



Submission

To the Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Inquiry into Language Learning in Indigenous Communities

From John Hobson, Koori Centre, University of Sydney

January 4, 2012.

The Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) research grants have been the mainstay of high quality linguistic, anthropological and archeological research nationally for the last two decades. While the Indigenous Languages Support (formerly Maintenance of Indigenous Languages and Records (*MILR*)) scheme provides invaluable support to predominantly community-based activities, it has been the AIATSIS research grants that have traditionally funded the bulk of academic research that underpins such work.

The following announcement on the AIATSIS website is therefore deeply troubling and has already begun to impact negatively on the progress of planned research activities in the field:

“2012 Grants round suspended

With the greatest reluctance, the AIATSIS Council has decided that applications for research grants will not be invited for the 2012 year. Although an important discretionary program, this will be the first time in over 20 years that grants will not be available.

AIATSIS funding from Government has fallen steadily over the past decade, in inflation-adjusted terms. Submissions to Government for increased base funding, or exemption from the efficiency dividend, have been unsuccessful. We have now passed the point where all legislated functions can be delivered, and in this context Council took the view that decisive action was called for. Whilst Council noted, and appreciates, the Government’s decision to exempt AIATSIS from the additional 2.5%



Koori Centre
Rm No 224 Old Teachers College A22
The University of Sydney
NSW 2006 Australia

T +61 2 9351 2046
F +61 2 9351 6923
E koori.centre@sydney.edu.au
sydney.edu.au/koori

ABN 15 211 513 464
CRICOS 00026A



efficiency dividend in 2012-13, this will have no positive impact on ongoing funding.

An internal review of the grants program found that it isn't meeting the intended purposes. It has been substantially unchanged for over a decade, and would need to be redesigned to meet current expectations from Indigenous communities, researchers and AIATSIS priorities. In addition, the grants program is no longer eligible for inclusion in the Australian Competitive Grants Register, due to a Government policy decision in 2010.

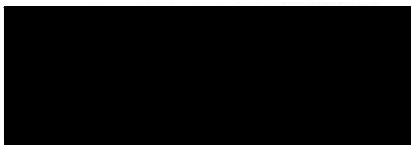
For these reasons, Council reluctantly decided that the grants program could not be funded next year. Instead, the funds will be used to bolster research in priority areas which are critically short of resources.

A report will be provided to Council's meeting in August 2012 on the impact of this change."

<http://www.aiatsis.gov.au/research/grants/grants.html>, accessed December 15, 2011.

This announcement dramatically evidences the tenuous state of funding available to Australian language conservation and revitalisation and suggests an urgent need for the establishment of a substantial and ongoing funding base to support research into Indigenous languages and cultures into the future, as well as a significant boost in the funding levels for AIATSIS itself.

It is hoped that a recommendation from the Committee in this regard might have some effect.



John Hobson