

“We need our own anthropologist!”

An inquiry into the institutional work of the professional anthropologist in Arnhem Land

People Policy Place Seminar

1 August 2025

Sam Williams

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“We need our own anthropologist”



“If ‘old’ anthropology understands its task to be revealing one world to another, the challenge of *yut̥a* anthropology is to bring different worlds into relationship ...

rather than repudiating anthropology for its lingering colonial ties and presumptions, [we are] interested in the possibilities of renewing this discipline.”

Miyarrka Media, 2019, p. 11-12

Some jobs given to me as the group's anthropologist:

1. Registering sacred sites with the Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority (AAPA)
2. Finding archival material from anthropologists at AIATSIS
3. Making videos

Some questions I won't answer...

Who exercises authority in making anthropological knowledge?

Or, the institutions that govern and authorize knowledge making.


How is contemporary anthropological knowledge made?

Or, the institutional procedures by which knowledge work is done.

Where is anthropological knowledge located?

Or, the places that are the institutional grounds of knowing.

1. Registering sacred sites with AAPA

Sacred Site Registration Form		
REQUEST TO HAVE A SACRED SITE REGISTERED BY THE ABORIGINAL AREAS PROTECTION AUTHORITY (Section 27, Northern Territory Aboriginal Sacred Sites Act 1989)		
Sacred Site Name: Amala-Arawitt		
English Translation: "The place where the didgeridoo stopped"		
Alternative names (and language): N/A – Mawng language area.		
General and geographic description of site location: The site is located at a promontory on the northern side of Junction Bay that points out into the bay before the coastline turns to the north-east. The site is located approximately 8km as the crow flies from the mouth of the Goomadeer River and 8km as the crow flies from Hall Point.		
GPS waypoint reference (record boundary): See attached KML file.		
Description of site features: The site comprises a small hill located on the headland above a sand beach as well as adjoining 'didgeridoo shaped' intertidal rock reefs that extend into the sea in roughly a south-easterly direction from the coastline and are surrounded by turbulent waters.		
Is the site under threat? (yes or no provide details) Yes, custodians are concerned about commercial fishers, fishing tour operators and recreational fishers unwittingly entering this dangerous site.		
Site access restriction: (circle one) Men only Women only Open Access <i>No access this site, whether men or women, balanda or bininj.</i>		
Photo access restriction: (circle as relevant) Men only Women only Open Access <i>Audiovisual materials prepared as part of registration should only be accessible to current and future generations of custodians of the traditional owning clan, or distributed to others according to their permission.</i>		
Public Story for the Register: "This is where the didgeridoo stopped and turned into a reef. This is a dangerous place, no one should go near it."		
Anthropologist to record following NTSSA essential info: 1. Full Story in Notebook not for public; 2. Photograph (a) whole site & individual site features (no people in view); (b) site and custodians; 3. GPS Boundary of site and waypoint of each specific site feature; 4. Note all existing infrastructure / assets within site boundary or nearby; discuss detriment issues with landowner & custodians separately and note how to resolve.		

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Note: Upon Re-

(2) Gets ISU to

(3) Lodges site

Office Use On

Map Sequen

Trim Contain

GPS Waypo

location





SACRED SITE

Beyond this point lies a site of
traditional significance
to Aboriginal people

PLEASE RESPECT THIS
SACRED PLACE

THE PENALTY FOR UNLAWFUL
WORKS OR DESECRATION
OF A SACRED SITE MAY
BE UP TO 2000
PENALTY UNITS

For further information contact:
Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority
Telephone: (08-8900...




