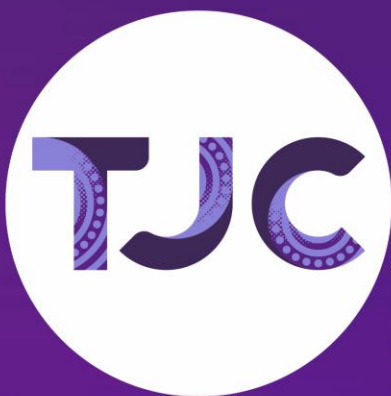




CultureStrong Platforms

Setting the Standard at Wikimedia

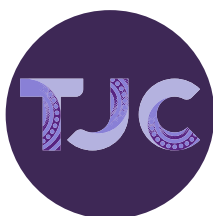


**Terri Janke
and Company**
Lawyers and Consultants

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

Terri Janke and Company (**TJC**) acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the lands on which we live and work. We extend our respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples throughout Australia. We recognise their ongoing connection to land, sea and community. We pay our respects to their knowledge, and to the Elders past and present.

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CULTURAL WARNING

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander readers should be advised that this document may contain names or references to people who have since passed away.

A NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY

The term Indigenous is used throughout this White Paper as an inclusive descriptor for Indigenous peoples globally and, within the Australian context, to refer to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Where possible, this White Paper seeks to refer to specific Nations, language groups, communities or peoples by their preferred terms of identification and acknowledges that preferences regarding terminology may differ between communities and individuals. References to Indigenous peoples internationally similarly seek to defer to the preferred forms of identification used by those communities.

SPELLING OF INDIGENOUS WORDS AND NAMES

This White Paper contains Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language words, including names of clan groups and communities. The authors recognise that there are often alternative spellings. Respectfully, the authors have used the spelling preferred by the people who are referred to within this White Paper, to enable them to describe themselves. Where the names are generally used, commonly used spelling is adopted and, in some cases, alternatives are noted.

LEGAL NOTICE

The laws and policies referred to in this publication are current as of 16 July 2026. Any reference to laws and policies are for general use only and should not be relied upon for legal advice for a specific matter. For such matters, it is recommended to obtain professional legal advice from a suitable, qualified legal practitioner.

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FOREWORD

Dear Wikimedians,

CultureStrong: An Open Letter to Wikimedians

For many people, Wikimedia platforms are the first place they go to learn, including what they learn about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. That reach carries great responsibility.

Much of what has been recorded about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples was not written by us. Much of it was written at a time when we had little or no say in how we were represented. As a result, it can carry stereotypes, inaccuracies and perspectives that were never our own. Our oral knowledge systems were often written down by others, and the person holding the pen held the power to decide how our culture was described.

For Indigenous peoples, the control and management of knowledge and cultural expression is a way of life. It is how culture is carried, protected and passed on from generation to generation. Some knowledge, including sacred and secret material, should not be shared at all. The fact that something can be found in the public domain does not automatically make it appropriate to reproduce or share. We must also consider whether it belongs there in the first place.

Harm is done, too, through the quiet repetition of half-truths online, where one error becomes a hundred. At the same time, Indigenous voices remain underrepresented in the writing, governance and moderation of knowledge on these platforms. Yet those voices and perspectives are exactly what is needed to make Wikimedia more accurate, respectful and genuinely inclusive.

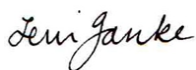
This paper seeks to help turn that around. It recommends that Wikimedia Australia develop a dedicated ICIP and Indigenous Data Sovereignty (**IDSov**) Protocol through a staged, Indigenous-led process shaped with communities, Knowledge Holders and Wikimedians. At its heart is CultureStrong: an approach that supports best practice, creates culturally safe environments, and encourages more Indigenous people to participate in the sharing and stewardship of knowledge.

This is not a departure from what Wikimedia stands for, it is an extension of it. Wikimedia's mission rests on knowledge that is accurate, verifiable and accessible, and on platforms that are genuinely inclusive. Working in this way strengthens that mission. It leads to better sourcing, fewer errors repeated as fact, and a richer, more trusted record of human knowledge, where Indigenous peoples can recognise themselves, their histories and their voices. Real progress will require ongoing listening, learning, adaptation and Indigenous leadership. But together we can build something stronger.

So, I invite you to join this movement, to take part in the discussions, share your ideas, and help create platforms are inclusive and CultureStrong.

With respect,

Dr Terri Janke



1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1. The Importance of Indigenous Cultural Knowledge

Across Australia and the Pacific, shells have long held cultural significance. They have been used as adornment, traded across vast distances, incorporated into ceremony, and fashioned into tools and artworks. A shell found on a beach may appear to belong to no one. It can seem free for anyone to pick up, collect or take away.

Yet a shell carries a deeper story.

It comes from a living ecosystem. It has connections to place, to sea Country, to culture and to the people who understand its significance. Its value is not simply found in the object itself, but in the relationships, knowledge and meaning connected to it.

Indigenous knowledge is often treated in a similar way. Once knowledge is written down, archived, digitised or placed online, it is frequently assumed to be free for anyone to use, reproduce or reinterpret. Yet knowledge does not lose its connection to the people, communities and Countries from which it comes simply because it becomes publicly accessible. Like the shell on the beach, it carries relationships, responsibilities and cultural meaning that deserve recognition and respect.

1.2. The Challenge

For millions of people around the world, platforms such as Wikipedia are the first place they go to learn about Indigenous peoples, cultures, histories and knowledge. Yet much of this information has historically been collected, recorded and governed without Indigenous involvement. As a result, digital platforms can unintentionally perpetuate inaccuracies, colonial narratives, cultural harm and the exclusion of Indigenous voices from decisions about how their cultures and knowledge are represented.

Research undertaken by Wikimedia Australia and Indigenous researchers has highlighted concerns regarding cultural safety, the reliance on Western knowledge systems, the underrepresentation of Indigenous voices, and the absence of Indigenous governance mechanisms in relation to Indigenous content. These concerns reflect broader global conversations about Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP), Indigenous Data Sovereignty (IDSov), and Indigenous peoples' rights to maintain, control, protect and develop their cultural heritage and knowledge.

1.3. What is CultureStrong?

CultureStrong is both a framework and a movement designed to address these challenges.

Grounded in ICIP, IDSov, the [United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples \(2007\)](#) and the principles of self-determination, CultureStrong seeks to strengthen the integrity, accuracy and cultural safety of knowledge systems by centering Indigenous authority, leadership and participation.

At its heart, CultureStrong asks a simple but powerful question:

Who has the cultural authority to tell this story?

While many Western knowledge systems assess reliability through publication, citation and academic recognition, CultureStrong recognises that Indigenous knowledge systems are also built upon cultural authority, community accountability, oral traditions, informed consent and cultural protocols. Indigenous peoples should not merely be the subjects of knowledge. They should help determine how their cultures, histories and knowledge are represented, interpreted and shared.

1.4. Indigenous Leadership in Action

Across the world, Indigenous communities are already demonstrating what this can look like.

In Canada, the Atikamekw Nation partnered with Wikimedia Canada to translate articles, photographs and audio recordings into their language. What began as a classroom project evolved into a community-led initiative that strengthened language preservation and passed cultural knowledge to future generations.

In Aotearoa New Zealand, Māori contributors have helped spark important conversations about the protection of mātauranga Māori within open knowledge systems. Māori editors have highlighted that some knowledge is taonga (a treasure carrying cultural responsibilities) and have challenged assumptions that all knowledge should be freely shared simply because it can be documented online.

In Western Australia, Noongarpedia is a Noongar-language Wikipedia platform that enables Noongar people to share stories, build knowledge and support language revitalisation through Indigenous-led participation in digital spaces.

In Chile, Wikimedia Chile has partnered with Mapuche communities to strengthen the presence of the Mapudungun language and Mapuche knowledge across Wikimedia projects. Mapuche descendant Michelle Collipal, Communications Director at Wikimedia Chile, has supported this work by encouraging the participation of Indigenous language speakers in Wikimedia projects and promoting community-led approaches to language revitalisation and the respectful representation of Mapuche knowledge in digital spaces.

Internationally, the Mukurtu and Local Contexts initiatives, developed through collaboration with the Warumungu community in Australia's Northern Territory, have created innovative tools that allow Indigenous communities to communicate cultural protocols, permissions and responsibilities relating to knowledge sharing online.

Together, these examples show that the question is not whether Indigenous knowledge belongs in digital spaces. Rather, the question is how it is shared, who governs it, and whether Indigenous peoples have a meaningful role in decisions about its use.

1.5. A Movement for Change

CultureStrong responds through a practical and rights-based approach that promotes cultural safety, informed decision-making and respectful engagement with Indigenous content. It encourages contributors, institutions and platform operators to consider cultural authority, consent, attribution, context and potential harm alongside traditional measures of reliability and accuracy.

Importantly, CultureStrong is not simply a guide. It is a call to action. It seeks to build a movement that supports Indigenous leadership, participation and governance across digital knowledge systems. This includes improving metadata and classification systems, supporting Indigenous languages, strengthening cultural competency, increasing Indigenous participation in decision-making, and creating pathways for Indigenous peoples to shape how their cultures, histories and knowledge are represented online.

CultureStrong is not a departure from the principles of open knowledge. It is an evolution of them. By embracing Indigenous perspectives, knowledge systems can become more accurate, inclusive, trusted and representative of the diverse peoples whose stories they seek to tell.

1.6. Join the Conversation

Too often, digital knowledge systems treat Indigenous knowledge like shells scattered along a beach; valuable, interesting and available for anyone to collect. CultureStrong invites us to see something more. It asks us to recognise the living relationships behind knowledge, the communities who remain connected to it, and the responsibilities that come with sharing it.

The challenge before us is not whether knowledge should be shared, but how it can be shared in ways that respect cultural authority, self-determination and Indigenous rights.

We invite Wikimedians, Indigenous communities, cultural institutions, researchers, policymakers and members of the public to contribute to this conversation. The consultation questions that follow are designed to encourage discussion about how open knowledge platforms can better recognise Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property, support Indigenous Data Sovereignty, improve cultural safety, strengthen Indigenous participation and create more equitable approaches to knowledge sharing.

Join the CultureStrong movement. Read the questions. Share your perspectives. Help shape the future of open knowledge. Together, we can build knowledge systems that not only share information, but do so in ways that respect Indigenous peoples, honour cultural authority and support cultural integrity for generations to come.

2. INTRODUCTION

2.1. Background

Open knowledge platforms play an increasingly important role in shaping how information about Indigenous peoples, cultures and histories is created, shared and accessed. Recognising the opportunities and challenges this presents, Wikimedia Australia Inc (Wikimedia Australia) engaged Terri Janke and Company (TJC) in 2024 to explore how Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP) and Indigenous Data Sovereignty (IDSov) principles could be more effectively embedded across Wikimedia platforms.

TJC's engagement followed research commissioned by Wikimedia Australia between 2022 and 2024 (Commissioned Research) that highlighted systemic issues in the representation and inclusion of Indigenous people on Wikimedia platforms (refer to [3.1 Wikimedia Australia's Commissioned Research](#) for more detail).

As part of TJC's scoping we conducted a high-level review of the Commissioned Research and three of Wikimedia's central platforms: Wikipedia, Wikimedia Commons and Wikidata. As a result of our review, we made several recommendations for Wikimedia Australia regarding the governance and protection of ICIP and IDSov across these platforms as well as broader best practice standards for Indigenous engagement online. We identified issues regarding a lack of guidance for staff and contributors in effectively working with any content that relates to, represents, describes, records, categorises, or content that is created by, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples or their Country (Indigenous Content). We also identified issues relating to cultural safety and inclusion for Indigenous people using Wikimedia platforms. These reflected broader issues experienced across many online spaces (refer to [3 The Challenges of Open Platforms for Indigenous Peoples](#) for more detail).

Wikimedia Australia subsequently engaged TJC in 2025 to create a guide for ethically engaging and managing ICIP and IDSov on the Wikimedia platforms. [The Wikimedia Australia CultureStrong Guide](#) (**Guide**) was developed between 2025 and 2026 and outlines good practice engagement, management and use of ICIP and Indigenous Data based upon a risk assessment and rights-based approach to the use of Australian Indigenous Content on Wikimedia platforms including Dr Terri Janke's internationally renowned True Tracks® Principles. We note that Indigenous Content here means any content that relates to, represents, describes, records, categorises, or is created by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples or their Country. It can include ICIP and Indigenous Data as well as culturally sensitive, Secret/Sacred, and/or offensive materials.



