

The cover art features a dark purple and black background with intricate, glowing white and yellow patterns. These patterns include wavy lines, circles, and abstract shapes, reminiscent of traditional Indigenous art or digital data visualizations. The title 'Journal of Global Indigeneity' is centered in a bold, white, sans-serif font.

# Journal of Global Indigeneity

## Envisioning Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander AI Futures Communique: March 2025

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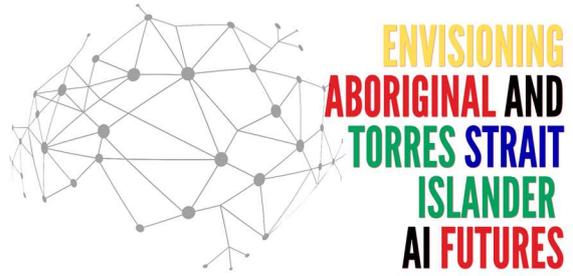
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# ENVISIONING ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER AI FUTURES COMMUNIQUE

## March 2025

In January 2025, over forty Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers, practitioners, community members, and allies, gathered at the Centre for Global Indigenous Futures at the Wallumattagal Campus of Macquarie University in Sydney to **envisage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander AI futures**. The conversation was grounded in Indigenous Data Sovereignty<sup>1</sup>, Indigenous Protocols for AI<sup>2</sup> and Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property<sup>3</sup> principles, recognising that Indigenous peoples are always the authority for their knowledge and data wherever it is held and used, and have the right to determine its proper governance.

Attendees imagined how AI can and should be used to empower Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and how AI can support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to thrive.

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<sup>1</sup> Indigenous Data Sovereignty refers to the right of Indigenous people to exercise ownership over Indigenous data, which includes “information or knowledge, in any format or medium, which is about and may affect Indigenous peoples both collectively and individually” (Maia Wingara & Australian Indigenous Governance Institute, 2018), and includes data about resources, environments and non-human kin (Carroll et al., 2021). The attendees' visions in this document are consistent with alternative articulations of Indigenous data.

<sup>2</sup> Indigenous protocols are "context-specific behavioural agreements that direct people on how to move, connect, interact and exchange on Country in lawful ways" (Abdilla, et al., 2021).

<sup>3</sup> Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP) refers to Indigenous peoples' rights to their cultural heritage based on the fundamental right to self-determination (Janke, 2021).

The attendees envisioned that in ten years' time:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and cultures are **respected, recognised and supported** by AI systems:
  - AI systems will recognise that there are hundreds of diverse Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Countries, cultures and languages in Australia.
  - AI systems will be accessible to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and they will determine appropriate access, permissions and utilisation of their cultural knowledge, data, and information for AI systems.
  - AI systems will be designed and developed with aligned cultural governance, principles and protocols to ensure the health and wellbeing of Country and community.
  - AI systems will support First Nations peoples in their ongoing connection to Country, practising of, and ongoing development of Culture, including, but not limited to, caring for Country and the revitalisation and maintenance of First Languages, songlines, knowledge and kinship, ensuring intergenerational transmission.
  - AI systems will support each First Nation's community in maintaining a thriving community including, but not limited to, positive and sustainable economic, health, education, and environmental outcomes.
  - Indigenous-controlled businesses will lead the development and deployment of AI for environmental monitoring, health analytics, and cultural tourism. AI will enhance, not replace, cultural employment opportunities.
  - AI systems will recognise Indigenous knowledge, First Nations governance and authorisation, by encoding Indigenous protocols as rules within AI Systems to respect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledges, authority, attribution, protocols, and permissions.
  - AI systems will only use Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander data that has been verified and approved by the relevant community in accordance with free, prior and informed consent (FPIC) for the predefined specified purpose and intent of the AI model, system, and life cycle.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are **leading** National and International AI governance:
  - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people will be included in all AI governance groups and decision-making discussions, with the agency, and autonomy to set agendas specific to culture, Country, and communities, and their relationships and intersections with technology.
  - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander data used in AI systems has appropriate Indigenous Data Governance frameworks and encoded Indigenous Protocols within AI systems to protect Indigenous Data Sovereignty to ensure the cultural integrity of AI lifecycles and ecosystems.

- First Nations peoples are leading the ongoing governance, management and monitoring of Indigenous-specific AI systems by utilising Indigenous data and knowledges throughout the AI lifecycle.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people will be acknowledged and positioned as leading experts in AI systems that intertwine cultural and technical knowledges for AI models and data sets.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are being empowered as **active leaders and partners** in the design and development of AI systems:
  - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members will be part of multi-disciplinary projects that include regulators, product development, research, design, technical development, stakeholder engagement, and user testing to build AI systems and technologies.
  - Appropriate cultural knowledge authorities are engaged with free, prior and informed consent in the development of AI systems that involve cultural knowledge.
  - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people will be building AI autonomously.
  - The digital and technology divide between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is remedied and resolved. This includes access to sufficient broadband and other infrastructure requirements to access, utilise and generate AI systems and technologies for, and not limited to, education, training, health, well-being and affordability of technological services.
  - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities are empowered by datasets specific to their communities to address Closing the Gap priorities (Australian Government, 2020).
  - Appropriate cultural knowledge authorities are engaged with free, prior and informed consent (FPIC) in the development of AI systems that involve cultural knowledge.
- AI ethics/governance **frameworks, standards and policies** will respect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and cultures:
  - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have developed specific AI ethics and governance practices that protect Indigenous data, knowledges and ICIP.
  - When AI systems and applications are developed, the ethics and responsibilities are taken into account holistically, including taking into account opportunities for, risks to, and participation of, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
  - Existing Indigenous rights policies and data use protocols like UNDRIP<sup>4</sup> and the ATSILIRN<sup>5</sup> Protocols are embedded in AI policies.

