Screen production lecturer Tom Murray has been making documentaries and training up new storytellers in Australian indigenous communities for almost fifteen years. He’s recently taken this passion to the Pacific, starting a major new program with the Australian Film and Television Radio School (AFTRS) and a group of key partners.

“Having had a lot of experience in training emerging Indigenous Australian film-makers, it seemed like there was a desperate need in the Pacific for training that would assist Indigenous Pacific storytellers to tell their stories to the world,” says Tom.

“When you look at the success of Australian indigenous filmmakers on the world stage – people like Warwick Thornton, Rachel Perkins and Ivan Sen to name just a few - it can only be hoped that the talented storytellers of the Pacific Islands might someday let the world know about what is happening in their countries, in their atolls and backyards.”

From February 4th to 15th, Tom and a colleague from AFTRS ran digital storytelling workshops in Tahiti as part of the ‘Pan-Pacific Media Training Project’ – a collaboration between PACMAS (the Pacific Media Assistance Scheme), CBA (The Commonwealth Broadcasting Association), Macquarie and AFTRS. The project is in its first year and has been very successful.

“Ultimately I hope Macquarie and its staff can be more involved into the future, and there has been some preliminary discussion with the funding bodies to establish scholarships for selected Pacific storytellers to continue their development through post-graduate study at Macquarie,” says Tom.

Tom’s interest in the Pacific was initially sparked by his current research project, which looks at soldiers from the Pacific who fought for the French and British colonies in WWI. Tom says he was struck by how little he really knew about the region.

“The island states of the Pacific are some of our nearest neighbours and yet so little of Pacific culture has penetrated into the mainstream understanding of Australia’s cultural neighbourhood,” he says.

He is keen to encourage Pacific storytellers to explain their perspectives to Australians and to the world through new media. With significant issues in the Pacific emerging as a result of climate change, commercial pressure on fisheries, and shifting strategic and diplomatic alliances with China, Taiwan, the US and Australia-New Zealand, “Pacific storytellers are uniquely placed to explain these things to us,” Tom says.

Tom found the best part was watching the ‘light bulbs’ flash on in some of the participants as they realised ways to tell stories that they had never realised before.

“During the course we presented a $7500 prize to Myron Williams, a young TV broadcaster from Fiji, for a fantastic film concept called the ‘Fishcallers.’ The film is about a village woman who has lived a subsistence fishing life that involves a fishing technique of ‘calling’ the fish, but unfortunately fish stocks are falling for a number of contemporary reasons. The film investigates some very important global issues, and some highly local responses. The award and further mentoring will allow Myron to tell his story - this is very exciting!” Tom says.