2. Finding archival material from anthropologists at AIATSIS

CR43943 Sam Williams - Items of interest

Visiting AIATSIS Thursday 21 November 2024

MOVING IMAGE

<p>Call Number: GILLIESPIE.D001 Item ID: 183127-1001 Shelf number: FC00514_1 Title: Canoe Manufacture: bark cutting and mat making Publication Information: 1973 Physical Description: 1 film reel (approximately 8 min., approximately 150 feet) : silent, colour; 8 mm Abstract: Construction of a bark canoe; weaving of a mat from grasses. Personal Subject: Bulun Bulun, Johnny, 1945-2010 Date/Place: Filmed in Maningrida, N.T., 1973-4 Source of acquisition: Gillespie, Dan; deposited for AIAS in 1974</p>	<p>Open access</p> 
<p>Call Number: GILLIESPIE.D002 Item ID: 183220-1001 Shelf number: FC00515_1 Title: Canoe Film Publication Information: 1973-1974 Physical Description: 1 film reel (approximately 16 min., approximately 225 feet) : silent, colour; 8 mm Abstract: The manufacture of a canoe by hollowing from a tree trunk with axes and adzes Place: Maningrida (Central Arnhem Land NT SD53-02) Performer: Mr. 'Big Barney' Geriduwanga Source of acquisition: Gillespie, Dan</p>	<p>No form. Open viewing.</p> <p>(Copy of Technological Processes at Maningrida & Environs No. 2 ... Dugout Canoes available.)</p> 
<p>Call number: MEEHAN JONES.001 Item ID: 354534-1001 Title: An-barra field tapes Publication Information: 1972-1980 Physical Description: 15 film reels (approximately 3 hours, approximately 6,480 feet) : silent, colour; 8 mm film, on approximately 7.5 in. reels Abstract: Anthropological and archaeological field work undertaken by Betty Meehan and Rhys Jones focusing on An-barra food procurement. Date/Place: Filmed in Blyth River region, Arnhem Land, N.T., 1972-1980 General note: Meehan, B. (1982). Shell Bed to Shell Midden, Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, Canberra. 189 pp. (Available at AIATSIS Library B13494.21.631).</p>	<p>Conditions apply</p> <p>[Viewing available to all AIATSIS clients. Copying available to relevant Indigenous persons only - otherwise permission must be sought from Betty Meehan or the An-barra community.]</p>

PICTORIAL

<p>Call number: AIATSIS.036.CS Item ID: 326961-1001 Title: Arbarna people performing the Rom Ceremony in Canberra Publication Information: 1996 Physical Description: 112 slides : colour ; 35 mm. Abstract: Arbarna people performing the Rom Ceremony at Acton House and the National Library of Australia</p>	<p>Open access</p> 
<p>Call number: GILLIESPIE.D01.BW Item ID: 1071-1001 Title: Big Barney making a dugout canoe Physical Description: 1 negative : black and white ; 8 x 12 cm. General Note: see also GILLIESPIE.D01.CS-000937542 Click here to view caption list</p>	<p>Open access</p> 
<p>Call number: GILLIESPIE.D01.CS Item ID: 2216-1001 Title: Making a dugout canoe in Arnhem Land, during 1973-1974 Publication Information: 1973-1974 Physical Description: 46 slides : colour ; 35 mm. General Note: Persons photographed include : David Bandarpi; Barney Geriduwanga</p>	<p>Open access</p> 



Important message This website will soon be redirected to the new Collections Online service. Please read about the upcoming changes here.

These images are a part of the AIATSIS photographic collection. Please email CollectionEnquiry@aiatsis.gov.au if you would like to order a copy of these images or have a question about the images.