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The Guide was developed with oversight and direction from an Indigenous Expert Working Group comprising Associate Professor Jessica Russ-Smith (Wiradyuri Wambuul), Dr Kirsten Thorpe (Worimi), Miriam Corowa (Bundjalung), AIATSIS CEO Leonard Hill (Ngemba), Dr Tamika Worrell (Gamillaroi), and Yanti Ropeyarn (Angkamuthi/Yadhaykenu/Woppaburra/ Meriam). The Working Group shaped the Guide's content, approach and recommendations, ensuring Indigenous perspectives and cultural authority informed its development. The Guide also integrated feedback from the broader Wikimedia community and received an overwhelmingly positive response during WikiCon 2026 in Canberra, Australia.

(For more information on the Guide please refer to [3.4 Wikimedia Australia's CultureStrong Guide](#)).

2.2. What is CultureStrong?

CultureStrong is a term employed by Dr Terri Janke for the Guide to support contributors and Wikimedia staff in assessing the usefulness, accuracy, integrity and appropriateness of sources they might encounter or seek to use across Wikimedia platforms. CultureStrong is an approach to sourcing and using Indigenous Content that prioritises Indigenous creators and Indigenous-led collaborations and productions. Indigenous-led collaborations and productions are those in which Indigenous people hold meaningful decision-making authority over the development, creation, governance and presentation of the content. These sources reflect Indigenous leadership, self-determination, cultural authority, cultural protocols and informed consent by Indigenous contributors, collaborators or those appearing within the sources. In CultureStrong sources, Indigenous voices guide the narrative, hold cultural authority and shape the interpretation and use of Indigenous knowledge.

CultureStrong sources may differ from Wikipedia's Reliable Sources¹ in that they are not assessed solely according to Western-derived indicators of reliability such as scholarly publication, academic citation or the appearance of neutrality. Wikipedia's Reliable Sources guidelines prioritise secondary sources and publication or citation by scholarship or major news organisations over self-driven research, oral histories and smaller, lesser cited publications. These standards, while deemed

¹ Wikipedia, *Wikipedia: Reliable Sources* (Web Page) https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Reliable_sources.

appropriate to certain groups within a Western context, can have the effect of entrenching colonial narratives and excluding Indigenous knowledge systems built upon oral, relational and personal histories governed by cultural protocols. They also can marginalize other culturally diverse communities, people with disabilities, LGBTQI+ communities and women.

CultureStrong sources on the other hand, assess reliability in accordance with Indigenous knowledge systems and protocols. This includes the presence of cultural authority, community accountability and Indigenous leadership as well as evidence of the observance of cultural protocols and informed consent by Indigenous contributors or collaborators within the source itself. A source may therefore be considered reliable within Wikipedia's guidelines yet still be culturally unsafe, extractive or inappropriate from an Indigenous perspective if it lacks this cultural accountability. Conversely, Indigenous-led oral histories, community-controlled publications or culturally authorised knowledge sources may hold significant authority and integrity despite not fitting within conventional Western publication or citation models and therefore not being viewed as a reliable source on Wiki platforms.

2.3. A Note on Terminology

Before discussing the challenges of open platforms, it is important to take a moment to note the terminology used in this White Paper. There exists a range of labels used within the country now known as Australia to describe Indigenous peoples, knowledges, cultural expressions, heritage and rights. These terms reflect differing Indigenous Nations' laws, cultures, protocols, stories and languages as well as settler colonial histories. This diversity also applies at an international level.

Throughout this Paper, terminology has been informed by international instruments, including the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples 2007 (**UNDRIP**), as well as Dr Terri Janke's work on ICIP within Australia.

There is currently no official definition of Indigenous peoples that has been adopted by any United Nations body, with self-identification prioritised over rigid categories. The United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (**UNPFII**) states:

Indigenous Peoples are inheritors and practitioners of unique cultures and ways of relating to people and the environment. They have retained social, cultural, economic and political characteristics that are distinct from those of the dominant societies in which they live. Despite their cultural differences, Indigenous Peoples from around the world share common problems related to the protection of their rights as distinct peoples.²

UNPFII provides that modern understandings of the term are based on the following factors:

- Self-identification as Indigenous peoples at the individual level and accepted by the community as their member.
- Historical continuity with pre-colonial and/or pre-settler societies
- Strong links to territories and surrounding natural resources
- Distinct social, economic or political systems
- Distinct language, culture and beliefs
- They form non-dominant groups of society
- Resolve to maintain and reproduce their ancestral environments and systems as distinctive peoples and communities.³

² United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, *Indigenous Peoples at the United Nations* (Web Page) <https://social.desa.un.org/issues/indigenous-peoples/indigenous-peoples-at-the-united-nations>.

³ United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, *Who Are Indigenous Peoples?* (Fact Sheet, (Fact Sheet No 1, United Nations, 2006) https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/5session_factsheet1.pdf

We adopt this terminology throughout the White Paper to designate Indigenous peoples throughout the world. When referring to Australian Indigenous peoples, we refer specifically to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Where possible, this White Paper seeks to refer to specific Nations, language groups, communities or peoples by their preferred terms of identification and acknowledges that preferences regarding terminology may differ between communities and individuals. References to Indigenous peoples internationally similarly seek to defer to the preferred forms of identification used by those communities.

A range of terms are also used internationally to describe Indigenous expressions of culture and knowledge. For example, UNDRIP refers to 'cultural heritage, traditional knowledge and traditional cultural expressions,' while the World Intellectual Property Organisation (**WIPO**) commonly uses terms such as 'traditional knowledge,' 'traditional cultural expressions' and 'genetic resources.'⁴ Other frameworks that are often built upon or refer back to UNDRIP since 2007 may refer to IDSov, Indigenous Data Governance (**IDGov**), or concepts such as Free, Prior and Informed Consent (**FPIC**).

Within Australia, the ICIP has become widely adopted as a term to describe the rights of Indigenous peoples to maintain, control, protect and develop their cultural heritage, knowledge systems and cultural expressions. This Paper uses ICIP as a broad and holistic term while recognising that no single term fully captures the diversity and complexity of Indigenous cultural rights globally. When speaking of Indigenous knowledge and culture more broadly, we use those terms as they are used at an international level and in scholarship. The definitions set out in the [Appendix](#) clarify in detail the definitions of terms used throughout this Paper.

⁴ World Intellectual Property Organization, *WIPO Treaty on Intellectual Property, Genetic Resources and Associated Traditional Knowledge* (Web Page) <https://www.wipo.int/en/web/treaties/ip/gratk/index>.. Wikipedia, *WIPO Treaty on Intellectual Property, Genetic Resources and Associated Traditional Knowledge* (Web Page) https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/WIPO_Treaty_on_Intellectual_Property,_Genetic_Resources_and_Associated_Traditional_Knowledge.

3. THE CHALLENGES OF OPEN PLATFORMS FOR INDIGENOUS PEOPLE

3.1. Wikimedia Australia's Commissioned Research

Between 2023 and 2024 Wikimedia Australia commissioned research that indicated Wikimedia platforms were challenging spaces for Indigenous people regarding Indigenous Content. The research commenced with a discussion paper in 2023 entitled *Wikimedia Australia and First Nations Metadata: ATSILIRN Protocols for Description and Access* prepared by Dr Kirsten Thorpe (Worimi), Nathan muddyi Sentence (Wiradjuri) and Dr Lauren Booker (Garigal) at Jumbunna Institute for Indigenous Education & Research at the University of Technology Sydney. In 2024 this research was extended by Indigenous researchers at Macquarie University, Distinguished Professor Bronwyn Carlson and Lotus Rana (Pitcairn and Indian) of the Department of Critical Indigenous Studies, who identified several key concerns in their report *"I really like Wikipedia but I don't trust it": Understanding First Nations peoples' experiences using Wikipedia as readers and/or editors.*

Wikimedia Australia and First Nations Metadata: ATSILIRN Protocols for Description and Access

This discussion paper examined how Wikimedia platforms, particularly Wikipedia and Wikidata could better support the sharing of Indigenous content by applying the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Library, Information and Resource Network (ATSILIRN) Protocols for Description and Access, specifically Protocol 5 on Description and Classification (**ATSILIRN Protocol 5**). ATSILIRN Protocol 5 focuses on culturally appropriate metadata, terminology, classification and access practices. Drawing on desktop research, collaborative yarning sessions and Indigenous standpoint theory,⁵ The paper highlighted tensions between Wikimedia's open-access philosophy and ICIP rights.

The authors argued that classification systems and metadata standards are shaped by dominant power structures. Historical descriptions have often portrayed Indigenous peoples using racist and derogatory terms, reinforcing colonial narratives and limiting Indigenous agency. Metadata therefore requires active decolonisation rather than being treated as objective or neutral.

The paper found that existing Wikimedia and metadata systems often reproduce colonial bias, harmful terminology and inaccurate or reductive representations of Indigenous peoples because they are largely built on Western knowledge frameworks and insufficiently informed by Indigenous worldviews. It identified concerns including the use of outdated and offensive metadata, lack of Indigenous authority over Indigenous content, absence of culturally safe protocols and structural barriers that prevented genuine Indigenous participation and governance. It also identified the need for stronger critical information literacy skills in Wikipedia contributors to recognise bias in 'authoritative' Western sources and to understand how knowledge is produced; whose voices are represented, whose are absent and whether sources reproduce colonial biases. The harm of racist, offensive and outdated language across Wikimedia platforms was identified as an ongoing issue that required contextualisation, warnings, removal and replacement with culturally appropriate terminology.

The paper recommended Wikimedia Australia provide stronger Indigenous-led guidance across its platforms including Indigenous-led description, annotation, thesauri, and explore tools such as Traditional Knowledge Labels⁶ and Indigenous metadata frameworks to better protect ICIP rights and embed Indigenous research principles into Wikimedia practices. It concluded by observing that meaningful change required more than correcting terminology; it also needed undertake a broader

⁵ Larissa Behrendt, 'Indigenous Storytelling: Decolonizing Institutions and Assertive Self-Determination: Implications for Legal Practice' in Jo-Ann Archibald, Jenny Lee-Morgan, Jason De Santolo and Linda Tuhiwai Smith (eds), *Decolonizing Research: Indigenous Storywork as Methodology* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2019) 175.

⁶ Local Contexts, *Traditional Knowledge Labels* (Web Page) <https://localcontexts.org/labels/traditional-knowledge-labels/>.

transformation that centred Indigenous worldviews, addressing structural issues of racism, representation and control, as well as create culturally safe pathways for Indigenous participation and authority over the use or sharing of Indigenous content.

“I really like Wikipedia but I don’t trust it”: Understanding First Nations peoples’ experiences using Wikipedia as readers and/or editors

This report examined how Indigenous peoples experience Wikipedia as readers and editors. Using an Indigenist research methodology,⁷ the study drew on interviews, group discussions and surveys with over thirty Indigenous participants to explore issues of trust, cultural safety, representation and participation in editing as well, as governance of Indigenous content on Wikipedia.

The report found that while participants generally viewed Wikipedia as a useful and accessible source of information, they expressed significant concerns about the reliability, accuracy and governance of Indigenous content on Wikipedia. Concerns included the prevalence of inaccurate information, the reliance on Western academic sources that may contain colonial biases, the marginalisation of Indigenous knowledge systems and oral histories, and the ability of non-Indigenous editors to create and edit content about Indigenous peoples without Indigenous oversight or involvement. Participants noted that this can perpetuate colonial narratives and misinformation while limiting Indigenous authority over how their cultures and histories are represented.

At the same time, many acknowledged Wikipedia’s potential to support education and the visibility of Indigenous histories, as well as provide a means of obtaining information to support reconnection of members of Indigenous communities. Participants expressed that they believed there is a lot of potential on the platform, but there is work to do before it can become a trusted and welcoming space.

