

The Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS)
51 Lawson Crescent, Acton Peninsula, Acton ACT 2601, Australia
Via email reception@aiatsis.gov.au

1 December 2025

To Whom It May Concern,

RE: AIATSIS 'Public Notice' Requested for Kuranda, Far North Queensland

I, as a community member and volunteer, am requesting a brief statement in an easy to read format, that explains the disclaimer on the AIATSIS map:

*This map attempts to represent the language, social or nation groups of Aboriginal Australia. It shows only the general locations of larger groupings of people which may include clans, dialects or individual languages in a group. It used published resources from the eighteenth century-1994 and is not intended to be exact, nor the boundaries fixed. **It is not suitable for native title or other land claims.** David R Horton (creator), © AIATSIS, 1996. No reproduction without permission.*

In Kuranda, we have an urgent scenario arising where Aboriginal people, including their Indigenous corporations, are using the AIATSIS map for land claims and country claims based on the big, colourful map. They are likely thinking as the map is government issue it must be true!

We have so many social challenges in our small community so the last thing we need is a failure to read the disclaimer on the AIATSIS map. The tensions are escalating – those who think the map is true - and those who know it's not.

It would be appropriate for AIATSIS to assist our community to adopt clarity around the AIATSIS map:

That it cannot be used to claim land, country, nationhood, or native title

This is a very serious issue in a small village in Far North Queensland with an ex Aboriginal Mission (Mona Mona) close by. To be frank, there are hundreds of poor and under-educated Aboriginal people essentially being misled by this map, regardless of intention or disclaimer, there are people walking around using the AIATSIS map to claim country and nationhood under the linguist's invented naming convention used by Horton at the time.

I'm sure you can understand the heartache that is sweeping our community as people come to understand the map disclaimer, and that Horton sourced delineations by linguist PATZ1980 which were arbitrarily (m. by chance), chosen by the linguists at that time:

Where the self-termed "languages" of several tribes are mutually understandable, the linguist may recognise these as dialects of one superordinate language. But "there was not usually any name for a group of tribes whose speech was mutually intelligible, nor for the language^ [the superordinate language] that we can - on linguistic criteria - assign to them. It is necessary to choose some label for each language^, and this usually has to be done fairly arbitrarily by the linguist" (Dixon 1980:43). (Patz 2002:PAGE)

I don't know why the linguists and Horton chose to overwrite Norman B. Tindale's extensive earlier work in Far North Queensland in the Cairns area, however the result is eight (8) Tindale Tribes (recorded in detail by Primary Sources) have been reduced to three (3) Language Nations (invented by linguists).

It would be helpful if AIATSIS provides a public notice we can put in our local paper that lets everyone know about the disclaimer and highlights what it means. This will greatly assist to settle the disputes. Please see sample notice right. This notice could be used in other communities where the AIATSIS map has also wreaked havoc with people not reading, or misinterpreting, the disclaimer.

Thank you for your assistance with this matter.

Kind regards,

Jo Martin
for Correcting the Records Project
2020 – 2030
history@kurandaregion.org
0401 423 573

PUBLIC NOTICE



The AIATSIS Map of Indigenous Australia published in 1996 has the following disclaimer (fine print) under the map title:

*This map attempts to represent the language, social or nation groups of Aboriginal Australia. It shows only the general locations of larger groupings of people which may include clans, dialects or individual languages in a group. It used published resources from the eighteenth century-1994 and is not intended to be exact, nor the boundaries fixed. **It is not suitable for native title or other land claims.** David R Horton (creator), © AIATSIS, 1996. No reproduction without permission.*

AIATSIS sincerely apologises for any misrepresentations that, may or may not, have occurred sourcing this map.

To be clear, the AIATSIS map is a colourful interpretation of the Aboriginal groups of Australia, as described by writer David J Horton in 1996 in the Encyclopedia of Aboriginal Australia with the accompanying map. The encyclopedia and map should not be understood as traditional law and custom, or factual, and cannot be used to claim land, country, nationhood, or native title.

www.aiatsis.gov.au/explore/map-indigenous-australia