

**'Harim gut, lukautim, na iusim'**

**'Catch sounds, keep them and use them'**

## **The creation of a modern sound archive at Papua New Guinea's national broadcaster**

This paper outlines a PNG aid project, Media Development Initiative (MDI), that the ABC has involved with over the last two years.

Papua New Guinea is a primitive tribal land whose inhabited history goes back 50,000 years. Australia started administering the southern half of the country in 1884 – Germany had control of the north. After World War I Australia was given a mandate to administer the German sector as well. And after World War II the two territories were combined, still under Australian control. The ABC managed the NBC as an ABC outpost until PNG itself was granted independence from Australia in September 1975. The present head of the library, which houses the radio archives and the record library, was actually trained in Australia at the ABC.



The MDI project began in January 2005 and the current phase will end in December 2007. Broadly, the project is aimed at improving the output and overall effectiveness of the NBC as the national radio broadcaster for PNG. The project is based on the premise that public broadcasting is extremely important for populations too poor or geographically dispersed to have access to media services (including print) other than radio, and also that media services are essential for development in a democracy. The aim of the project is to improve the quality of programming and transmission and to extend the reach of the NBC, especially to people with little or no access to media services. AusAID directly approached the ABC about undertaking the project, because of the long history of association between the two broadcasters, and the unique needs of Papua New Guinea.





The main ‘focus areas’ of the project are:

- Organisational Development
- Delivering Quality Programs
- Strengthening the Kundu, or regional radio, Network
- Digitising the NBC Archive – this involves digitisation of the existing audio collection and setting up a database to catalogue archival material



In summary, the project has assisted with:

- Establishing two new programs, *Kunai Strit* (a serial drama) and *Maus Bilong Ples* (*Voices from the Village*) as well as new programs produced specifically to alert people to the dangers of HIV/AIDS transmission
- Beginning the process of digitisation and reviving the NBC archive. This is the part of the project I was working on.
- Building managerial capacity at the NBC, including devising a new corporate plan and a comprehensive set of editorial guidelines
- Undertaking an ambitious but successful coverage of the 2007 national election that gave PNG people unprecedented access to real-time results
- Improved content, presentation and style for a number of programs



Initially my ABC colleague Ben Whitten and I took on the archival task. As a technical specialist, Ben looked after the technical side of digitisation, while my responsibility was to develop a database into a catalogue and then train staff to use it.

Both Ben and I conducted training sessions in archival principles with NBC management, program makers and library staff.



It is not an understatement to say that the library was in a state of disarray. It had been set up 30 years before and little had changed since. Very few resources had been poured into the department, and it was going to take an infusion of aid money to get the library off its knees.



Before I set the digitisation part of the project aside, I'll tell you that a studio was redesigned and equipment purchased.



Two technical staff were allocated to the project and we began the process of digitisation. This project gave the library ‘street cred’ around the corridors of the NBC – program staff had always considered the library a bit of a backwater. Part of our brief was also to raise the profile of the library and present it as integral to the job of making radio programs. One of the bi-products was to raise the image of the committed staff who worked there and heighten their motivation, which had always been a problem. It’s difficult to run an archive if staff members come and go as they please.

The most important part of my little corner of the project was the catalogue. Now there are plenty of good databases around that are suitable for libraries and archives. The trouble is they cost plenty too. Some are so good they need an IT department to maintain and service them. Neither NBC nor the MDI aid project had this sort of money.

# NATIONAL BROADCASTING CORPORATION



Let me tell you a little about the NBC. There are two networks in the country. Karai is based in Port Moresby and serves the greater metropolitan region – it is relayed in part to most of the regional stations. The Kundu service – which comprises 19 regionals –broadcasts local interest programs on shoestring budgets.



At Karai the programs are not dissimilar to that of national broadcasters the world over: news, current affairs, programs for schools, programs about environment and agriculture, women's issues, religious programs and sports broadcasts – Papuans love their sport, particularly Rugby League.

While these programs are similar to the output of the ABC, the BBC, or any of your national broadcasters, it is fair to say that NBC programs are less sophisticated. PNG is a very Christian country so religious programs contain Bible readings, sermons etc – the church is brought into the radio studio. The agriculture programs are instructional – as practical as you can get over a tinny radio with sometimes inadequate reception. The health programs are often instructional manuals on the avoidance of AIDS (which is a big problem in PNG), while current affairs is very pragmatic – it's all about presenting the stories in a straightforward, ungarnished manner. Not much room for archival input there. I found that the practical no-nonsense nature of their programs does not allow for much archival input at the best of times. Oh, and by the way, a lot of the time they broadcast in three languages – English, Pidgin and Motu.

