

## **EMBARGOED**

**United Kingdom 3:00pm BST Wednesday 11 September 2024**

**Australia 12:00am AEST Thursday 12 September 2024**

## **WARUMUNGU CULTURAL HERITAGE MATERIAL RETURNED BY THE HORNIMAN MUSEUM AND GARDENS**

A collection of artefacts of significant cultural importance to the Warumungu Community of Tennant Creek in Australia's Northern Territory have been returned today at a formal handover ceremony in London by the Horniman Museum and Gardens.

The return of this material was initiated by the Warumungu Community with the support of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS). AIATSIS is Australia's only national cultural institution whose work is solely dedicated to the diverse history, culture, and heritage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians.

The formal request for the Warumungu materials was received on 3 May 2023 and the Horniman responded according to its Restitution and Repatriation Policy. The decision of the Horniman Trustees was endorsed by The Charity Commission, as the regulator of the charitable sector, on 7 February 2024, under s 106 of the Charities Act 2011, noting the Trustees' 'moral obligation'.

The artefacts include a Wurtil (water carrier), Ngurrulumuru (pick), Marttans (knives), Murkutu (sheath), Warnanja (axe), Wartilykirri (hooked 'number seven' boomerangs, including one from the Horniman's Handling Collection), and Jalkkaji (spear thrower).

Today's handover ceremony was attended by Warumungu Elders Cliff Plummer Jabarula and William (Bill) Ah Kit Jakamarra, representatives of AIATSIS and the Horniman Museum and Gardens, and many distinguished guests.

At the request of the Warumungu Community, the items will temporarily be held at AIATSIS in Canberra, Australia, until the Community is ready to receive them on Country. Following their return to Country, they will be permanently housed at the Nyinkka Nyunyu Arts and Cultural Centre in Tennant Creek.

The return of cultural heritage material is a key aspiration of First Nations people. It supports the maintenance and revitalisation of the world's oldest continuous living cultures. It facilitates the intergenerational transfer of knowledge, supports reconciliation, truth-telling, and healing. The Australian Government's, AIATSIS-led, Return of Cultural Heritage (RoCH) program works to identify and facilitate the return of cultural heritage material held in overseas collections. AIATSIS' approach is grounded in building respectful and productive relationships with both the communities whose material is held abroad and the collecting institutions and collectors who house these

materials. Since 2018, AIATSIS has supported the return of more than 2,200 culturally significant items to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, and has also supported collecting institutions to gain long-term, meaningful relationships with communities that they may never have previously been in contact with.

A media toolkit is available at the following [link](#).

### **Quotes attributable:**

#### **Mr Michael Jones Jampijinpa, Senior Warumungu Elder**

“Because it’s been taken away from here, we would like to see all those things come back to the area where they were collected. They are Warumungu and they need to come back to Warumungu country. We are happy that they’re coming back because all that stuff was taken a long time ago before my time. I want to thank them (Horniman Museum) for sending those things back to us. They’ve made a choice to send them back to where they belong. It wasn’t them who collected it, it was their ancestors, so I want to thank them.”

#### **Senator the Hon Malarndirri McCarthy, Minister for Indigenous Australians**

“Returning these artefacts to Warumungu Country is an acknowledgment of the importance of cultural heritage material to truth-telling and healing, ultimately contributing to a deeper understanding of our story as a nation.

First Nations communities have long been fighting for repatriation and the Australian Government remains committed to working with them to facilitate the return of their heritage from overseas collections.”

#### **His Excellency the Hon Stephen Smith, Australian High Commissioner to the United Kingdom**

“The handover of artefacts from the Horniman Museum and Gardens to the Warumungu community is a significant occasion. It marks another step forward in Australia’s national reconciliation process and reflects the strength and maturity of the Australia-UK relationship.

Assisting with the return of cultural heritage from UK collecting institutions to First Nations communities across Australia is a very important aspect of the Australian High Commission’s work in the United Kingdom.

We are pleased to support AIATSIS’ work in this area and will continue to work closely with UK institutions to facilitate future returns.”

#### **Michael Salter-Church, Chair of Trustees at the Horniman Museum and Gardens**

"It is right these objects are being returned to the Warumungu people, to whom they are of the utmost significance. They will support the passing on of Warumungu culture and Lore to future generations. The Trustees of the Horniman Museum and Gardens are very pleased to enable their return and are honoured to welcome community elders to Forest Hill for the ceremony. Throughout the return process, the Horniman has enjoyed a warm and collaborative relationship with all representatives from Australia. We look forward to continuing this into the future as we connect our visitors and community with global cultures and the natural environment, encouraging us to shape a positive future for the world we all share."

**Jody Broun, CEO, National Indigenous Australians Agency**

"The return of these Warumungu cultural materials is not just about bringing objects back to their rightful place; it's about acknowledging the deep, living connection Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have with our heritage. This repatriation is a powerful act of truth-telling and a vital step towards healing and justice for the Warumungu people and all First Nations communities."

**Leonard Hill, CEO, Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS)**

"Today's return of cultural material from the Horniman Museum and Gardens marks an important step towards safeguarding the cultural heritage of the Warumungu Community for future generations.

I am immensely proud of the work we do at AIATSIS, particularly our work to support the return of cultural heritage material to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities which enables the intergenerational transfer of knowledge, truth-telling and healing for Australia's First Nations people.

I commend the Horniman Museum and Gardens for the care they have taken in conserving this significant cultural material and for their collaboration with AIATSIS and the Warumungu Community to enable its safe return to Country."

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