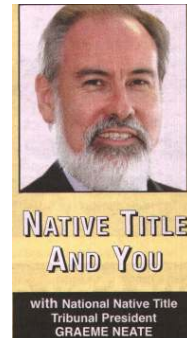




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Conference an opportunity to discuss, reflect



AUSTRALIA'S native title leaders and policy-makers congregated in Canberra from 1-3 June for the annual native title conference organised by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS).

The event is an opportunity for people involved in all facets of native title to discuss and reflect on progress in native title around Australia and issues of concern to them and their organisations.

This year claimants, native title holders, people from native title representative bodies, state and federal government departments, the National Native Title Tribunal, politics, academia, the legal profession and anthropologists attended the conference.

Information, ideas and experiences were shared in relation to the themes 'People, Place, Power', reflecting the fact the conference was held in the national capital where significant native title decisions have been made and the *Native Title Act* was passed and amended.

The AIATSIS conference has been an important forum for debate about the Act. It has contributed ideas that have shaped various amendments since the Act was implemented in 1994.

The Tribunal continues to inform and participate in the open discussions at the annual conference.

This year I joined Justice John Mansfield and Justice John Dowsett of the Federal Court and lawyer Ann Daniel in a panel discussion 'Resolving native title claims: Putting the 2009 amendments to work'.

The judges outlined the approaches the Court is taking to case manage claims more actively, and to work with the Tribunal, parties and funding departments to set regional priorities so that claims move more quickly and predictably towards resolution.

Tribunal Member Daniel O'Dea and regional manager Tom Weaver jointly

presented a paper 'Mediation and case management post-2009' on the second day of the conference. Their paper focused mainly on Queensland and West Australian experiences. It analysed statistics, court orders and hearing outcomes, examining case management, Tribunal mediation and how the parties have responded to the 2009 amendments.

The Tribunal is pleased to join others involved in native title to contribute to the debate about the direction native title should take.

It is through such discussions that new approaches can be developed to improve outcomes for claimants and other native title parties.

As with all conferences, much of the exchange occurred outside the formal sessions.

I caught up with people who have been involved in Aboriginal land claim proceedings since long before the *Native Title Act*, and we were able to reflect on decades of experiences and outcomes.

I talked to people from different native title groups who told me of their achievements and the benefits they are enjoying from native title. One claimant, however, told me of his disappointment and despair in relation to his group's claim.

So, formally and informally, various experiences and perspectives were shared.

The Tribunal welcomes and supports changes to processes, policies and approaches that enable us to better facilitate timely and effective native title outcomes.

● Visit www.aiatsis.gov.au for more about the AIATSIS 2010 native title conference and AIATSIS' new book *Dialogue about Land Justice: Papers from the National Native Title Conference*, a collection of key papers from previous conferences.