One of the first things I did in PNG was to educate the managers, program makers and library staff about the value of archival management and its potential as a program resource. The value of the library was not fully understood because it was not viewed positively or as an asset. It was, rather, a place to get a tape they can recycle and record a new interview on – and this is how many past programs have been lost. It was also a place to send problematic or excess personnel – hindering the establishment of a dedicated and professional staff. There was lots of program material in the library but how could you find it? There was virtually nothing that could be called a catalogue – except for the music.



The library was a place to come for a chat and look at the chaos that was ‘the collection’. Program makers didn’t know how they could use it. I make it sound primitive – but really it was under-resourced, undiscovered, and in need of a good make-over. The library – and the NBC – operated according to Melanesian time – relaxed, laid back, perhaps a bit antiquated, and with a mood that, ‘Yeah things could be improved’...sometime in the future.



## PAPUA NEW GUINEA

New Guinea is a fascinating country. More languages are spoken there than in any other country in the world – about 800 in all. Most of the population lives in isolated communities, maintaining a lifestyle that hasn’t changed for centuries. There are hardly any significant roads in the country – you can’t travel from the south to the north by road – you must fly. Port Moresby, the capital, is also one of the world’s more dangerous cities.

## CDS/ISIS



The main part of my job was installing a database. Following some confirmatory investigation, it was decided that CDS/ISIS was to be used. CDS/ISIS was developed by UNESCO but there was no developed version that could be plugged straight into an archive. It was a bit like a blank canvas – with frame and stretched canvas – waiting for the creative part of the process to begin. A consultant in Sydney was contracted to do the developmental work.

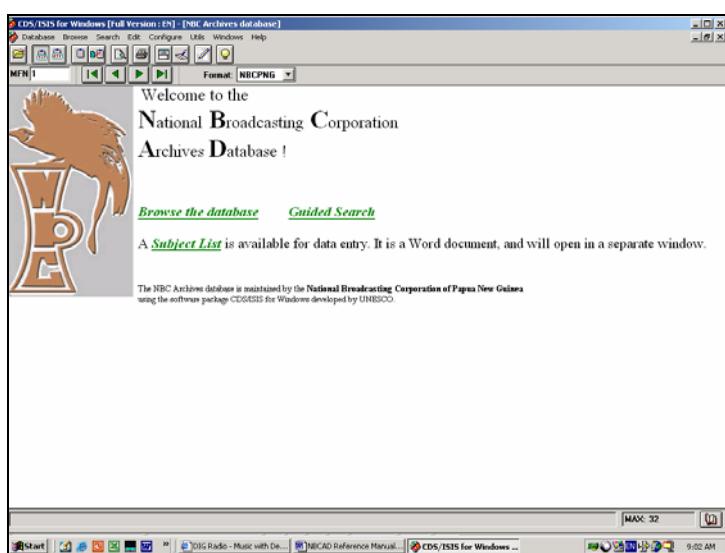
But first I had to ascertain exactly what the NBC needed. This was my own personal journey into the heart of darkness. It is not easy to divest oneself of preconceptions about what a broadcast archive should do, and how it should operate. In my journey down the river I had to learn as much about PNG culture as the way the NBC operated and to shed my own personal baggage in the process.

A case in point was the implementation of a subject thesaurus. After a search for an appropriate existing thesaurus proved fruitless, I decided to use the ABC's and just simplify and adapt it. Out with the Australian-relevant place names and in with the PNG ones. But which other countries do they have relationships with? There are also terms that are unknown in PNG – various concepts are often known by different terms. I had to ask my hosts: 'Do you know the word X?' Which term of two similar or identical terms is the one in common usage? Eg Jail, gaol or prison? Is there any need for a domestic term if the concept doesn't exist? Eg. 'Unemployment Benefits' if there is no such thing. On the other side of the coin were concepts that don't exist in our culture but do in PNG – for example, black magic. But what is the local term for it – voodoo, cursing, pointing the bone, spell casting, sorcery, witchcraft. After much discussion – the latter was chosen. The music thesaurus was another adventure. Music is not as varied as it is in western music but there are very specific music types, particularly under the broad heading of 'string band', the country's most popular music style.

