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[home](#) > [policies](#) > Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander protocols

[Home](#) [About ALIA](#) [Membership](#) [Events & Activities](#) [News & Publications](#) [Education & PD](#) [Employment](#) [Groups](#)

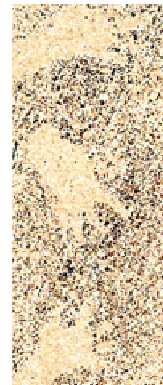
[Issues & Advocacy](#)

## Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander protocols for libraries, archives and information services

### The protocols

#### Preamble

1. [Content and perspectives](#)
2. [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander intellectual property issues](#)
3. [Accessibility and use](#)
4. [Subject headings/Classification of materials](#)
5. [Secret or sacred materials](#)
6. [Offensive materials](#)
7. [Governance and management](#)
8. [Staffing](#)
9. [Education and training for professional practice](#)
10. [Awareness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and issues](#)
11. [Copying and repatriation of records to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities](#)



#### **Preamble**

These protocols are intended to guide libraries, archives and information services in appropriate ways:

to interact with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the communities which the organisations serve, and  
to handle materials with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander content.

They are a guide to good practice which will need to be interpreted and applied in the context of each organisation's mission, collections and client community.

The protocols address:

1. the recognition of the moral rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the owners of their knowledge;
2. other important issues arising from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander content and perspectives in documentary materials, media and traditional cultural property;
3. issues in access to libraries, archives and information resources by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples;
4. encouragement for both the involvement and the participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the governance and operation of libraries, archives and information services; and
5. appropriate representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and their cultures in libraries, archives and information services.

### **1. Content and perspectives**

*It is my view that you need to look carefully at the way Aboriginal people are portrayed in libraries, and you need to reach out to Aboriginal people and show us that we are welcome to participate in an area which we were excluded from for a long time.*  
(Mick Dodson, 1993)

Many of the records, books, images and other materials held by Australian libraries, archives and information services include depictions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, culture and experience presented from a variety of perspectives. Major institutions have a responsibility to ensure that their collections are comprehensive, inclusive and reflective of all perspectives. These collections may include sensitive material which needs to be handled with special care. Smaller institutions may have a more specialised collecting focus.

In developing and managing collections, organisations will follow good archival and/or library practice. Additionally, in order to respond appropriately to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and issues, organisations should consider the following strategies:

- 1.1 Consult in an appropriate and ongoing manner with relevant Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in regard to the development and management of the collections.
- 1.2 Seek to balance collections by acquiring material by as well as that about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
- 1.3 In the case of government archives, consult through the relevant government agency. Agencies should be advised of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander content of materials and appropriate access policies.
- 1.4 Promote the existence and availability of collections and provide clients with an explanation for any conditions governing access.

1.5 Facilitate the development of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community keeping places.

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## 2. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander intellectual property issues

*We can and ought to demand restricted access to some records. But in respect of any particular item, it must be the indigenous people with authority in the particular group who own the information who advise on research and curatorial practices.*  
(Marcia Langton)

*The final point I wish to make concerns ownership in the legal sense. The information collected about us is simply not owned by us.*  
(Henrietta Fourmile, 1989)

The interests of the authors and publishers of records, books and other documentary material are protected by copyright law but the interests of those whose culture is described are not. The primary rights of the owners of a culture must be recognised. Libraries, archives and information services will:

- 2.1 Become aware of the issues surrounding cultural documentation and the need for cultural awareness training.
  - 2.2 Develop proper professional recognition of the primary cultural and intellectual property rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and consult with appropriate Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander peoples on their application.
  - 2.3 Develop ways, including the recognition of moral rights, to protect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural and intellectual property.
  - 2.4 Share information on initiatives involving cultural documentation.
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## 3. Accessibility and use

*The second point is, once you've got librarians who are able to relate to Aboriginal people warmly, then you have to find a way in which you can strengthen your librarians to be strong enough to get out of their buildings and go into the community. The third point is that, once you've got out there into the community and the people like you, then is the time to invite them back into the library.*  
(Maisie Wilson, 1979)

Aboriginal people who have written about libraries and other resource centres have invariably mentioned how important it is to feel comfortable in them. This includes having approachable staff members, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander faces amongst the staff, an easy atmosphere and pleasant surroundings. Friendly staff will mean that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples do not feel intimidated by an alien Anglo-American system or inadvertently made to feel inferior if they do not know how to find information. Libraries, archives and information services will:

