



Libraries play important role

SPECIALIST information available from National Native Title Tribunal libraries is helping people involved in native title to progress their negotiations.

Under the *Native Title Act*, applicants are required to present reports that demonstrate their community has had an ongoing connection to country over many generations.

The Tribunal's collection, featuring rare and old books, includes important information about Australia's early colonial history and Indigenous life and activity at that time.

This kind of information can be crucial evidence in Federal Court hearings to determine native title because it shows Indigenous presence in Australia's early colonial history.

Among the Tribunal's valuable research materials is a book published in 1886-1887 – *The Australian race : its origin, languages, customs, place of landing in Australia, and the routes by which it spread itself over that continent*, by Edward M Curr. This has been used to help show connection for many groups of Indigenous people.

In other libraries, rare books like Curr's are often kept under lock and key and access is limited to supervised readings, so it is satisfying to work in an environment where people can borrow and read these sorts of important documents.

The library takes a range of steps to ensure important documents are kept in circulation.

Many rare books have been recorded electronically from the internet or other sources to ensure they remain intact and available to researchers.

For example, the Tribunal discovered there was only one copy of anthropologist Professor W E H Stanner's original thesis *Economic change in North Australia tribes*, which was published by the University of London in 1938.

With permission from the late Professor Stanner's widow Patricia, the library obtained a copy from the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) – which had been holding the only copy of this thesis on microfiche. The Tribunal had a copy made and now, for the first time, this is available for public lending.

The Tribunal's libraries were established in 1995, in the Principal and Western Australian registries in Perth, and the Queensland Registry in Brisbane. The Tribunal's offices in Melbourne, Sydney, Adelaide, Darwin and Cairns also have collections of books, journals, and other publications that can be the starting point for hands-on native title research.

Researchers can make an appointment with Tribunal librarians to receive personal assistance on research projects into native title or related issues.

Native title representative bodies are key library users because of their work to develop connection reports. The Tribunal library provides induction

courses to explain to researchers how they can most effectively use the service to complete their reports.

The Tribunal's research and legal sections are extensive users of the library, with projects completed after accessing often hundreds of references from the Tribunal's library. For example, the Daly River project used more than 700 references from materials in our library or items borrowed from other libraries.

Membership of the library entitles many researchers to access most services provided free or at normal library charges. People with an interest in native title can also subscribe to email alerts about what's new in the library.

The library also provides an email 'judgment' alert service to advise subscribers when native title decisions are made and include links to reports on a wide range of issues that affect native title. More than 600 subscribers receive this service.

People with a general interest in native title are advised to first seek information at their public library. If information is not available from regular sources, then libraries can borrow items from the Tribunal libraries.

The Tribunal's library services can be accessed online at www.nntt.gov.au – go to Publications, maps and research > Library services – and the library catalogue is available for information searches for all web visitors.



Koori Mail
21-Oct-2009
Page: 22
General News
Region: National
Circulation: 9164
Type: Australian Magazines Lifestyle
Size: 381.96 sq.cms
Frequency: Fortnightly