GILLESPIE.D03.BW-N09139_32
The sail [of a dugout canoe] in position



GILLESPIE.D03.BW-N09139_29
Gindruwanga [Ginidruwanga], assisted by Munduning Munduning [working on a dugout canoe sail]



GILLESPIE.D03.BW-N09139_28
Gindruwanga [Ginidruwanga], assisted by Munduning Munduning [working on a dugout canoe sail]



GILLESPIE.D03.BW-N09139_27
Gindruwanga [Ginidruwanga], assisted by Munduning Munduning [working on a canoe sail]



GILLESPIE.D03.BW-N09139_25
The artisan [an unidentified man] trimming the span [spar] - for the Institute canoe, [children visible in the background]



GILLESPIE.D03.BW-N09139_24
[Hand woven] sail - for Institute [dugout] canoe

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HIATT.L09.CS-000156088



HIATT.L09.CS-000156085



HIATT.L09.CS-000156020

A group of people in a canoe [in the distance] - leaving Kopanga for Lalagadjirapa

AIATSIS acknowledges the traditional owners of country throughout Australia and their continuing connection to land, culture and community.

We pay our respects to Elders past and present.



20 December 2024

Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies
51 Lawson Crescent, Acton
ACT 2601

Cc: Vince Bicego
Collections Access Officer
Vince.Bicego@aiatsis.gov.au

Dear AIATSIS,

Re: Requesting copies of our family photos and videos, and permission to reproduce this material

We write as Elders representing the An-barra Burarra region. We are Traditional Owners of *An-Gatja Wana* – the Blyth River – and surrounding regions.

From the 1950s onwards, our family welcomed many *balanda* (non-Indigenous people) to live and work on our Country, including Les Hiatt, Margaret Clunies-Ross, Betty Meehan, Rhys Jones and Dan Gillespie.

All of these *balanda* made many photos and videos of us and our family which are now in the AIATSIS archive.

We knew these people when we were children, and they worked with our parents, especially Frank Gurrmanamana and Barney Geridruwanga. Barney Geridruwanga made a dugout canoe in 1973 for the National Ethnographic Collection of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies. Our families were also invited to Canberra to perform a Rom Ceremony in 1995.

Currently, we are working with Sam Williams at Charles Darwin University to create videos about our Country that we can use to help teach our families about important ancestral places and stories.

Sam recently visited the AIATSIS archive in Canberra on 21 November 2024. He brought us a story about all the photos and videos which are at the AIATSIS archive of us and our family taken by *balanda* who were living and working on our Country.

We are writing to request copies of these materials.

We would like copies for our personal use. We would also like to include some of the photo and video materials in the AIATSIS archive in the videos we are making, to show people what life was like on our Country when we were young.

We have attached a record of the materials we are requesting (**Attachment 1**), and the materials we would like to use in our video project.