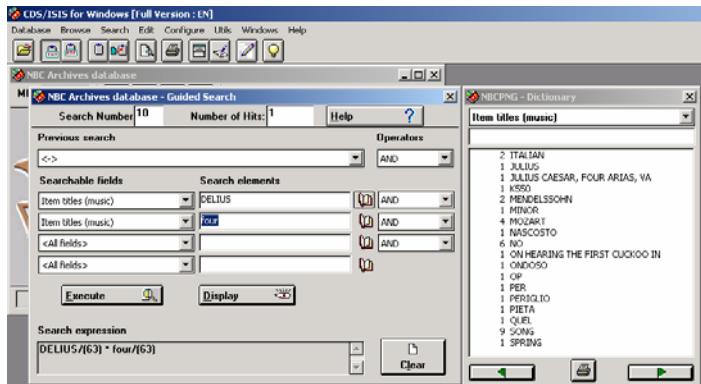
Once I worked out the NBC's needs, the next challenge was to see how CDS/ISIS could accommodate it. Data entry is not simple if you want terms to be indexed. To do so, you need to code each string of letters by inserting a two-character code before the words to be indexed. You need this to be able to find a shelf number, a speaker, a subject etc. Because data entry was never going to be simple, I wanted to be able to use as many pick-lists as possible – to reduce the number of necessary keystrokes. Pick-lists would work with a relatively small number of options but not where there were a lot (such as with the subject thesaurus). So Type of Music, Music Genre, Location, Language and Technical Data could sit within the database. Unfortunately, the thesaurus had to reside in Word form outside the database. We had a hotlink to the Word file, and cataloguers were encouraged to copy and paste the terms into the database. Obviously updating the Word document was easy, likewise editing the master pick-list in CDS-ISIS.

This is the boring part of the presentation so I'll keep it mercifully brief.

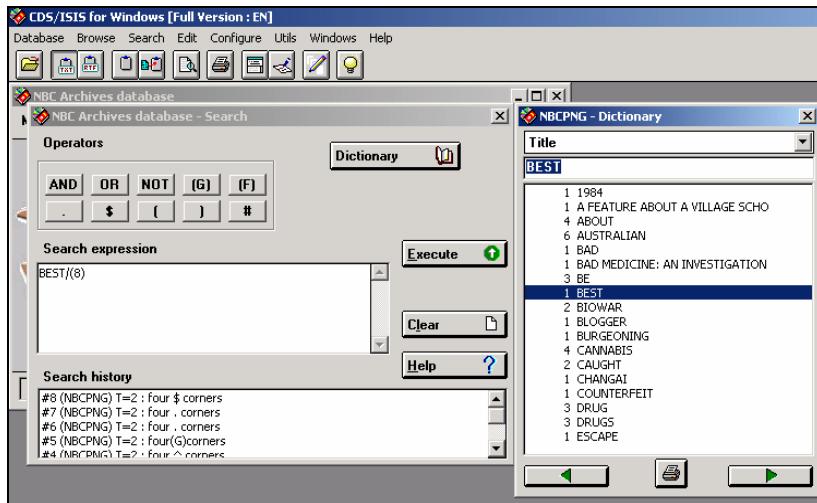
Here's what you first see when you log in.



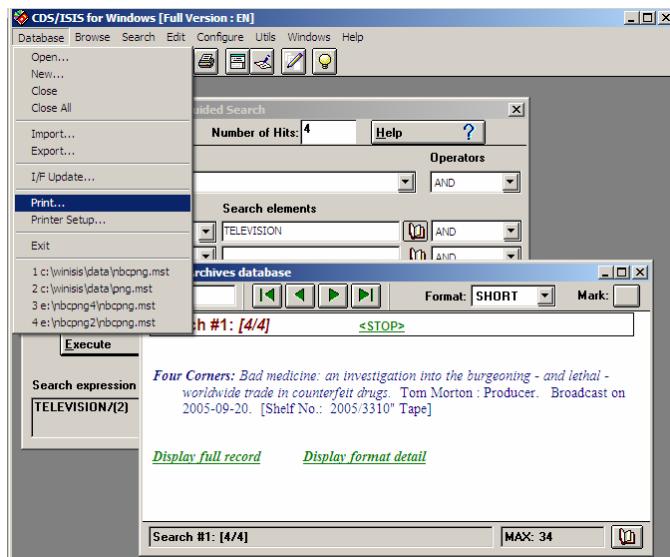
You can choose to browse the database or go straight to the guided search window.