Key recommendations of the report included establishing an Indigenous Advisory Board for Wikimedia Australia, increasing Indigenous participation in editing through training, residencies and paid opportunities, reviewing open-access editing of Indigenous content, improving complaints and dispute resolution processes, and introducing cultural safety standards, including stronger use of Indigenous sources and protocols.

3.2. Global Conversations

United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007)

The [United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#) (UNDRIP)⁸ establishes a foundational international framework that underpins contemporary discussions regarding, IDSov, ICIP, Indigenous governance and cultural rights.

Central to UNDRIP is the recognition under Article 31 that Indigenous peoples have the right to ‘maintain, control, protect and develop their cultural heritage, traditional knowledge and traditional cultural expressions,’ as well as the intellectual property associated with those rights. UNDRIP further recognises, under Article 32(2), the importance of Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC), requiring States to consult and cooperate in good faith with Indigenous peoples through their own representative institutions before approving activities affecting their peoples, lands, resources or cultural interests.

⁷ Lester Irabinna Rigney, ‘Internationalism of an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Anti-Colonial Cultural Critique of Research Methodologies: A Guide to Indigenist Research Methodology and Its Principles’ in *Research and Development in Higher Education: Advancing International Perspectives* (1997) 20 629.

⁸ *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People*, GA Res 61/295, UN Doc A/Res/61/295 (2 October 2007, adopted 13 September 2007).

UNDRIP was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 2007, with 144 States voting in favour.⁹ Although Australia, Canada, Aotearoa New Zealand and the United States initially voted against the Declaration, all four countries have since formally endorsed it, alongside several other States that originally abstained.¹⁰ As a result, UNDRIP now holds near-universal political support internationally and is widely recognised as the leading global framework articulating the rights of Indigenous peoples. However, implementation of UNDRIP varies significantly between jurisdictions. Some countries, including Canada, have enacted legislation to implement UNDRIP domestically, while others, such as Australia, have yet to develop formal legislative protections (for further information refer to [3.3 Australian Developments](#) below). Despite a lack of universal implementation at the level of nation states, UNDRIP operates as a powerful influence on its signatories. It provides an evolving best practice framework that guides governments, institutions and organisations to better support Indigenous self-determination, ICIP and IDSov.

UNDRIP underpins many best practice frameworks, protocols and ethical standards for Indigenous engagement internationally, including Terri Janke and Company's True Tracks® Principles within Australia. Governments, cultural institutions, researchers, archives, libraries, universities and digital platform providers are increasingly recognising the need to align their policies and practices with UNDRIP when working with Indigenous communities.

The Challenges of Open Knowledge

Across the world,¹¹ Indigenous peoples, cultural institutions, researchers, libraries, archives and digital platform providers are grappling with the tension between 'open knowledge' models and Indigenous peoples' rights to maintain, control, protect and develop their ICIP and Indigenous Data. IDSov has emerged as a significant global movement and area of scholarship. The IDSov movement asserts the right of Indigenous peoples to govern the collection, ownership, access, use and stewardship of data relating to their peoples, territories, cultures and knowledges. This work has increasingly highlighted the need for digital platforms and open access initiatives to recognise Indigenous governance, authority and cultural protocols in relation to Indigenous knowledge, particularly where content is made freely accessible, reused and circulated at scale.

There is growing recognition that open access frameworks like Wikimedia's Wikipedia, Wikimedia Commons and Wikidata can present challenges for ICIP and IDSov. Where Indigenous Content is developed and managed predominantly by non-Indigenous contributors, there is a risk that Indigenous knowledge may be shared, interpreted or contextualised without appropriate engagement, consent or regard for Indigenous cultural protocols.

A significant body of international research now recognises that Indigenous knowledge systems are not always compatible with the Western assumptions that are embedded within open digital platforms.¹² Professor Emeritus Alexander Flor at the University of the Philippines argues that the

⁹ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (Web Page) <https://www.ohchr.org/en/indigenous-peoples/un-declaration-rights-indigenous-peoples>.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ The authors would like to acknowledge that the research was limited to materials available in English or accessible through English translation, and therefore may not capture all relevant perspectives, sources or legal developments in other languages.

¹² Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact Foundation, *Asian Framework on Indigenous Knowledge and Data Sovereignty* (Framework Document, 2023) <https://aippnet.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/22-Aug-2023-Final-IKDS-Framework.pdf>. Copp  lie Cocq, 'Open Science in S  mi Research: Researchers' Dilemmas' (2023) *Frontiers in Research Metrics and Analytics* <https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/research-metrics-and-analytics/articles/10.3389/frma.2023.1095169/full>. Veronika Meduna, 'Protecting Indigenous Knowledge' (Web Page, Plant & Food Research, 11 May 2025) <https://www.plantandfood.com/en-au/article/protecting-indigenous-knowledge/>. Krista McCracken and Skylee-Storm Hogan, *Open Educational Resources and Indigenous Knowledge: Decolonizing Practices and Perspectives* (eCampusOntario, 2020) <https://www.ecampusontario.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/OEProject-McCracken.pdf>.

application of open access principles to Indigenous knowledge must be approached with caution. He notes that Indigenous knowledge is frequently governed by cultural protocols under which Elders, healers and other recognised custodians determine how, when and by whom knowledge may be shared. Flor contends that unrestricted online access may fail to respect these governance systems and can contribute to the misuse, misrepresentation or inappropriate disclosure of Indigenous knowledge.¹³ Similarly, Australian researchers Johanna Funk and Kathy Guthadjaka (Gatjirrk Warramiri), in their article *Indigenous Authorship on Open and Digital Platforms: Social Justice Processes and Potential*, observe that many digital platforms are designed according to Western epistemological assumptions that treat knowledge as discrete, transferable and universally shareable units of information.¹⁴ In contrast, Indigenous knowledge systems often recognise knowledge as relational, contextual, collective and governed by cultural authority, responsibilities and protocols. As Funk and Guthadjaka explain, knowledge may only be shared by recognised knowledge holders, for specific purposes, and within culturally appropriate contexts. Unlimited openness may therefore conflict with Indigenous cultural governance systems that have existed for millennia.

In Canada, researchers examining Indigenous Open Educational Resources (OER) found that conventional 'open access' models frequently fail to account for Indigenous rights to govern the sharing and reproduction of cultural knowledge. The report, *Community First: Open Practices and Indigenous Knowledge*, by Krista McCracken and Skylee-Storm Hogan (Kanien:keha'ka) emphasised that not all Indigenous knowledge should be openly accessible and that Indigenous communities and knowledge holders, rather than researchers, institutions or platform providers, must determine what knowledge can be shared publicly and under what conditions.¹⁵ The report also highlighted the importance of FPIC, relationship building, Indigenous governance and community-led decision-making in all projects involving Indigenous knowledge.

At an international policy level, issues regarding the ongoing control and authority for use of Indigenous knowledge in the digital space are increasingly recognised within broader human rights and cultural heritage discussions. UNESCO and other United Nations bodies have acknowledged that digitisation and open access initiatives must not undermine Indigenous peoples' rights to maintain control over their cultural heritage and knowledge systems. The United Nations Special Rapporteur in the report *Digitalization of Cultural Heritage and Cultural Rights* warned that open access to digitised cultural heritage must not result in reduced control by source communities or facilitate commercial exploitation of Indigenous heritage.¹⁶ The report emphasised the urgent need for intellectual property and digital governance systems to adopt cultural rights approaches that recognise Indigenous peoples' rights and interests.

¹³ Alexander Flor, 'Open Access to Indigenous Knowledge?' (LinkedIn, 13 March 2014) <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/20140313094651-173195569-open-access-to-indigenous-knowledge/> accessed 17 June 2025.

¹⁴ Johanna Funk and Kathy Guthadjaka, 'Indigenous Authorship on Open and Digital Platforms: Social Justice Processes and Potential' (2020) 2020(1) *Journal of Interactive Media in Education* 6 <https://doi.org/10.5334/jime.560>.

¹⁵ Krista McCracken and Skylee-Storm Hogan, *Open Educational Resources and Indigenous Knowledge: Decolonizing Practices and Perspectives* (eCampusOntario, 2020) <https://www.ecampusontario.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/OEProject-McCracken.pdf>.

¹⁶ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, *Digitalization of Cultural Heritage and Preserving Cultural Rights* (Thematic Report, UN Doc A/HRC/58/60) <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/thematic-reports/ahrc5860-digitalization-cultural-heritage-preserving-cultural-rights>.

The Indigenous Data Sovereignty Movement

Canadian scholarship has also contributed to the development of IDSov frameworks such as OCAP® (Ownership, Control, Access and Possession), which affirm Indigenous peoples' rights to control information about their communities, cultures and identities through Indigenous governance of data collection, management and use. These principles have become influential internationally, particularly in relation to digital archives, research collections and online platforms.¹⁷

The growing international movement for Indigenous Data Sovereignty has also been strengthened through the work of the Global Indigenous Data Alliance (**GIDA**), an Indigenous-led international collective established to advance Indigenous peoples' rights and interests in relation to data. Bringing together Indigenous leaders, researchers and practitioners from across the world, GIDA has played a significant role in promoting Indigenous approaches to data governance and fostering international collaboration across diverse legal, cultural and institutional contexts. Its work has helped elevate Indigenous Data Sovereignty as a global movement and has influenced governments, universities, research institutions and digital platforms seeking to develop more ethical and culturally responsive approaches to the governance of Indigenous Data.¹⁸

Building on their international collaboration, GIDA developed the CARE Principles for Indigenous Data Governance (Collective Benefit, Authority to Control, Responsibility and Ethics), which complement the FAIR (Findable, Accessible, Interoperable and Reusable) data principles commonly used in scientific research.¹⁹ The CARE Principles recognise that Indigenous peoples must remain central decision-makers regarding the collection, governance, interpretation and use of Indigenous Data and knowledge. CARE principles recognise that Indigenous peoples must remain central decision-makers regarding the collection, governance, interpretation and use of Indigenous Data and knowledge.

In Aotearoa New Zealand, Māori scholars and researchers have similarly raised concerns about the treatment of mātauranga Māori (Māori knowledge) within open data environments. Māori researchers have emphasised that 'data are taonga' (treasures) and that once cultural information is shared online, control over its future use can become difficult or impossible to regain. Māori commentators have identified tensions between Wikimedia's open knowledge philosophy and Māori cultural obligations relating to whakapapa (genealogy), sacred knowledge and community authority.²⁰ These concerns reflect broader questions about who has the authority to share Indigenous knowledge online and whether existing open platform governance structures adequately recognise Indigenous cultural responsibilities and protocols. (For further information regarding Māori knowledges on Wikipedia please refer to [4.2 Increasing Indigenous Participation and Leadership](#) below)

Indigenous communities have collaborated at an international level to develop practical responses and tools to navigate these challenges. In 2007, the Warumungu community worked with collaborators Associate Professor Jane Anderson of New York University and Professor Kim Christen of Washington State University to create the Mukurtu Wumpurrarni-kari Archive. The name 'Mukurtu' is the community's term for 'dilly bag', a safe keeping place to share the knowledge, stories and cultural materials of the Warumungu people. Since its development, Mukurtu CMS has grown into an open-source platform founded on the flexible needs of a range of communities who want a self-

¹⁷ First Nations Information Governance Centre, *OCAP® Training* (Web Page) <https://fnigc.ca/ocap-training/>.

¹⁸ Global Indigenous Data Alliance, *CARE Principles for Indigenous Data Governance* (Web Page) <https://www.gida-global.org/careprinciples>.

¹⁹ Global Indigenous Data Alliance, *CARE Principles for Indigenous Data Governance* (Web Page) <https://www.gida-global.org/careprinciples>.

²⁰ Veronika Meduna, 'Protecting Indigenous Knowledge' (Web Page, Plant & Food Research, 11 May 2025) <https://www.plantandfood.com/en-nz/article/protecting-indigenous-knowledge>. See also: Wikimedia Diff, @Worldsgreatestmum 'Protecting Mātauranga Māori within an Open Knowledge Platform' (Web Page, 20 February 2024) <https://diff.wikimedia.org/2024/02/20/protecting-matauranga-maori-within-an-open-knowledge-platform/>.

determinative way to manage and share their digital cultural heritage. Far from its original home in the remote regions of the Northern Territory of Australia, Mukurtu is now maintained by the Mukurtu team at the Center for Digital Scholarship and Curation at Washington State University. This team consults with Indigenous communities and organisations globally to continue to adapt the platform to meet the needs of a diverse range of Indigenous peoples.

