

**Speaking Notes for Professor Mick Dodson AM
Chairperson, AIATSIS**

**Introduction of SUNNY AND THE DARK HORSE –
Canberra International Film Festival**

**6:00pm Monday 9 November 2015,
National Film and Sound Archive, Canberra**

Firstly I acknowledge the traditional owners whose country we are gathered on this evening. I acknowledge their continuing connection with the land, and pay my respects to their elders, past and present.

It's my pleasure this evening to introduce SUNNY AND THE DARK HORSE, a film by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies – now AIATSIS' – Film Unit.

When David MacDougall arrived as the Director of the AIAS Film Unit, it marked a new era not only for the Institute but also for anthropological filmmaking.

Led by filmmakers like Roger Sandall, Curtis Levy, David and Judith MacDougall, and the late Kim McKenzie, the Film Unit had the creative freedom to work closely with Aboriginal communities to deliver not only world-class ethnographic films, but also many documentaries for general audiences.

The filmmakers practiced a more collaborative approach to their films, and chose to use translations and subtitles to give direct access to the subject's voice and thoughts.

The Film Unit also led the way in terms of debate about cross-cultural ethics in filmmaking, and pioneered the training of Aboriginal filmmakers, notably Wayne Barker and Oomerah (Coral) Edwards.

The early 1980s was a period of change for Aboriginal communities in New South Wales and of particular importance to Aboriginal people working on the land was the Aboriginal Land Fund Commission's operation of buying back land for communities to run enterprises.

Collum Collum station was one of these enterprises.

It was in this era of change and optimism among Aboriginal people that the film *SUNNY AND THE DARK HORSE* was completed. This film changed the way anthropological films are made about Indigenous peoples.

By turning their camera away from remote Aboriginal communities to concentrate on Aboriginal people in the southeast of Australia, the MacDougall's participatory style of filmmaking enabled the storyteller, Sunny Bancroft, an Aboriginal stockman and manager of Collum Station, to express himself through a semi-fictional narrative.

It was a courageous film for the MacDougall's to make at the time and one which helped cement the AIAS Film Unit as a leader in the world of visual anthropology.

Today we acknowledge that Sunny Bancroft was an equal participant in the film making process. His enthusiasm and storytelling ability is engaging and insightful and comes to life through the film.

Tonight's screening is a small recognition of the national and international importance of 30 remarkable films made by the AIAS Film Unit and in particular those of David and Judith MacDougall.

Thank you.