and assimilating students. This is best evidenced through practices of ‘training’ stolen generation children in skills of domestic servitude and the common practice of banning children from speaking their own languages in school. It is important that any Indigenous language policy discussion acknowledge this fact up front.

Remembering this history, I’d like to now briefly note the broad findings from the research base in relation to bilingual education and the teaching of Indigenous languages in schools as it stands today:

- The international research base is clear in determining that conceptual development in children is enhanced when students are taught in their first language.
- The research base is clear in showing that education of Indigenous students in their first language is a critical component of students well-being, self esteem and personal development at school.
- Indigenous communities, parents and teachers overwhelmingly support the teaching in Indigenous schools. This is a crucial factor in the engagement of Indigenous parents and communities in education generally.
- There is no evidence that learning in an Indigenous first language has a negative effect on English language acquisition.
- There is no credible evidence that ‘English only’ remote schools perform better than bilingual schools.
- The evidence of the benefits of Indigenous language programs for Indigenous students overwhelmingly supports their continuation and development.
Indeed, it seems surprising to me that there is still such resistance in some education policy circles to providing bilingual programs to Indigenous students.

Much of the more recent debate and discussion around the role of Indigenous languages in education has focused either on the role of education in the maintenance of Indigenous languages, or on the role of Indigenous languages in English literacy and learning. While both of these issues are critical to any policy formulation on Indigenous languages, there has been a paucity of discussion and understanding in public policy about the potential and importance of Indigenous languages in the connection between school and local development activity, particularly in remote Australia.

In Australia, there is a belated interest in the role that Indigenous Knowledge (IK), and especially, Indigenous Ecological Knowledge (IEK) can play in the generation of economic and social development activity in remote regions. What is often not explicitly recognised is that Indigenous languages are the repositories of IK, and as such are the bedrock upon which IK (and IEK) are built. Indigenous systems of knowledge and practice are embedded within language and institutionalised by language. What is known, how knowledge is gained, and even how knowledge is defined and expressed is to a large extent determined by language and its use in context. In other words, language is knowledge. The use of IK or IEK in development, therefore, depends upon the continued intergenerational availability of Indigenous languages to support such knowledge.

The ‘value’ of IK and the Indigenous languages that underpin it, has long been recognised in the fields of agriculture and medicine, as well as in bio-prospecting and in conservation, wildlife management, tourism and art. Internationally, The World Bank, The UN and the IMF have all formally recognised the economic value of Indigenous knowledge in the alleviation of poverty, the creation of sustainable development and in the provision of localised employment pathways.

A good example of emergent development that relies on Indigenous knowledge and language is Indigenous Land and Sea Management (ILSM) in remote Australia. If you would like to read more about this, I recommend books such as People on Country.

Finally, the importance of Indigenous languages and knowledge to ILSM is just one example of the role languages can play in localised development and employment activity. Unless education in local Indigenous languages is supported, IK and IEK can be lost over a relatively short time period, as exhibited by language extinguishment in many parts of Australia. With the loss of language, pathways to potentially viable Indigenous livelihood options and related education and career opportunities for remote Indigenous youth will also be lost. This is something we should all work together to avoid in the future.

Bill Fogarty

Compiled by Barbara Wallner