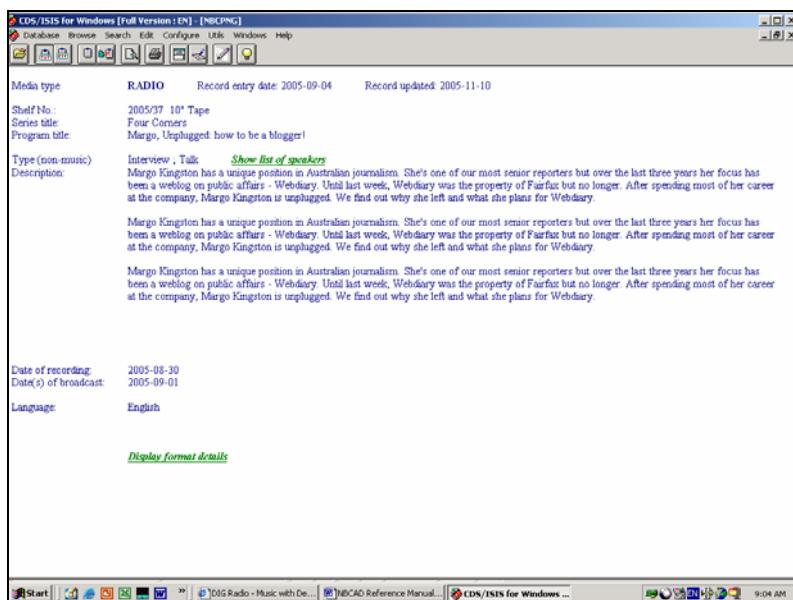
Or you can choose the Expert search option, which is less attractive as it requires a better memory than mine. You need to remember the field number as well as its name.



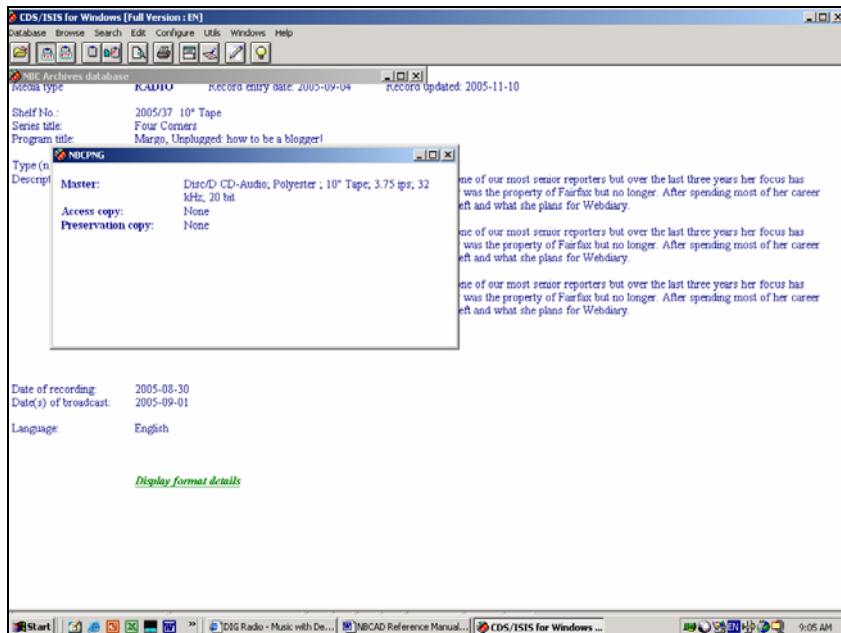
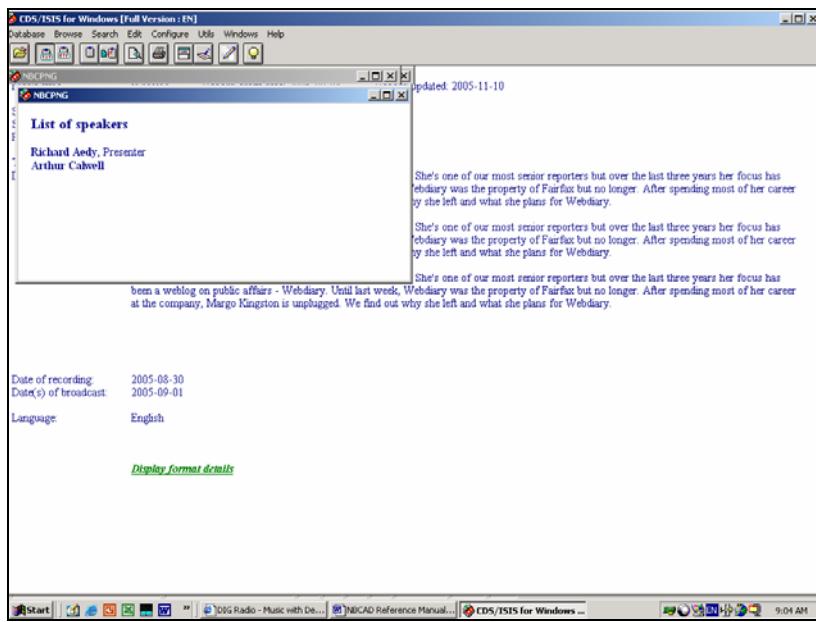
In this example you're looking for the word <Best> in field number 8, the Title field. As you will see, there are buttons that allow you to do Boolean searches. You will also see that the Dictionary lists all terms in the Title field. Your result set will look something like this. The fourth record is displayed in short form. You have the option of choosing the full display or the format details. In this case the researcher is choosing to print the result set.