- 3.1 Develop and implement clear statements of the types of resources and services Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples want by initiating consultation to determine appropriate resources and services.
  - 3.2 Employ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in visible areas such as reference and other service points as well as in other public roles such as client liaison.
  - 3.3 Employ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as liaison officers to work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and/or communities served by the organisation ensuring that the liaison is ongoing, responding to the changing interests and needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
  - 3.4 Ensure accessibility by encouraging and fostering positive relationships between staff members and clients including peoples from all backgrounds.
  - 3.5 Promote libraries, archives and information services in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.
  - 3.6 Encourage the use of the organisation's facilities as meeting places and resources for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
  - 3.7 Involve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the planning, design and layout of libraries, archives and information services to create welcoming and suitable environments.
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## 4. Description and classification of materials

*We have been referred to and catalogued as 'savages' or 'primitive' while Western industrial peoples are referred to as advanced and complex.*  
(Mick Dodson, 1993)

Indexing terminology, subject headings and classification systems are designed to provide easy access to materials in libraries, archives and information services. However, the use of outdated, inaccurate or value laden terms actually obstructs access. There needs to be nothing less than a total paradigm shift away from Eurocentric approaches to categorisation and description. To improve access libraries, archives and information services will:

- 4.1 Develop, implement and use a national thesaurus for describing documentation relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and issues.
  - 4.2 Develop and use subject headings and guidelines for archival description which are sensitive to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and which promote effective retrieval.
  - 4.3 Promote appropriate changes to Library of Congress Subject Headings with the aim of retrospectively recataloguing items recorded with unsuitable subject headings.
  - 4.4 Improve access by the introduction of classificatory systems which describe items by their geographic, language and cultural identifiers.
  - 4.5 Consult with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples at local, state/territory and national levels in relation to the description, cataloguing and classification of materials in libraries, archives and information services.
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## 5. Secret or sacred materials

*There is information that is restricted, that our children cannot learn about, there is information that is restricted even to adults, there is information that is of a secret or sacred nature, that many people have no knowledge of or access to. That knowledge is only there for certain people to have access to.*  
(Galarrwuy Yunupingu, 1986)

Some of the materials in libraries, archives and information services are of a confidential or sensitive nature which may require certain restrictions on access for regulatory, commercial, security or community reasons.

In relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander content, these sensitivities have greatest force when the materials include records and/or depictions of secret and/or sacred information which may have been recorded with or without permission. There are both published and archival materials which contain secret or sacred information which should have not been made generally available. An item need not be on open access to everyone just because it has been

published: some Aboriginal peoples have given secret information to respected researchers, not realising that the information would be published and made available to the general public.

Secret or sacred/sensitive indigenous information should not be confused with material that may be considered offensive to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Guidance on the handling of potentially offensive material is provided in **Protocol 6**.

A *working definition* of secret or sacred material must include consultation ie an item is secret or sacred if it contains information which is considered to be secret or sacred by the community to which it pertains. Suitable management practices will depend on both the materials and the communities served by the organisations.

In implementing the processes through which such materials are managed, libraries, archives and information services will:

5.1 Consult in the identification of such materials and the development of suitable management practices with the most appropriate representatives of the particular Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities involved.

5.2 Facilitate the process of consultation and implementation by developing effective mechanisms including liaison with reference groups at local, state and national levels.

5.3 Participate in the establishment of reference groups consisting of senior library and archival services staff and Aboriginal representatives.

5.4 Seek actively to identify the existence of secret or sacred and sensitive materials by retrospectively surveying holdings and by monitoring current materials.

5.5 Each appoint specific, designated Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander liaison officer/s to serve as the specific point/s of contact between their institution and the relevant reference group/s.

5.6 Provide suitable storage and viewing facilities with limited access as may be required.

5.7 Ensure that any conditions on access are understood by staff and users and are fully implemented.

5.8 Support the establishment of a national database for the identification of publications with secret or sacred content and of suitable management practices.

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## 6. Offensive materials

*No person is likely to willingly go to a place which portrays or displays them in a way that is alien and degrading.*  
(Mick Dodson, 1993)

Libraries, archives and information services need to recognise that their collections may contain materials that are offensive to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Such materials may be racist, sexist, derogatory, abusive or offensively wrong. Many examples are of a historical nature but some are contemporary. Libraries, archives and information services have a responsibility to preserve and make accessible the documentary record but must also respond appropriately to the existence of offensive materials. Within the context of their missions and the communities they serve, organisations will:

6.1 Develop an awareness of the extent to which their collections may contain materials which will be offensive to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

6.2 Take advice from and develop effective consultation strategies with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in relation to sensitive materials including materials which are offensive.