Developed by Anderson and Christen in 2010, the Local Contexts project emerged from the Mukurtu platform to practically manage cultural heritage materials. Local Contexts provides Traditional Knowledge (TK) Labels and Notices that can be applied to digital collections and online materials to communicate Indigenous cultural protocols, permissions and expectations around use, attribution and access.²¹ These tools are increasingly being adopted globally by museums, archives, libraries, universities and research institutions as mechanisms to recognise Indigenous authority and embed Indigenous governance into digital environments. These models demonstrate that digital accessibility and Indigenous governance are not mutually exclusive, but require governance systems that recognise Indigenous law, authority and cultural context.

The Indigenous-owned-and-operated [Native BioData Consortium \(NBDC\)](#) in Eagle Butte, South Dakota, hosted within the Cheyenne River Reservation of the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe similarly provides researchers with a safe harbour in which to store information according to IDSov principles. Data stored in NBDC is only accessible by researchers if they contact the nonprofit and obtain the permission of the specific Indigenous community whose data they are seeking to use. In Canada, the Indigenous-led digital platform [FirstVoices](#) based in British Columbia, facilitates the preservation, management and sharing of Indigenous languages by communities according to principles of IDSov. Developed by the First Peoples' Cultural Council and First Peoples' Cultural Foundations, participating communities retain ownership and copyright over their content and control how it is managed, accessed and shared, including whether knowledge is made publicly available or restricted to authorised community members.

Wikimedia and the Future of Indigenous Digital Knowledge

These global conversations demonstrate that the challenges identified on Wikimedia platforms are not isolated issues. Rather, they form part of broader concerns held by Indigenous peoples regarding self-determination, cultural governance, ethical digitisation and the responsibilities of online platforms operating across the world with varying degrees of content moderation, legal oversight, and cultural guidance or input from Indigenous communities.

The proliferation of published research, digital tools such as Local Contexts and Mukurtu CMS, as well as ongoing discussions demonstrate that strategies to address these concerns are emerging. The development of Wikimedia Australia's CultureStrong Guide is just one piece of a larger movement toward supporting best practice in open platforms. Wikimedia has an opportunity to position itself at the forefront of these global developments by embedding Indigenous-led guidance that supports culturally safer, inclusive and equitable digital knowledge environments for Indigenous peoples both within Australia and internationally.

3.3. Australian Developments

There have been significant developments in Australia regarding the recognition and protection of Indigenous cultural knowledge, heritage and data. These developments reflect the vital role Indigenous peoples, cultures, knowledges and heritage play in the fabric of Australia's social, cultural, political and economic landscape. They also reflect increasing expectations from Indigenous communities, governments, institutions and the private sector that organisations operating in Australia

²¹ Local Contexts, *About* (Web Page) <https://localcontexts.org/about/>.

engage with Indigenous peoples and Indigenous Content in culturally respectful and ethically responsible ways as part of a broader 'social licence' for operating within an Australian context.²²

Central to these developments has been the evolution of the concept of ICIP within Australia. The term was developed and advanced through the pioneering work of Dr Terri Janke. In her landmark report, *Our Culture: Our Future* prepared in 1998 for the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) the use and treatment of Indigenous cultural expressions and knowledge within Australian law was examined. The report followed extensive national consultations and research investigating the experiences of Indigenous peoples in relation to the protection, misuse and commercialisation of their cultural heritage and knowledge. It documented widespread concerns regarding the unauthorised reproduction of Indigenous art, stories, language, imagery, ecological knowledge, recordings, ancestral remains and sacred materials, as well as the inadequacy of existing Australian intellectual property laws to protect Indigenous cultural rights and collective custodianship.

Drawing upon the work of United Nations Special Rapporteur Erica-Irene Daes²³ and international developments concerning Indigenous peoples' cultural heritage rights, *Our Culture: Our Future* recognised that Indigenous peoples view culture, knowledge and heritage as interconnected and inseparable from relationships to Country, community and identity. Rather than separating 'cultural property' and 'intellectual property' into narrow Western legal categories, the report adopted the term 'Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property' to describe Indigenous peoples' rights to their heritage as a holistic and interconnected system. Importantly, the report recognised that Indigenous heritage is living, evolving and collectively held, and that Indigenous communities themselves should determine what constitutes their cultural heritage and how it should be protected.

Since the release of *Our Culture: Our Future*, ICIP has become an increasingly influential framework across Australia. Although developed in the 1990s, since 2007 it has drawn upon the articles of UNDRIP that enshrine self-determination and protection of cultural heritage. ICIP is broadly defined to refer to the rights of Indigenous Peoples to their heritage, which includes:

- literary performing and artistic works (including songs, music, dances, stories, ceremonies, symbols, languages and designs);
- scientific, agricultural, technical and ecological knowledge (including cultigens, medicines and the phenotypes of flora and fauna);
- all items of movable cultural property;
- cultural governance and practice;
- Ancestral human remains and tissues;
- immovable cultural property (including sacred and historically significant sites and burial grounds); and
- documentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' heritage in archives, film, photographs, videotape or audiotape and all forms of media.

Governments, cultural institutions, universities, libraries, archives, collecting institutions, researchers and industry bodies have progressively adopted ICIP protocols and policies to guide best practice

²² For a comprehensive overview of ICIP development up to 2019, see Terri Janke, 'True Tracks: Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property Principles for Putting Self-Determination into Practice' (PhD Thesis, Australian National University, 2019). Key international and national best practices related to ICIP and IDSov are discussed in the advisory sections below.

²³ Mrs Erica Irene Daes, Final Report on the Protection of the Heritage of Indigenous Peoples, United Nations Document E/CN.4/Sub.2/1995/26).

engagement with Indigenous peoples and Indigenous cultural materials.²⁴ Many of these protocols have been developed by TJC in accordance with the True Tracks® Principles for best practice Indigenous engagement. These frameworks seek to move beyond minimum legal compliance to recognise Indigenous self-determination, cultural authority, FPIC, attribution, benefit sharing and cultural integrity.

Alongside the development of ICIP protections, Indigenous scholars in Australia have become key contributors to international discussions regarding IDSov and IDGov. A major milestone in this movement was the establishment of the Maïam nayri Wingara Indigenous Data Sovereignty Collective in 2017. Maïam nayri Wingara which means ‘welcome to good knowledge’ in the languages of the Meriam Mer, palawa kani, and D’harawal peoples, brought together Indigenous researchers, community leaders and practitioners to advocate for Indigenous control over data relating to Indigenous peoples, communities, cultures and Countries.

In 2018, Maïam nayri Wingara developed a set of **five core principles** that are regarded as best practice in Australia for supporting Indigenous people’s self-determination for use of their data.²⁵

The work of Maïam nayri Wingara has significantly shaped IDSov policy and research discussions in Australia and contributed to broader international developments, including the CARE Principles for Indigenous Data Governance. These principles have increasingly influenced research institutions, governments, archives, digital platforms and data governance frameworks globally, particularly in response to concerns regarding open data, digitisation, artificial intelligence (AI) and the use of Indigenous Data without Indigenous governance or consent.

These national developments have placed Wikimedia Australia and TJC in a unique position globally to show leadership in best practice engagement with Indigenous communities and content, responding to both community, industry and government expectations surrounding respect for ICIP and IDSov principles.

It is important to note that the momentum for ICIP protections has led the Australian Government to undertake a scoping study in 2022 to develop stand-alone legislation for the protection of ICIP.²⁶ It is

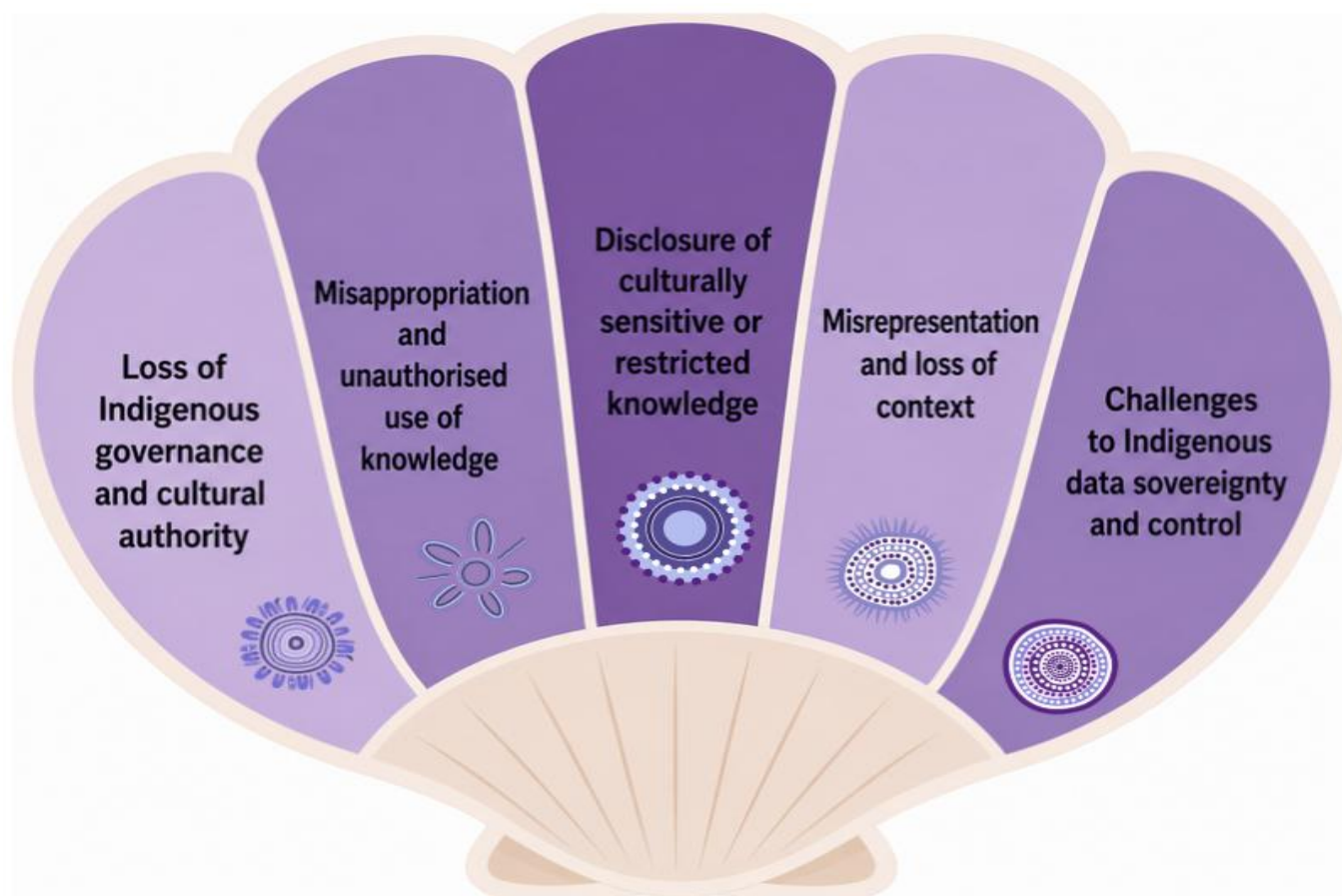
²⁴ See generally, Aboriginal Affairs New South Wales, *Aboriginal Cultural and Intellectual Property Protocol* (Protocol, 2019) <https://www.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/noindex/2024-03/AANSW-Aboriginal-Cultural-and-Intellectual-Property-ICIP-Protocol.pdf>; Arts8, *Pathways to Engagement: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Protocols in Performing Arts Training* (Protocol, October 2019) <https://www.arts.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/pathways-to-engagement-aboriginal-torres-strait-islander-protocols-performing-arts-training.pdf>; Australia Council for the Arts, *Protocols for using First Nations Cultural and Intellectual Property in the Arts* (Protocol, 2019) <https://creative.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/protocols-for-using-first-nati-5f72716d09f01.pdf>; Australian Library and Information Association, *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Protocols for Libraries, Archives and Information Services* (Protocol, 2010) <https://atsilirn.aiatsis.gov.au/protocols.php>; Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation, *Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property Principles* (Protocol) <https://www.csiro.au/en/about/policies/science-and-delivery-policy/indigenous-cultural-and-intellectual-property-principles>; National Library of Australia, *Australian Indigenous Cultural & Intellectual Property Protocol* (Protocol, February 2023) <https://www.library.gov.au/first-australians/indigenous-cultural-and-intellectual-property>; Screen Australia, *Pathways & Protocols: A filmmaker’s guide to working with Indigenous people, culture and concepts* (Protocol, May 2009) <https://www.screenaustralia.gov.au/getmedia/16e5ade3-bbca-4db2-a433-94bcd4c45434/Pathways-and-Protocols>; University of Newcastle, *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural and Intellectual Property Protocol* (Protocol, 2023) https://www.newcastle.edu.au/~data/assets/pdf_file/0006/907881/2022-0066-ICIP-protocolFINAL.pdf#:~:text=The%20Indigenous%20Cultural%20and%20Intellectual,influence%20internal%20policies%20and%20processes.