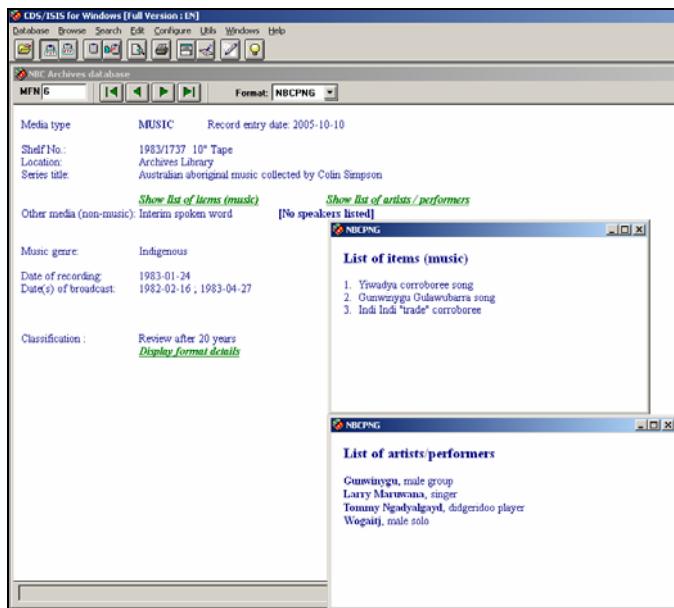
A Full display looks like this.



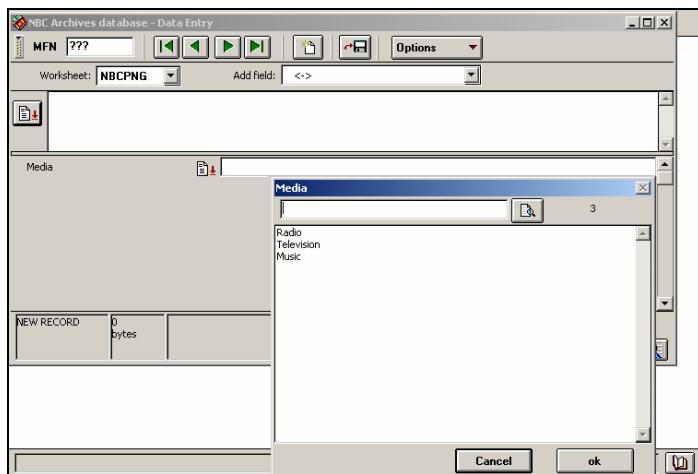
Note the two hyperlinks that will display the list of speakers or the format details.



A Music record looks a little different.



Now all that looks very beautiful and we researchers can glory in our skill of composing the perfect search query and displaying just what we need to see and no more. Clever, aren't we? Well, yes. But the researcher would flounder if not for the skilled cataloguer. This is what greets the cataloguer when he logs in with tape or disc in hand.



Choose radio and you populate the screen with a multitude of empty fields. Choose music and you get a different set of empty fields. Choose TV and you'll be accused of dreaming. (There is no National TV station.)