Thank you in advance,

Betty Ngurabanguaraba

Betty Ngurabanguaraba

Daughter of Frank Gurrmanamana, Kinimba and Gamart Elder

Elva Gindjerakama

Elva Gindjerakama

Daughter of Frank Gurrmanamana, Kinimba and Gamart Elder

Mirrabel Ngalamirra

MIRRABELL-NGALAMIRRA

Daughter of Frank Gurrmanamana, Kinimba and Gamart Elder

Dominic Mason

Dominic Mason

Ana-wurtja Elder

Stuart Yirawara

Stuart Yirawara

Son of Barney Geridruwanga, Ana-wurtja Elder

Oliver Ankin

Oliver ANKIN

Son of Barney Geridruwanga, Ana-wurtja Elder

Jimmy Olsen

Jimmy OLSEN

Son of Malakaliya, Wartacha Elder

RANDALL DARCY
BAYARAGA

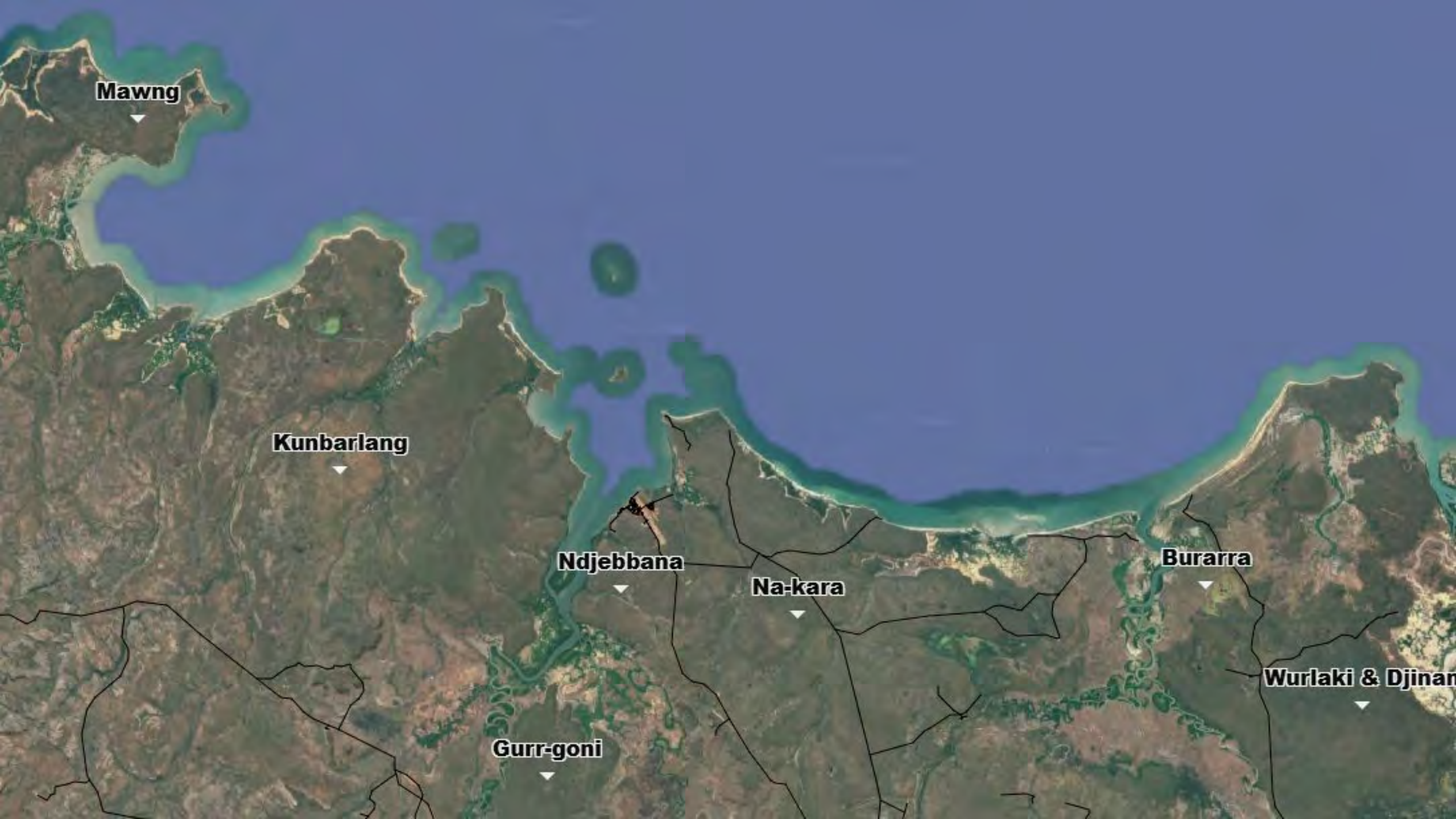
Randall Bayaraga Darcy
Balwarra Elder

MICHAEL D.