²⁵ Maïam nayri Wingara is a collective of Indigenous experts and academics, from a range of Australian institutions and organisations, who have paved the way in the IDSov and IDGov spaces within Australia.

²⁶ For information on the incoming stand-alone ICIP legislation, see Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communication and the Arts, *Protecting Indigenous cultural and intellectual property*

expected that within the next few years, there will be stand-alone ICIP legislation that must be complied with.

Wikimedia Australia has taken the opportunity to get ahead of these new legislative requirements, sending a message to the public and its stakeholders that support for Indigenous empowerment and self-determination around cultural heritage and knowledge is not merely a compliance issue, but a core value of the platforms.



Key issues between open platforms and Indigenous knowledge systems, ©Terri Janke & Company, 2026 Excluded from the Creative Commons licence applying to this publication.

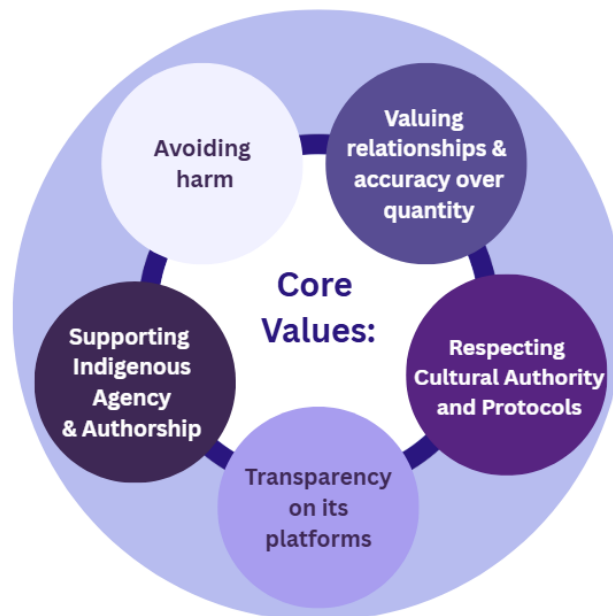
rights (Web Page) <https://www.arts.gov.au/what-we-do/indigenous-arts-and-languages/protecting-indigenous-cultural-and-intellectual-property-rights>; For more information on the inadequacy and inability of current legal protections to protect ICIP, see Productivity Commission, *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander visual arts and crafts* (Study report, November 2022); Dr Terri Janke has been appointed Chair of the First Nations Expert Working Group on ICIP for the development of standalone legislation, see Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communication and the Arts, *First Nations Expert Working Group on Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property* (Web Page) <https://www.arts.gov.au/what-we-do/indigenous-arts-and-languages/stand-alone-indigenous-cultural-and-intellectual-property-legislation/first-nations-expert-working-group-indigenous-cultural-and-intellectual-property>

Key issues between open platforms and Indigenous knowledge systems

Loss of Indigenous governance and cultural authority	Open platforms are often built on assumptions that information should be freely accessible and reusable. This can conflict with Indigenous governance systems, where knowledge is subject to cultural protocols and may only be shared by authorised knowledge holders for particular purposes.
Misappropriation and unauthorised use of knowledge	Once Indigenous knowledge is openly available online, it may be copied, reproduced, commercialised or incorporated into products, research or AI systems without consent, attribution or benefit-sharing with the relevant Indigenous community.
Disclosure of culturally sensitive or restricted knowledge	Some knowledge is sacred, gender-specific or otherwise restricted according to cultural protocols. Open platforms may not adequately accommodate these restrictions, creating a risk that knowledge is shared contrary to cultural protocols.
Misrepresentation and loss of context	Indigenous knowledge is often relational, place-based and embedded within cultural practices, languages and responsibilities. When extracted and uploaded to open platforms, knowledge may be detached from its cultural context, leading to misrepresentation, distortion or misuse.
Challenges to Indigenous Data Sovereignty and control	Many digital platforms are owned and governed by external organisations. This can limit Indigenous communities' ability to determine how their knowledge is stored, managed, accessed, shared and reused, undermining principles of Indigenous Data sovereignty and self-determination.

3.4. Wikimedia Australia's CultureStrong Guide

The Guide developed by TJC and its Indigenous Expert Working Group adopts a practical, rights-based and culturally informed approach to working with Indigenous Content across Wikimedia platforms that prioritises CultureStrong Sources. The Guide recognises both the opportunities and complexities presented by open knowledge systems and seeks to support contributors to engage with Indigenous Content in ways that are ethical, culturally respectful and responsive to Indigenous rights and interests. It balances the need to support and promote the sharing of knowledge and Indigenous Content with responsibility towards Indigenous peoples under the following five core values set out below.



© Wikimedia Guiding Principles for Wikimedia Australia's ICIP and Indigenous Data Guide, Terri Janke and Company, 2026. Excluded from the Creative Commons licence

The Guide acknowledges that existing legal frameworks and open-access platform models do not always adequately recognise Indigenous cultural authority, Indigenous governance systems, or the collective rights and responsibilities associated with ICIP and Indigenous Data. The Guide therefore encourages contributors to move beyond minimum legal compliance and consider broader questions of cultural integrity, self-determination, context, consent and harm prevention when engaging with Indigenous Content. It acknowledges however some conflict between existing Wikimedia policies as the recommendations of the Guide and is therefore drafted not as a strict compliance framework that might foreclose the sharing of knowledge, but rather a methodology for assessing sources from an Indigenous rights perspective to promote better knowledge and more accurate contextualisation of the use and description of Indigenous Content when used on Wikimedia platforms.

Grounded in the understanding that Indigenous knowledge systems are living, dynamic and relational, the Guide recognises Indigenous Content cannot be approached solely through Western frameworks, particularly where material may involve Indigenous cultural responsibilities, collective custodianship, culturally sensitive information or Indigenous governance protocols. In response, the Guide draws upon Indigenous-led standards and frameworks, including ICIP principles, IDSov, FPIC, the True Tracks® Principles, and Indigenous-led citation, metadata and governance approaches.

A central feature of the Guide is its emphasis on culturally informed and risk-based decision-making. The Guide recognises that not all Indigenous Content carries the same level of sensitivity or potential for harm. Some material may be appropriate for broad public sharing, while other material may involve ICIP, culturally sensitive information, Secret/Sacred knowledge or offensive historical content requiring additional safeguards, contextualisation or removal. To address these complexities, the

Guide adopts a structured risk assessment framework that encourages contributors to consider cultural authority, provenance, context, Indigenous perspectives and potential impacts before publishing, editing, categorising or reusing Indigenous Content.

The Guide also recognises that metadata, categorisation and structured data are not neutral technical processes. On Wikimedia platforms, metadata influences how Indigenous Content is searched, classified, interpreted, reused and disseminated, including through AI systems and downstream digital platforms. The Guide therefore places significant emphasis on culturally appropriate metadata practices, Indigenous-led terminology, attribution and classification systems that better reflect Indigenous perspectives, Nations, Countries and language groups.

Importantly, the Guide acknowledges that Wikimedia platforms operate within existing global governance structures, collaborative editing systems and open licensing models that may not always align neatly with Indigenous rights frameworks such as ICIP, IDSov and FPIC. Rather than presenting these tensions as irreconcilable, the Guide seeks to provide practical and constructive pathways for navigating them in good faith. In doing so, it aims to strengthen Indigenous participation, improve cultural safety, support more accurate and respectful representation of Indigenous peoples and cultures, and minimise the risk of harm within open knowledge environments.

The Guide is intended to be an evolving educational resource. It recognises that Indigenous governance frameworks, cultural protocols, terminology and community expectations will change over time as knowledge passes intergenerationally. It promotes ongoing reflection, learning and education by contributors, institutions and Wikimedia communities in response to Indigenous perspectives, emerging best practice standards and changing technological environments, including the growing use of AI and machine-readable data systems.

3.5. Limitations of the Guide

While the Guide provides practical and culturally informed guidance for working with Indigenous Content across Wikimedia platforms, it also recognises that there are structural, legal and governance limitations within existing Wikimedia systems that may constrain the full implementation of ICIP, IDSov and FPIC principles at this time.

Wikimedia platforms are built upon foundational principles of open access, collaborative editing, verifiability, neutrality and open licensing. Many of these systems were developed within Western legal and knowledge traditions and may not always align with Indigenous governance frameworks, cultural protocols or the collective rights relating to Indigenous knowledge, heritage and data. As a result, there are circumstances in which content may comply with existing Wikimedia policies and copyright laws while still raising cultural, ethical or Indigenous governance concerns.

The Guide acknowledges that some recommendations outlined within it may not be fully achievable under current Wikimedia policies, technical infrastructure or platform governance arrangements.

Tensions may arise in relation to:

- irrevocable open licensing models under Creative Commons that permit downstream reuse of content without ongoing Indigenous governance;
- Wikimedia policies prioritising public availability and verifiability over Indigenous cultural authority or consent;
- the inability to fully restrict access to culturally sensitive materials or Indigenous Data once published on open platforms;
- existing notability and reliable source guidelines that privilege Western publishing systems and secondary sources over Indigenous oral histories, Indigenous protocols and Indigenous-led sources;
- limitations in platform functionality regarding cultural warnings, metadata governance, permissions frameworks and Indigenous-controlled access protocols;

- anonymous and decentralised editing structures that may make consultation, accountability and Indigenous governance difficult to operationalise consistently; and
- the global nature of Wikimedia governance, where policy change often requires protracted international community consensus-building processes.

The Guide also recognises that Wikimedia contributors are volunteers operating within existing community rules and governance structures. Contributors are therefore not expected to act inconsistently with current Wikimedia platform policies or undertake responsibilities that exceed the capacities of their role, time or authority. Rather, the Guide is intended to support contributors to engage with Indigenous Content more thoughtfully and respectfully within existing frameworks, while encouraging ongoing reflection, dialogue and future policy development.

As set out above in relation to open knowledge models more generally, the Guide acknowledges that issues regarding Indigenous Content are not unique to Wikimedia platforms. Similar challenges are currently being examined internationally across archives, libraries, museums, universities, AI, open data initiatives and digital heritage platforms. Questions regarding Indigenous governance, culturally appropriate metadata, Indigenous consent, Indigenous-led moderation and ethical reuse of Indigenous knowledge remain emerging areas of practice and debate globally. As such, the Guide should be understood as part of a broader and evolving international movement towards more culturally responsive digital governance systems.

In adopting an educational approach, the Guide seeks to build consensus and support for longer-term initiatives to support greater self-determination and participation by Indigenous communities and editors on its platforms. It identifies opportunities where culturally safer practices can be implemented immediately while identifying areas requiring broader community engagement, policy reform, technical development and consensus-building across Wikimedia movements internationally. This includes future discussions regarding:

- coding banners for culturally appropriate warnings and notices on Wikipedia;
- Indigenous-led metadata and classification systems for Wikimedia Commons and Wikidata;
- governance pathways for culturally sensitive or Secret/Sacred material;
- improved recognition of Indigenous-led and CultureStrong Sources within Wikimedia policies;
- greater Indigenous participation in moderation, governance and dispute resolution processes;
- mechanisms to better reflect FPIC and Indigenous cultural authority within open knowledge environments such as flagging or removal processes;
- removal of Creative Commons licences for Indigenous Content; and
- approaches to AI, machine-readable data and downstream reuse of Indigenous Content.