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<sup>4</sup> United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (United Nations, 2007)

<sup>5</sup> Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Library and Information Resources Network Protocols (ATSILIRN, 2012)

- AI ethics embed the principles of Indigenous systems thinking such as relationality and reciprocity into the governance of AI systems into the governance of AI systems.
- Indigenous knowledge systems are respected and integrated into all aspects of data governance and AI development.
- Agreements for AI systems that relate to Indigenous cultural knowledge and or practices for AI systems that relate to Indigenous cultural knowledge and or practices ensure fair compensation for cultural products, expertise, and knowledge.
- Healthy Country is critical. AI systems will support First Nations efforts to **care for Country**:
  - The environmental impacts of data centres to Country will be offset with sustainable design of both hardware and software, and through carbon offsetting.
  - AI systems support Indigenous governance models in caring for Country, assisting communities in decision-making on land, water, and resource management, environmental monitoring, and fire management based on Indigenous knowledge.



In 2025, some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are suspicious of AI and do not support its use. It must be acknowledged that AI poses significant, specific risks to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and these risks need to be addressed to achieve the 2035 vision. However, there is also a risk that non-participation will further widen the digital inclusion gap and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people will lose their opportunity to be involved in the development of AI tools that could help them and their communities to thrive.

The attendees envisioned that in ten years' time:

- Low rates of **data and technology literacy** for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people must be improved. This can be achieved through:
  - Data literacy taught through in school curriculums and also offered as courses through community centres and libraries.
  - Technology courses taught in an accessible manner, at undergraduate and postgraduate levels, with opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students supported through scholarships, mentoring, and networking.
  - Improving equitable access to technology for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, especially in regional and remote areas.

- The risks of AI processes and outputs have the ability to re-traumatise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and any **potential harm must be mitigated**. This can be achieved through:
  - Identifying and removing harmful and anti-Indigenous cultural biases and language from AI algorithms and datasets.
  - Technicians and AI practitioners increasing their cultural capability and humility by learning from the application of Indigenous protocols and trauma-informed practice in archives and libraries.
  - Recognising that racist, offensive and derogatory language and stereotypes are harmful to First Nations peoples, and actively avoiding reproducing such harms in AI algorithms, language and datasets.
- The misuse and appropriation of Indigenous knowledges must be prohibited through laws and industry standards that require verified datasets that have **Indigenous knowledge attribution, protocols and permission** embedded in them:
  - Indigenous data is only being used in AI models with the free, prior and informed consent (FPIC) of the related Indigenous knowledge authority.
  - FPIC for use of Indigenous data being time limited and requiring active re-consent after set time periods.
  - Indigenous Data Sovereignty (IDSov) and ICIP are embedded in protocols across various fields and industries. Stakeholders are educated regarding the importance of aligning data management plans, reporting to funders, contracts and practices with IDSov principles.

The considerations discussed above are not exhaustive. We (the authors) also recognise the importance of topics such as: mitigating bias in AI algorithms, preventing racial profiling and discrimination in automated decision-making (e.g., justice, policing, and hiring); the risks and challenges of agentic AI systems and other emerging AI capabilities; the role of water resources and mining in supporting AI infrastructures such as data centres. We call for ongoing debate and discussion.



To ensure this vision becomes a reality, attendees discussed how stakeholders will form a coalition of the willing who believe that AI can and should be a tool in supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to thrive. This stakeholder group includes:

- Traditional Owners who hold deep knowledge of Country, and of First Nations ceremony, lore, identity, Language, and kinship. By walking in alignment with these, we ensure First Nations voices shape the future, allowing AI and technology to enhance, not limit, Indigenous self-determination.
- Government agencies who have the ability to regulate AI development, promote best practices and emerging standards, and use and support ethical AI development and implementation with funding.
- Universities who provide training/education opportunities and career opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to become part of the growing AI industry, and who can integrate Indigenous considerations around AI and data into curricula.
- Academics who gather and use data for their research.
- Practitioners of law, technology and social sciences who can translate ID-Sov and ICIP principles into protocols for AI systems.
- Galleries, libraries, archives and museums who hold large amounts of Indigenous data that are increasingly being scraped into AI models, but who also have been working on implementing Indigenous rights into record management for decades.
- Technology companies, including data centre providers, who are at the forefront of AI developments and can lead with best practice (including that which is listed above) and can build Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities' AI capabilities and capacities through partnerships, traineeships and employment.
- Small business owners, and community and business forums, who are able to drive and inform real world projects on the ground.
- AI Industry conferences, forums and events (such as Datathon) which enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to connect and discuss AI approaches.
- Young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders, who advocate for AI education and digital sovereignty.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. Digital literacy education needs to equip the next generation with skills and AI needs to support their dreams.

We come together to make this future a reality because we believe that AI can be a tool that supports Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to thrive. We see that these priorities specifically align with the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, Priority 4 (Shared Access to Data and Information), but also that these principles for AI can also benefit all Australians because Indigenous rights are human rights. “What’s good for mob is good for everyone” (L. Murray, personal communication, March 21, 2025).

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