Michael Bali Dennis
Gunyjulkunyjul Elder

3. Making videos





Mawng

Kunbarlang

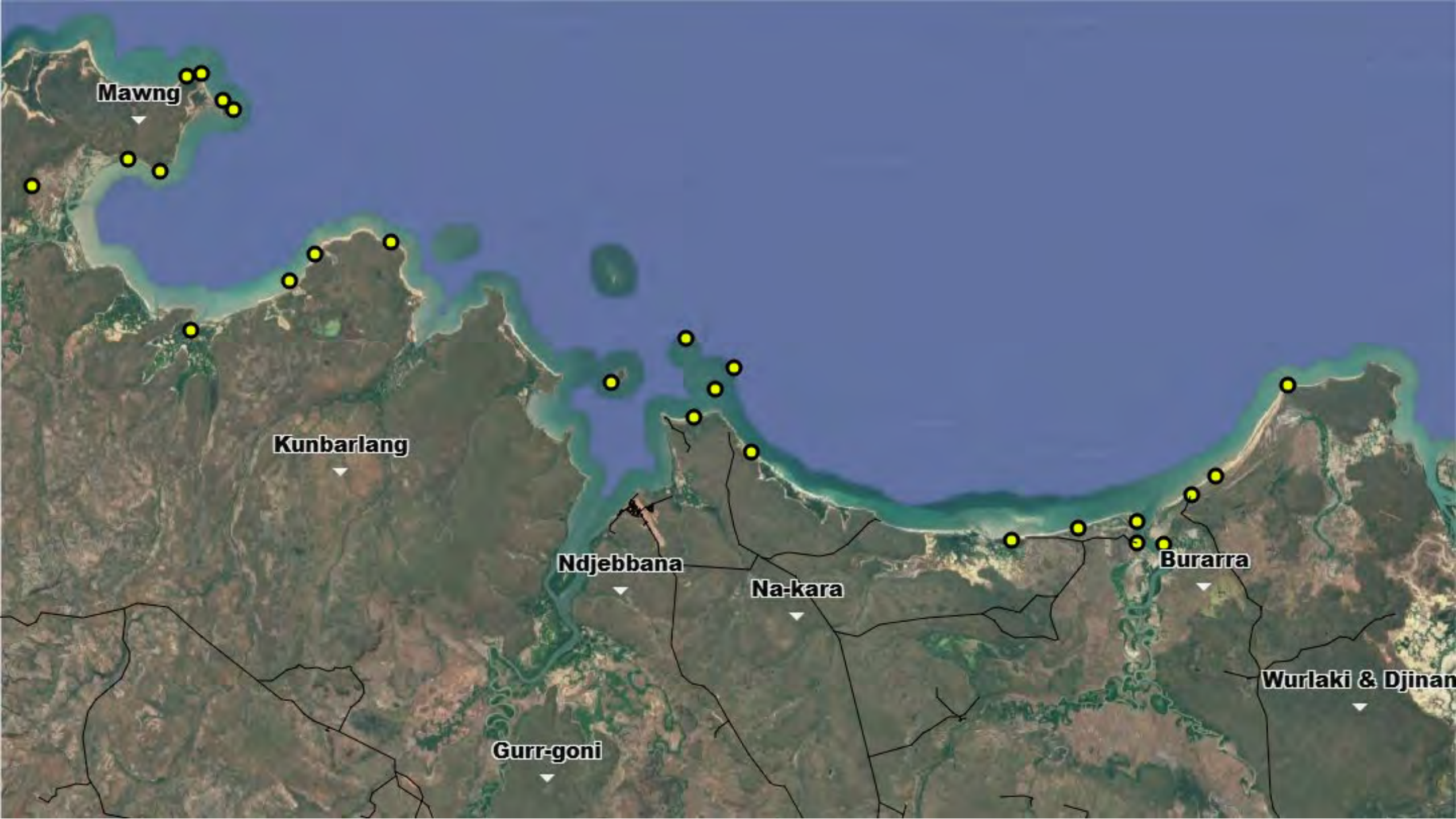
Ndjebbana

Na-kara

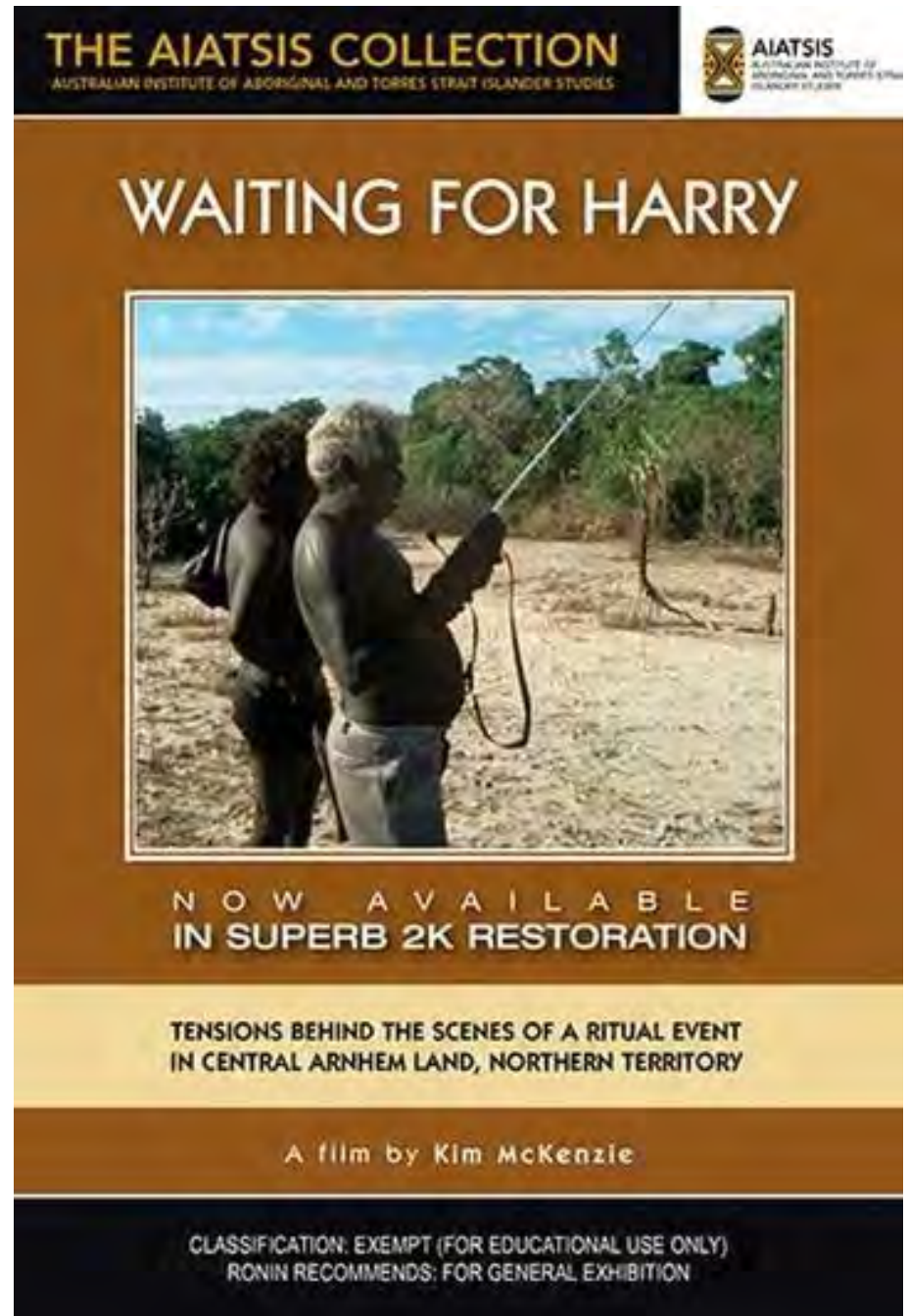
Burarra

Gurr-goni

Wurlaki & Djinan



“The emblems I hold so dear are now on a film. So the film is also dear to me.”



Drawing threads together...



Thank you

Sam Williams

sam.williams@students.cdu.edu.au



NORTHERN
INSTITUTE
People. Policy. Place.