Ultimately, the Guide does not attempt to resolve all tensions between open knowledge systems and Indigenous rights frameworks. Instead, it provides a constructive foundation for ongoing engagement, learning and collaboration. It recognises that meaningful and sustainable change will require long-term relationship building, Indigenous leadership, community participation and continued dialogue across Wikimedia communities, institutions and Indigenous peoples both within Australia and internationally.

4. NEXT STEPS: ENACTING CHANGE ON WIKIMEDIA PLATFORMS

4.1. Creating a World First Protocol in Australia

Building upon the positive reception of the Guide, it is recommended that Wikimedia Australia undertake the next phase of work by developing a dedicated ICIP and IDSoV Protocol (**Protocol**). A Protocol is considered necessary due to the significant nuance, complexity and cultural sensitivity associated with Indigenous Content. A protocol provides practical case studies derived from meaningful consultation across diverse Indigenous communities in Australia. In this way, a Protocol can provide more detailed step-by-step, scenario-based guidance than the Guide as it operationalises and illustrates the high-level principles and risk-based guidance. With over 200 Indigenous nations across Australia, it is important that the diversity of perspectives, protocols and histories of these communities are reflected in the Protocol.

It is recommended that Wikimedia Australia undertake a staged, Indigenous-led Protocol development process informed by extensive consultation with Australian Indigenous communities, Indigenous Knowledge Holders, Wikimedians, cultural institutions, researchers and relevant subject matter experts. Such a process would support broader participation in shaping how Indigenous Content is represented, managed and governed on Wikimedia platforms while also fostering transparency, trust and long-term relationship building between Wikimedia Australia and Indigenous communities by raising awareness regarding Wikimedia's commitment to improving the Wikimedia platforms as well as offering opportunities for capacity building.

The proposed Protocol process would build upon the existing Guide and incorporate:

- broader national consultation and engagement activities;
- public education and awareness raising initiatives;
- Indigenous-led advisory and governance processes;
- development of practical operational standards and cultural protocols;
- further guidance regarding culturally sensitive material, metadata and Indigenous Data;
- pathways for ongoing review, reflection and adaptation; and
- mechanisms for balancing open knowledge principles with ICIP, IDSoV and culturally respectful engagement practices.

While the proposed protocol would be grounded within the Australian context and informed by Australian Indigenous perspectives, the broader methodology and consultation approach have the potential to provide a valuable model for other Wikimedia chapters, Indigenous peoples and cultural communities internationally.

Many of the challenges addressed throughout this White Paper, including culturally harmful representations, metadata systems, absences of Indigenous governance mechanisms, tensions between open access and Indigenous cultural authority, and concerns regarding AI and downstream reuse of Indigenous Content, are not unique to Australia. As outlined in [3.2 Global Conversations](#) Indigenous peoples globally are increasingly engaging with similar questions regarding digital cultural governance, IDSoV and ethical participation within open knowledge ecosystems.

Accordingly, the proposed Protocol process has the potential to operate as a broader model for how Wikimedia platforms and Indigenous communities may work collaboratively to develop culturally responsive governance frameworks. The process could provide an adaptable methodology for future Indigenous-led protocol development internationally, supporting other Wikimedia chapters and global Indigenous peoples to develop frameworks that reflect their own cultural protocols, governance systems, languages and community priorities.

The development of a Wikimedia Australia protocol would therefore represent an important next step in embedding Indigenous self-determination, cultural authority and respectful engagement practices

within Wikimedia environments, while also contributing to broader international conversations regarding Indigenous rights and digital governance in open knowledge systems.

4.2. Increasing Indigenous Participation and Leadership

Indigenous Perspectives on Wikimedia Platforms

Many Indigenous peoples perceive Wikimedia platforms as culturally unsafe and difficult to navigate due to experiences of harmful content, inaccurate representation, culturally inappropriate metadata practices, lack of Indigenous governance mechanisms and uncertainty regarding how Indigenous knowledge is used, categorised and reused online under Creative Commons licences. When disputes escalate, the overrepresentation of non-Indigenous administrators and policies that do not reflect CultureStrong Sources or processes means that Indigenous objections are often overruled by other contributors.

Reflections on mi-wiki

Wikipedia can play an important role in lifting the voices of Indigenous peoples globally, however these steps must be Indigenous led.²⁷ In Aotearoa New Zealand, Wikimedian Stuart Yeates in his reflection *Post-mortem of My Involvement in mi-wiki* published this year on that chapter's resources page, he explains that although he was once an advocate for Māori-language Wikipedia project (mi-wiki), his subsequent study of Māori knowledge systems and engagement with Māori perspectives as a Pākehā (non-Māori person), led him to conclude that the platform is fundamentally ill-suited to supporting Māori knowledge and cultural revitalisation. He argues that Wikipedia's reliance on Western concepts of authorship, documentary evidence, open licensing, and universal knowledge classification sits uneasily with Māori traditions of oral knowledge transmission, relational authority, and Indigenous approaches to knowledge governance. Pointing to the limited participation of Māori editors and the lack of strong Māori support for the project, he questions whether Māori-language Wikipedia meaningfully serves Māori aspirations. He is particularly critical of Wikidata's underlying Western epistemological assumptions, which he sees as being imposed across cultures and languages. Ultimately, Yeates concludes "I remain keen to be involved in and to support te ao Māori activity in this area, but it's got to be Māori-led not tacked onto a Western-centric project as mi.wikipedia.org appears to be."²⁸

A 2024 article on Diff entitled *Protecting Mātauranga Māori within an open knowledge platform*, Māori contributor @Worldsgreatestmum speaks to her experience creating a page for the nineteenth-century chief Tara Te Irigani on Wikipedia. Motivated by a desire to create something 'informative and well-researched,'²⁹ that could connect people across the world with the history of Māori people, she

²⁷ Bronwyn Carlson and Lotus Rana, "I Really Like Wikipedia, but I Don't Trust It": Understanding First Nations Peoples' Experiences Using Wikipedia as Readers and/or Editors' (2024) <https://doi.org/10.25949/76YK-G627>, Kirsten Thorpe, Nathan Sentance and Lauren Booker, *Wikimedia Australia and First Nations Metadata: ATSIILRN Protocols for Description and Access Discussion Paper* (Discussion Paper, Wikimedia Australia, 2023) <https://opus.lib.uts.edu.au/bitstream/10453/166700/3/Wikimedia%20Australia%20and%20First%20Nations%20Metadata-%20ATSIILRN%20Protocols%20for%20Description%20and%20Access%20Discussion%20paper%20FINAL.pdf>, Madeline Knickerbocker, 'Indigenous History on Wikipedia' (Web Page, *Active History*, 28 July 2020) <https://activehistory.ca/blog/2020/07/28/indigenous-history-on-wikipedia/>. Jordan Mae Cook, 'Students Bring Indigenous Perspectives to Wikipedia' (Web Page, *Folio*, University of Alberta, 20 April 2021) <https://www.ualberta.ca/en/folio/2021/04/students-bring-indigenous-perspectives-to-wikipedia.html>. Ivonne Kristiani, 'Encouraging Indigenous Knowledge Production for Wikipedia' (2021) 27(3) *New Review of Hypermedia and Multimedia* 245 <https://doi.org/10.1080/13614568.2021.1888320>. Mali Brodreski, 'From the Incubator to the World: Congratulations, Inari Sámi Wikipedia!' (Web Page, *Wikimedia Diff*, 23 October 2020) <https://diff.wikimedia.org/2020/10/23/from-the-incubator-to-the-world-congratulations-inari-sami-wikipedia/>.

²⁸ Stuart Yeates, *Post-mortem of My Involvement in mi-wiki* (2026) <https://www.wikidata.org/wiki/User:Stuartyeates>; <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1809-1062>.

²⁹ Wikimedia Diff, @Worldsgreatestmum 'Protecting Mātauranga Māori within an Open Knowledge Platform' (Web Page, 20 February 2024) <https://diff.wikimedia.org/2024/02/20/protecting-matauranga-maori-within-an-open-knowledge-platform/>.

realised that some of the knowledge she uncovered in her research was so precious, they were taonga (treasures) and not her information to share under Māori frameworks. She stated:

This truth around Māori taonga is in direct conflict with Wikimedia's mission of developing educational content under a free license, to be disseminated globally and effectively. This truth also directly contradicts the traditions of anthropologists and ethnologists for centuries, where culture, particularly indigenous culture, was something to be dissected and splayed out to view, detailed and sterile. I found myself feeling complicated, frustrated, and uncomfortable. Why did Wikipedia feel entitled to this information? Why would my article be considered less worthy if I withheld these taonga? Why does Wikipedia not understand the cultural context which I am working within? On one level I knew exactly why Wikipedia did not understand my cultural context, as its origins can be traced back to middle-class white-American men of the early 2000s with a passion for technology and a bank account to support it. These origins do not diminish the value of Wikipedia, but understanding the context of its creation was an irritating necessity for me to understand my specific frustrations with it.³⁰

She concludes her reflection by underscoring the need for Wikipedia to consider Indigenous models for holding and sharing knowledge as well as the importance of inclusive representation.

Towards Indigenous-Led Engagement and Governance

The Guide forms an important first step towards creating culturally safer platforms for Indigenous peoples but must be followed with meaningful engagement with Indigenous communities at a national and international level given the diversity of Indigenous cultures, laws and knowledge systems.

Many contributors have expressed a genuine willingness to engage respectfully with Indigenous Content but have identified a lack of confidence, practical guidance and cultural understanding when making decisions relating to Indigenous peoples, histories, languages and knowledge systems. The proposed national consultation process associated with the development of the Protocol therefore presents an important opportunity not only to inform the substantive content of the Protocol itself, but also to raise awareness of Wikimedia platforms amongst Indigenous communities, foster greater trust and participation, and support long-term capacity building across Wikimedia environments. Importantly, this process has the potential to encourage more Indigenous contributors, editors, administrators and decision-makers to actively participate in shaping how Indigenous Content is represented, governed and moderated across Wikimedia platforms.

There are already several important examples globally demonstrating how Wikimedia platforms can support Indigenous language revitalisation, community participation and Indigenous-led knowledge sharing when culturally appropriate engagement and governance approaches are adopted.

Positive Indigenous language and community initiatives have emerged across Wikipedia platforms both within Australia and internationally. The people of the Atikamekw Nation in Canada, with support by Wikimedia Canada, have been able to translate over 1000 articles, sound clips and photo descriptions into their traditional language and upload them onto Wikimedia platforms.³¹ This project began in a secondary school classroom as a way for students to research and protect their culture, but over time it evolved into a community wide project to pass on cultural knowledge and keep traditional language alive for the next generation.³²

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ka'nhehsí:io Deer, "A Way to Keep Our Language Alive": How the Atikamekw Nation Uses Wikipedia to Promote Its Language', CBC News (online, 2 August 2019) <https://www.cbc.ca/news/indigenous/atikamekw-language-wikipedia-project-1.5229196>.

³² Rising Voices, 'A Wikipedia Made for and by the Atikamekw First Nation in Canada' (Web Page, Global Voices, 13 June 2017) <https://rising.globalvoices.org/blog/2017/06/13/a-wikipedia-made-for-and-by-the-atikamekw-first-nation-in-canada/>.

Across northern Europe, Sámi contributors have used Wikimedia platforms to document Sámi languages, histories and communities while also advocating for improved representation of Indigenous peoples within digital knowledge systems.³³

In Australia, Noongarpedia, a Noongar-language Wikipedia project was developed in collaboration with Noongar communities in Western Australia.³⁴ Led by Noongar educator and researcher Professor Len Collard in partnership with Wikimedia contributors and educational institutions, Noongarpedia was established to support the revitalisation and everyday use of the Noongar language through Wikimedia platforms. The project encouraged Noongar community members, students and contributors to create and edit articles in Noongar language, embedding Indigenous language and cultural perspectives into open knowledge systems.³⁵ Noongarpedia has since been recognised internationally as an innovative example of how Wikimedia platforms can support Indigenous language preservation, intergenerational knowledge transmission and community-led digital participation.