**NBC Archives database - Data Entry**

MFN 15 | Back | Forward | Options | Worksheet: NBC | Add field: <->

**Radio**

Media	Radio
Record created	2005-11-07
Record updated	
Shelf No.	
Master ver. - Capacity/Size	If the carrier is a CD, then also select a CD size, eg. C60
Location	
Old Shelf No.	
Title (series)	
Title	
<input type="checkbox"/> Item titles (music)	1
<input type="checkbox"/> Description	1
<input type="checkbox"/> Type (non-music)	1
<input type="checkbox"/> Music genre	1
<input type="checkbox"/> Performance type	1
<input type="checkbox"/> Speaker	1
<input type="checkbox"/> Creator	1
<input type="checkbox"/> Contributor	1
<input type="checkbox"/> Artist (music)	1
<input type="checkbox"/> NBC production staff	1
<input type="checkbox"/> Source (non-NBC)	1
<input type="checkbox"/> Language	1
<input type="checkbox"/> Subject	1
<input type="checkbox"/> Subject (person)	1
Coverage (temporal)	
Coverage (spatial)	
Date of recording	
<input type="checkbox"/> Place(s) of recording	1
<input type="checkbox"/> Date(s) of broadcast	1
<input type="checkbox"/> Duration	1
<input type="checkbox"/> Precis	1
<input type="checkbox"/> Cut or track	1

Repeatable field

All available Fields

Pick-list available

Edit Window – displays data in selected field

I mentioned before that you have to code terms so that they are indexed properly. If I wanted to index <John Spence, presenter> so that I could find <John Spence>, <Spence> and <presenter>, I would have to enter it thus:

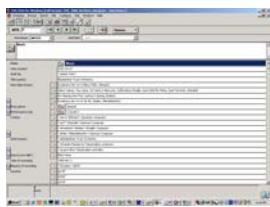
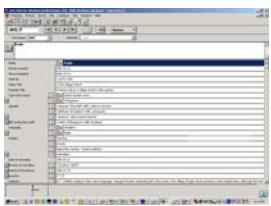
^aJohn^bSpence^cpresenter

Where ^a = first name

**^b = Last name**

$\wedge c = \text{description}$

And this is what your catalogue entry will look like in part. Save it and feel satisfied.



When we consider the theme of this conference – Building an Archive for the Future – a project such as this requires optimism. For as much as the ABC consultants tried to set up the NBC for the future, there is a requirement to take a reality check – the theme of this session. The PNG Government has neither the funds nor the intention to fund the NBC for this ongoing work. Just one look at the way the original ABC-installed broadcast facilities have run down gives you a clue to what may happen once AusAid funding ceases. There's the rub. Is aid to Third World countries a good or a bad thing? This question will be explored further at next year's IASA conference in Sydney.

And let's be realistic. There is a multitude of hurdles to overcome.

- NBC culture needs to be turned around.
- Staff members had rudimentary or no computer skills.
- Library management was timid about implementing change.
- Resource shortages are ever-present.
- Storage facilities are inadequate.
- There is no legislative support from National Archives to help the NBC archive the audio heritage of the nation – they're hard pressed managing and storing their own collections.
- Kundu stations have to petition their regional governments just to be able to maintain their own facilities and stay on air.
- No new tape means new programs are recorded over old.



But there is some promising news from PNG.

- Current management is behind the project.
- Many of the staff are committed to making better programs and preserving programs for the future.
- And what a rich culture they have to preserve.

- Radio is such an important part of communication in the country – the NBC has a captive audience.
- Locally engaged staff are now being used to continue the archival project, a major management task of which is to ensure that the sizeable collections held in provincial stations are also digitised and placed in secure storage.
- An archivist has been appointed, and a part-time Australian resident in PNG is currently overseeing the progress of the project.
- An air-conditioned shipping container has been ordered for overflow storage.

## CONCLUSION



In a country like PNG, where the oral tradition is so strong, it seems appropriate to put some effort into developing a sound archive that will preserve the stories, sounds and language of this diverse land. Yet there is an argument that the concept of a western-style broadcaster – a ‘modern sound archive’ with a disciplined management – runs contrary to the natural state of the nation. Is it yet another example of a western, developed country imposing its version of what is right on a country that does things differently? The history of the world is littered with paternalistic and arrogant acts by powerful nations, acts that will have the ultimate result of homogenising the world, bit-by-bit stripping away what makes them different and, in the case of PNG, unique. The great challenge is to make sure PNG broadcasting retains its own native character.