6.3 Develop strategies to deal appropriately with offensive materials in consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

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## 7. Governance and management

*There is no requirement for Aborigines to be members of the governing boards or councils, no provisions for some form of Aboriginal or advisory committee,...*  
(Henrietta Fournille, 1989)

Libraries, archives and information services which serve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and/or hold materials with Aboriginal and Torres Strait content or perspectives should ensure the involvement and participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in governance, management and operation. Such agencies will:

7.1 Ensure appropriate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander membership of governing and advisory bodies including boards, councils and committees.

7.2 Ensure meaningful Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation in effective development, adoption and implementation of relevant policies.

7.3 Develop mechanisms to ensure effective monitoring and review of policy implementation.

7.4 Facilitate organisational change to accommodate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives.

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## 8. Staffing

*Because this is what we have got to get, Aboriginal staff in libraries, if we are going to have Aborigines in libraries.*  
(Maisie Wilson, 1979)

The inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples within organisations can change organisational culture for the benefit of all. Libraries, archives and information services will:

8.1 Aim to reflect the composition of the client/community population in each organisation's staffing profile.

8.2 Take affirmative action to recruit and promote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. This responsibility will require employers, educational institutions and professional bodies to be proactive in developing employment and promotional pathways.

8.3 Recognise the value and/or relevance of prior learning and/or qualifications in other fields when appointing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

8.4 Involve members of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community in the selection of staff when it is appropriate.

8.5 Ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff members are suitably trained and supported.

8.6 Facilitate the entry of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff members into management positions through support strategies such as mentoring and training.

8.7 Recognise and respond to the cultural needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff members.

8.8 Develop and implement cross cultural awareness programs which ensure that all staff are approachable and sensitive to cultural diversity.

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## 9. Education and training for professional practice

*I strongly urge that we ensure that cross-cultural training is a requirement of library training by ensuring that it is on the library education agenda. Ideally these skills should be taught early in learning institutions and continually maintained in work places so that we can provide an equal service to all people.*  
(Phyllis Williams, 1993)

Libraries, archives and information services must ensure their staff are appropriately prepared to deal with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander materials, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients and staff. Libraries, archives and information services, educational institutions and professional bodies will:

9.1 Ensure that library and archive education and training courses at all levels adequately cover issues relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander materials, clients and staff.

9.2 Provide indigenous cultural awareness training for every staff member and particularly all who deal with the public.

9.3 Provide appropriate models for professional practice in cataloguing, acquisition, collection management and other areas on matters of concern to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

9.4 Ensure that education and training programs involve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in both design and delivery.

9.5 Support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in archive and library education and training through such means as positive encouragement, mentoring and study leave.

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## 10. Awareness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and issues

*Ignorance and fear on the part of the dominant communities often influences the way those societies deal with indigenous communities. Libraries have a duty to dispel that ignorance.*  
(Wharehuia Hemara, 1992)

Libraries, archives and information services can contribute to greater understanding between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and nonindigenous peoples. In pursuing this national aim, information agencies will:

10.1 Be proactive in the role of educator, promoting awareness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, cultures and issues among nonindigenous people.

10.2 Be proactive in acquiring materials produced by Aboriginal and Islander peoples and organisations.

10.3 Highlight Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander content and perspectives through such means as oral history and indexing and record copying projects.

10.4 Promote awareness and use of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander related holdings, by such means as targeted guides, finding aids, tours and exhibitions.

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## 11. Copying and repatriation of records to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities

Archives and libraries often hold original records which were created by, about or with the input of particular Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. A community may place tremendous importance on particular records and request copies for use and retention within the community. Some records may have been taken from the control of the community or created by theft or deception. In addressing this issue, libraries and archives will:

11.1 Respond sympathetically and co-operatively to any request from an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community for copies of records of specific relevance to the community for its use and retention.

11.2 Agree to the repatriation of original records to Aboriginal and Islander communities when it can be established that the records have been taken from the control of the community or created by theft or deception.

11.3 Seek permission to hold copies of repatriated records but refrain from copying such records should permission be denied.

11.4 Assist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in planning, providing and maintaining suitable keeping places for repatriated records.

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Compiled by Alex Byrne, Alana Garwood, Heather Moorcroft and Alan Barnes. The Protocols have been published by **ALIA** for ATSLIRN. Endorsed at the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Library and Information Resource Network (ATSLIRN) Conferences December 1994 and September 1995 and at the First Roundtable on Library and Archives Collections and Services of Relevance to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People May 1995. Comments, improvements and examples of implementation should be directed to **ATSLIRN**.

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