A similar approach is now being pursued by Wikimedia Chile in partnership with Mapuche communities to strengthen the representation of the Mapudungun language and Mapuche knowledge representation across Wikimedia platforms.³⁶ Following the creation of a Mapudungun Wikipedia in 2011 by scholars and native Mapuche college students over 500 entries were created. However, the project could not proceed and remains in the Incubator. As a result of this failure to proceed with the project, Wikimedia Chile recognised that technical infrastructure alone was insufficient to support meaningful Indigenous participation.

Instead, the project has been reoriented around building long-term partnerships with Mapuche educators, journalists, language institutions and communities to better understand local priorities and co-design Wikimedia initiatives that support language revitalisation and community aspirations. With a dedicated management team and leadership by Patricio Melillanca, a Mapuche journalist and communicator, the initiative has highlighted the opportunities for Indigenous participation particularly in the space of languages. After the National Institute for the Mapuzuguletuaiñ Mapuche Language (*Instituto Nacional de la Lengua Mapuche Mapuzuguletuaiñ*) joined Wikimedia Chile and Melillanca in a visit to the Araucanía Region Melillanca stated: 'I believe that the autonomous Mapuche systems of education, such as language-oriented boarding schools, could use Wikimedia tools to support their work, especially in communities that have access to information and knowledge technologies (TICs). Wikimedia platforms could represent a strong link to Mapuche media, which spreads language as well.

The Mapudungun Wikipedia project has also revealed the broader structural barriers to Indigenous participation including digital access, digital literacy, institutional capacity and even the continued use of colonial language classifications within international standards. Rather than focusing solely on content creation, the project now prioritises community dialogue, contributor training, partnerships with Indigenous organisations and support for Indigenous-led decision making. The experience demonstrates that increasing Indigenous representation on Wikimedia platforms requires sustained relationship-building, culturally responsive engagement and investment in Indigenous capacity-building, providing a useful model for how Wikimedia communities can work collaboratively with Indigenous peoples to develop more culturally safe and representative digital knowledge environments.

³³ Kristiina Jokinen, Katri Hiovain, Niklas Laxström, Ilona Rauhala and Graham Wilcock, *DigiSami and Digital Natives: Interaction Technology for the North Sami Language* (Project Report, DigiSami Project, University of Helsinki, 2020) <https://blogs.helsinki.fi/digisami-project/files/2020/02/ds-it.pdf>.

³⁴ Meta-Wiki, *Noongarpedia* (Web Page) <https://meta.wikimedia.org/wiki/Noongarpedia>.

³⁵ Monica Tan, 'Introducing "Noongarpedia" – Australia's First Indigenous Wikipedia', *The Guardian* (online, 2 September 2016) <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2016/sep/02/ngean-noonar-noongar-is-australias-first-indigenous-wikipedia-we-want-to-use-our-language>.

³⁶ Wikimedia Chile, *Strengthening Mapuche Representation Through Free Knowledge: Wikimedia Chile's Journey to Integrate the Mapudungun Language in the Digital Space* (Diff Blog, 30 October 2023) <https://diff.wikimedia.org/2023/10/30/strengthening-mapuche-representation-through-free-knowledge-wikimedia-chiles-journey-to-integrate-the-mapudungun-language-in-the-digital-space/>.

Working in Good Faith: A Community-Informed Approach to Wikipedia

One valuable recent contribution to scholarship examining Indigenous peoples' engagement with Wikimedia platforms is the 2026 published paper *Working in Good Faith: Honoring Indigenous Writers on Wikipedia*.³⁷ Written by non-Indigenous authors Alexandra Alisauskas, Erin Fields and Amanda Grey, it was developed through the Honouring Indigenous Writers initiative at the University of British Columbia. The paper documents a practical model for increasing Indigenous representation on Wikipedia while acknowledging the structural limitations of Wikimedia's existing governance and editorial systems. Unlike scholarship that focuses primarily on the risks posed by open knowledge platforms, the authors explore how culturally informed practices can create safer pathways for Indigenous participation without abandoning the principles of collaborative knowledge production.

Central to the paper is the recognition that many of the barriers experienced by Indigenous contributors are embedded within the design of Wikipedia itself. The authors identify tensions between Indigenous knowledge systems and Wikimedia's reliance upon Western concepts of neutrality, notability and reliable sources. They observe that these standards frequently disadvantage Indigenous authors and communities because many Indigenous knowledges are maintained through community authority, oral traditions or locally governed knowledge protocols rather than the forms of publication privileged by Wikipedia's editorial policies. Rather than suggesting that these tensions cannot be overcome, the authors argue that they require contributors to work deliberately and reflexively with Indigenous communities, recognising the historical legacy of extractive research and the continuing impacts of colonial approaches to knowledge production.

Drawing upon Indigenous research methodologies and frameworks including OCAP®, the CARE Principles, Local Contexts Traditional Knowledge Labels and Shawn Wilson's principles of respect, reciprocity and responsibility, the project developed a 'Working in Good Faith' approach that sought to rebalance relationships between Wikipedia contributors and Indigenous knowledge holders. Rather than treating publicly available information as automatically available for reuse, organisers contacted living Indigenous authors to seek permission before creating or expanding biographies, invited authors to identify inaccuracies, contribute biographical information and, where requested, review articles prior to publication. Although these practices extended beyond Wikipedia's conventional editing culture and required careful navigation of existing conflict of interest policies, they reflected a deliberate commitment to collaboration, transparency and Indigenous self-determination in the creation of online knowledge.

The authors acknowledge that these processes do not resolve all of the structural tensions between Wikimedia and Indigenous knowledge systems. Rather, they acknowledge that challenges relating to reliable sources, editorial disputes, categorisation, cultural misunderstanding and systemic bias remain. Nevertheless, the project demonstrates that meaningful improvements are possible when Wikimedia initiatives are grounded in meaningful relationships, community engagement and Indigenous-informed governance rather than relying solely upon existing platform policies. In doing so, 'Working in Good Faith' processes, like the CultureStrong Guide, provides one of the clearest practical examples to date of how Wikimedia initiatives can move beyond simply documenting Indigenous knowledge towards developing collaborative processes that respect Indigenous authority while strengthening Indigenous participation within open knowledge environments.

Lessons for Wikimedia Australia

These projects and conversations demonstrate that Wikimedia platforms can become important spaces for Indigenous storytelling, language revitalisation, cultural education and knowledge sharing when Indigenous participation and leadership are actively supported. They also demonstrate however, that participation alone is insufficient without broader efforts to improve cultural safety, governance structures and contributor awareness.

³⁷ Alexandra Alisauskas, Erin Fields and Amanda Grey, 'Working in Good Faith: Honoring Indigenous Writers on Wikipedia' (2026) 4(1) *Journal of Open Educational Resources in Higher Education* 128.

5. CONSULTATION QUESTIONS

The following questions are intended to support international discussion, reflection and collaboration regarding how Wikimedia platforms can become more culturally safe, equitable and CultureStrong for Indigenous peoples globally. They are designed to encourage participation from Indigenous communities, Wikimedians, cultural institutions, researchers, policymakers and the wider public.

Recognition and Respect of ICIP and IDSov

1. How can Wikimedia platforms better recognise and respect Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP), Indigenous Data Sovereignty (IDSov) and Indigenous cultural authority within existing platform policies and governance structures?

Cultural Safety

2. What changes to platform policies and practices would make Wikimedia a more culturally safe environment for Indigenous peoples globally, including protection from harmful, disrespectful or hostile treatment of Indigenous people and Indigenous Content?

Secret, Sacred and Sensitive Content

3. How should Wikimedia platforms handle Secret/Sacred or otherwise culturally sensitive Indigenous Content, particularly where open-access principles conflict with Indigenous protocols about who may hold, access or share that knowledge?

Metadata, Naming and Categorisation

4. How can Wikimedia improve existing metadata, categorisation and naming systems to better reflect Indigenous perspectives, languages, Nations, Countries and cultural governance systems?

Decision-making and Dispute Resolution

5. What authority should Indigenous peoples and communities hold in decisions about Indigenous Content, including how it is moderated and how disputes are resolved?

Reliable Sources and Indigenous Knowledge

6. How can Wikimedia's 'Reliable Sources' frameworks be expanded to properly recognise Indigenous-led sources, oral histories, community-controlled knowledge and Indigenous language materials?

Participation and Leadership

7. What practical steps could Wikimedia take to grow Indigenous participation and leadership amongst contributors, editors, administrators and Wikimedia governance bodies internationally?

Training and Cultural Competency

8. What training, educational resources and cultural competency initiatives are needed to better support contributors working with Indigenous Content across Wikimedia platforms?

Language Revitalisation and Indigenous-led Projects

9. How can Wikimedia platforms actively support Indigenous language revitalisation, Indigenous-led digital knowledge projects and culturally appropriate ways of sharing knowledge online?

Collaboration and Shared Standards

10. How can the global Wikimedia movement work in partnership with Indigenous peoples to co-design culturally responsive protocols, governance frameworks and best-practise standards for open knowledge?

6. CULTURESTRONG: CREATING A MOVEMENT

More than a Guide

The development of the Guide, together with the proposed Protocol, represents more than the creation of a single framework or policy initiative. It forms part of a broader international movement towards more culturally safe, respectful and equitable open knowledge systems.

Indigenous peoples globally continue to navigate the opportunities and challenges presented by digital knowledge environments, open data systems, collaborative online platforms and AI technologies. At the same time, contributors, researchers, institutions and Wikimedia communities around the world are increasingly seeking pathways to engage more respectfully and responsibly with Indigenous Content.

Shared Responsibility

Creating meaningful and sustainable change within Wikimedia ecosystems requires ongoing participation, dialogue, consensus building and shared responsibility at an international level. The Guide and proposed Protocol are intended to contribute to these conversations by encouraging practical reflection on how Wikimedia platforms can better recognise Indigenous cultural authority, Indigenous governance systems, Indigenous languages and Indigenous rights in digital environments.

Join the Movement

CultureStrong is intended to remain collaborative, evolving and community driven. There is no single solution to the complex issues raised throughout this White Paper, and meaningful progress will require ongoing listening, adaptation, Indigenous leadership and international collaboration.

Readers are encouraged to provide their feedback on the Consultation Questions above by scanning the QR Code and completing the survey, and to join the movement. We hope that you will participate in discussions, contribute ideas and support ongoing work towards creating Wikimedia platforms that not only share knowledge, but do so in ways that respect Indigenous peoples, cultures, knowledge systems and rights for generations to come.



Appendix 1. Definitions

CultureStrong Sources are those that prioritise Indigenous creators and Indigenous-led collaborations and productions. These sources reflect Indigenous leadership, self-determination, cultural authority, the observance of cultural protocols, Indigenous knowledge systems and informed consent by Indigenous contributors. Indigenous voices guide the narrative, hold cultural authority and shape the interpretation and use of Indigenous knowledge in CultureStrong sources.

Cultural Safety in online spaces means creating digital environments where Indigenous people can share, represent, and manage their knowledge and identity without facing misrepresentation, exclusion, or harm. It involves recognising power dynamics, ensuring Indigenous governance over their cultural content, and implementing protections against appropriation, discrimination, and misuse.

ICIP refers to the rights of Indigenous people to their heritage, including cultural heritage, traditional knowledge and traditional cultural expressions in accordance with Article 31 of UNDRIP.³⁸ Heritage comprises all objects, sites and knowledge the nature and use of which has been transmitted to continues to be transmitted from generation to generation, and which is regarded as pertaining to a particular Indigenous group or their territory. The heritage of an Indigenous people is a living one and includes objects, knowledge, literary and artistic works which may be created in the future based on that heritage. Heritage includes:

- literary performing and artistic works (including songs, music, dances, stories, ceremonies, symbols, languages and designs);
- scientific, agricultural, technical and ecological knowledge (including cultigens, medicines and the phenotypes of flora and fauna);
- all items of movable cultural property;
- cultural governance and practice;
- Ancestral human remains and tissues;
- immovable cultural property (including sacred and historically significant sites and burial grounds); and
- documentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' heritage in archives, film, photographs, videotape or audiotape and all forms of media.

