

Media Release



New Indigenous languages project maps 100 year-old data

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The State Library of NSW has launched an exciting new interactive experiment that uses 100 year-old survey data to map the location and meaning of Indigenous Australian place names across the country.

The project called *Weemala*, which means 'a big lookout' in the Sydney language, places historic survey information from the State Library's collection relating to Australia's Indigenous communities in a digital landscape.

According to NSW State Librarian & Chief Executive Alex Byrne: "This innovative collaboration capitalises on the expertise within our Indigenous Services team with the technical creativity of our DX Lab to create something new and wonderful for researchers and users to experience".

Developer and data enthusiast Chris McDowall, who has been working with the DX Lab as a 'Digital-Drop-In', created the test platform for *Weemala* using transcribed survey forms and correspondence received by the Royal Anthropological Society of Australasia between 1899 and 1903.

Determined to document Aboriginal words, place names and meanings, the Society issued a survey to government officials (including police officers in some instances) in each colony who were then responsible for recording this key cultural information from the local Aboriginal communities.

"The data contained in the surveys is an important source for documenting the meanings of many Aboriginal places names," said Kirsten Thorpe, Indigenous Services Manager at the State Library.

"By showing this rich data in the context of the locations it refers to, we hope to add another layer to people's understanding of these incredible records of our languages," said Ms Thorpe.

In developing *Weemala*, the Library's Indigenous Services team also worked with Emma Pike from Kaldor Public Art Projects and the artist Jonathan Jones to look at the information contained within the surveys and how they could be further used to explore questions around relationships between land and language.

"It was important to explore the structure and nuances within the data so that *Weemala* could be fully developed with this understanding in mind," said Ms Thorpe

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The digital experiment is part of the Library's ongoing Rediscovering Indigenous Languages project which aims to make accessible some of the oldest languages in the world by locating, digitising and providing access to Indigenous word lists, language records and other cultural documents, in consultation with the relevant Indigenous communities.

Experience *Weemala* on the State Library's website here:

<http://dxlab.sl.nsw.gov.au/weemala/>

Kirsten Thorpe and Paula Bray, DX Lab Leader are available for interviews.

For publicity images, interviews and more information, please contact:

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