Indigenous Data or **ID** includes any data, facts, information or statistics about Indigenous people, from Indigenous people, or about their culture or their Country.

Indigenous Data Sovereignty or **IDSov** refers to the right of Indigenous people to own and control Indigenous Data collected about them, their culture or their Country.

Indigenous Data Governance or **IDGov** refers to the right of Indigenous people to manage what, how and why Indigenous Data is collected, accessed, stored, interpreted and used.

Indigenous Knowledge refers to the understanding and practices developed by Indigenous communities over generations, rooted in their unique cultural experiences and relationships with the natural environment. This knowledge encompasses aspects of ecology, agriculture, and medicine, linking traditional wisdom with the natural sciences.³⁹

Indigenous Content is any content that relates to, represents, describes, records, categorises, or is created by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples or their Country. It can include ICIP and Indigenous Data as well as culturally sensitive, Secret/Sacred, and/or offensive materials.

³⁸ United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, GA Res 61/295, UN GAOR, 61st sess, 107th plen mtg, Agenda Item 68, UN Doc A/RES/61/295 (13 September 2007) https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/wp-content/uploads/sites/19/2018/11/UNDRIP_E_web.pdf.

³⁹ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, *Indigenous Knowledge* (Web Page) <https://www.unesco.org/en/query-list/i/indigenous-knowledge>.

Indigenous Culture refers to the unique social practices, beliefs, and traditions of the original inhabitants of a region. These cultures often emphasise a deep connection to the land and natural environment, which is significant in both social and human sciences. Indigenous peoples contribute invaluable knowledge and perspectives, particularly in fields like ecology and anthropology.⁴⁰

Intellectual Property or **IP** refers formal laws protecting intellectual creations (of the mind) and includes copyright, trade marks, patents, designs and plant breeder's rights. IP is an umbrella term to cover all these laws. These laws differ across countries and include case law developed by courts as well as statute and any applicable international agreements.

Knowledge Holders are Indigenous people who possess, and are often caretakers for, pieces of Indigenous knowledge. Being a knowledge holder often means that they have undergone in-depth cultural education and that they may have the cultural authority to decide when that knowledge can be passed to others.

Open Platform means a software system based on 'open standards' which allows users and other third parties to modify, adapt or extend the functions of the platform without altering the source code of the platform. An open platform can include components that may be either open source, proprietary, or a combination of the two.⁴¹

Right holders refers here to the Australian Indigenous individuals and communities with cultural authority and ancestral connection to ICIP, who are authorised to make decisions about its use.

Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) is the right of Indigenous Peoples to make decisions about their ICIP without coercion, with adequate time and information, and before any use or access occurs. FPIC is an ongoing process, not a one-time agreement.

Indigenous is the term used throughout this White Paper as an inclusive descriptor for Indigenous peoples globally and, within the Australian context, to refer to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Further detail regarding terminology and definitions is set out in section **2.3 A Note on Terminology**. Where possible, this White Paper seeks to refer to specific Nations, language groups, communities or peoples by their preferred terms of identification and acknowledges that preferences regarding terminology may differ between communities and individuals. References to Indigenous peoples internationally similarly seek to defer to the preferred forms of identification used by those communities.

Traditional Knowledge (TK) is knowledge, know-how, skills and practices that are developed, sustained and passed on from generation to generation within a community, often forming part of its cultural or spiritual identity. While there is not yet an accepted definition of TK at the international level, it can be said that traditional knowledge includes both the content of knowledge itself as well as traditional cultural expressions; e.g. distinctive signs and symbols. Traditional knowledge can be found in a wide variety of contexts, including agricultural, scientific, technical, ecological and medicinal knowledge as well as biodiversity-related knowledge.⁴²

⁴⁰ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, *Indigenous Cultures* (Web Page) <https://www.unesco.org/en/query-list/i/indigenous-cultures>.

⁴¹ Wikipedia, *Open Platform* (Web Page) https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Open_platform.

⁴² World Intellectual Property Organization, *Traditional Knowledge* (Web Page) <https://www.wipo.int/en/web/traditional-knowledge/tk/index>.

Appendix 2. Acknowledgements

This Paper, and the Guide that accompanies it, stand on the shoulders of countless Indigenous Elders, Traditional Custodians, communities, academics, practitioners and organisations across Australia and around the world who, over many decades, have worked tirelessly to advance the recognition, protection and respectful governance of ICIP, IDSov, Indigenous languages and Indigenous knowledge systems. Their scholarship, advocacy, leadership and generosity have fundamentally shaped the conversations, principles and practices that underpin this work. It is impossible to acknowledge in detail here every individual, community, organisation and movement whose contributions have informed this Paper and made the development of the accompanying Guide possible, but we do so with deep respect and gratitude, recognising that this publication represents only one contribution to a much broader, ongoing global movement led by Indigenous peoples.

Without the foundational contributions of organisations such as Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (**AIATSIS**), whose leadership in ethical research practices and Indigenous-led citations has helped shape national conversations and standards, our work would not be possible.

We also acknowledge the many Indigenous communities, organisations, researchers, cultural institutions, libraries, archives, Wikimedia contributors and allies across the world whose scholarship, advocacy and practical initiatives continue to reshape how Indigenous knowledge is understood, respected and governed in digital environments. Their collective efforts have laid the foundations upon which both this White Paper and the accompanying Guide have been developed.

Our work is intended to contribute to and continue these important conversations through collaboration, shared learning and ongoing engagement. It reflects the understanding that creating culturally safe and respectful digital knowledge environments is a collective responsibility that requires the leadership, expertise and participation of Indigenous peoples alongside the commitment of institutions, platforms and communities to continuous improvement.

Finally, we are deeply grateful to the members of the Expert Review Committee, whose knowledge, experience and thoughtful guidance have strengthened this work at every stage. Their insights, together with the contributions of those who have shared their research, lived experiences and expertise, have helped ensure that this Guide is grounded in respect for Indigenous rights, self-determination and cultural governance. Any value this work may have reflects the extraordinary body of work that has come before it and the many people who continue to advance Indigenous rights, self-determination and cultural governance around the world.

Miriam Corowa

Miriam Corowa is a Bundjalung woman of northern New South Wales and Senior Cultural Advisor for ABC News, bringing more than 25 years of experience as a journalist, presenter and documentary producer. Her role is focused on providing editorial and cultural guidance to reporting teams and sharing in the development of strategies and engagement for the network, including co-chair of the 2023 Referendum Reference Group, facilitating projects on First Nations languages use and consulting on the development of an ICIP Framework for the ABC. Miriam has also led the creation and delivery of training on Best Practice Reporting in Indigenous Affairs for ABC reporters and supported projects to provide additional journalism skills training for staff at the ABC and in the broader First Nations media sector.

Professor Kirsten Thorpe

Professor Kirsten Thorpe is a Worimi woman who leads the Indigenous Archives and Data Stewardship Hub at the Jumbunna Institute, University of Technology Sydney. Her work focuses on strengthening research and engagement with Indigenous protocols and advancing decolonising practices, particularly across the galleries, libraries, archives and museums (GLAM) sector.

Her 2022 doctoral thesis, *Unclasping the White Hand: Reclaiming and Refiguring the Archives to Support Indigenous Wellbeing and Sovereignty*, examined Indigenous self-determination and sovereignty in the stewardship of Indigenous knowledges, with a particular emphasis on archival engagement.

Kirsten is an invited member of the International Council on Archives Expert Group on Indigenous Matters, a co-founder of the Indigenous Archives Collective, and an elected member of the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) Indigenous Matters Section (2023-2027). She previously served as Manager, Indigenous Services at the State Library of New South Wales.

Yanti Ropeyarn

Yanti Ropeyarn is a Angkamuthi, Yadhaykenu, Woppaburra, Meriam woman and PhD candidate in the Department of Critical Indigenous Studies at Macquarie University. Her research thesis, *Righteous Rebellion: Asserting Indigenous Intellectual Sovereignty through a Blak Site'ation System*, explores the development of an Australian Indigenous citation style that supports respectful engagement with Indigenous ways of knowing.

Before commencing full-time research, Yanti worked for eight years in the library and information science sector, holding Senior Information Specialist and Librarian roles across national and academic libraries. Yanti was a founding member of the Australian Library and Information Association Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Expert Advisory Group in 2022.

Dr Tamika Worrell

Dr Tamika Worrell is a Gamillaroi woman and Senior Lecturer in the Department of Critical Indigenous Studies at Macquarie University, where she teaches across undergraduate and postgraduate programs. She also serves as Director of Research Training, supporting and mentoring the next generation of Indigenous researchers. Her research focuses on the representation of Indigenous peoples and perspectives in education, texts, and artificial intelligence.

Her doctoral thesis, *Prioritising Blak Voices: Representing Indigenous Perspectives in NSW English Classrooms*, was awarded without correction and received the Vice-Chancellor's Commendation for Academic Excellence. Recently, Tamika launched a report co-written with Professor Bronwyn Carlson entitled *Relational Futures: Indigenous Sovereignty and the Governance of Artificial Intelligence (AI)*, which examined Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' encounters and responses to AI.

Associate Professor Jessica Russ-Smith

Dr Jessica Russ-Smith is a Wiradyuri Wambuul woman and Associate Professor of Social Work at Australian Catholic University (ACU), Assistant Deputy Head of School (Allied Health), Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Curriculum and Pedagogy Coordinator for Social Work, and Chair of ACU's Indigenous Research Ethics Advisory Panel. Her work focuses on Indigenous sovereignty, decolonising higher education and social work, critical disability justice, ethics, and artificial intelligence.

A two-time University Medallist, Jessica received the 2024 Australian Awards for University Teaching (AAUT) Neville Bonner Award for Indigenous Education. She co-authored *The AI (R)evolution: Valuing Country, Culture and Community in a World of Algorithms* (2024), which centres First Nations perspectives and sovereignty in discussions about artificial intelligence. She is also a member of the Indigenous Allied Health Australia (IAHA) Research Advisory Committee

Leonard Hill

Leonard Hill is a Ngemba man and the Chief Executive Officer of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, or AIATSIS. Over his distinguished career in public service, he has held several Senior Executive Service roles, including Deputy CEO and Chief Operating Officer, Executive Director of Collections Services at AIATSIS, and Assistant Secretary, Culture Branch, within the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet.

Since the early 1990s, Leonard has worked across the Australian Government, New South Wales Government, and Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations in a wide range of Indigenous affairs, education, culture, and community leadership roles. His experience includes leadership positions in Indigenous education, employment, and regional service delivery, with a strong focus on supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Leonard has also represented Australia internationally, leading government and AIATSIS delegations on Indigenous policy, cultural heritage, and rights. This includes leading the Australian delegation to the United Nations Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (**EMRIP**) in Geneva and heading an AIATSIS delegation to Mexico to strengthen collaboration on Indigenous policy and national cultural and collecting institutions.

AIATSIS (The Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies)

AIATSIS is an Indigenous-led national institution for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, histories and knowledges. Established by the Australian Parliament in 1964, AIATSIS is an independent Commonwealth statutory authority that undertakes and supports research, maintaining one of the world's most significant collections of materials relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. It has developed nationally recognised standards, ethical guidance and resources for working with Indigenous communities. It aims to educate and inspire all people to better understand and celebrate the heritage and culture of the Indigenous peoples of Australia. AIATSIS plays a leading role in advancing Indigenous-led research, supporting the preservation and revitalisation of Indigenous languages and cultures, and promoting the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples through policy development, education and international engagement.

In the words of AIATSIS: 'Our vision is a world in which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge and cultures are recognised, respected, celebrated and valued.'

Maiam nayri Wingara

Maiam nayri Wingara is an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led collective of academics, researchers and practitioners dedicated to advancing Indigenous Data Sovereignty, or IDSov, and Indigenous Data Governance (**IDGov**) in Australia. In the languages of Meriam Mer, palawa kani and D'harawal the words Maiam nayri Wingara broadly translate to 'welcome to good data/knowledge'.

Established in 2017, the collective has played a leading role in developing the Australian Indigenous Data Sovereignty Principles and supports organisations and communities to implement these principles in practice through education, research and advocacy. Its work promotes the rights of Indigenous peoples to govern the collection, access, use and stewardship of data relating to their peoples, communities and cultures, consistent with the principles of self-determination and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.