

Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs
INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES

Indigenous language policy in Norway sheds considerable light on the possibilities for positive changes in Indigenous language policy in Australia. Australian investigations into Indigenous issues often lack international perspective, from where many useful ideas could be gleaned.

Government policy in Norway has been to formalise language access, and acknowledgement, in education and other areas. This has had considerable positive influence on Indigenous people's identity and culture.

□ The benefits of giving attention and recognition to Indigenous languages

In Norway, Indigenous language has been formally recognised through the Sami Language Act. This has resulted in communities being given bilingual status leading to access to a range of services including access to Indigenous language education.

□ The contribution of Indigenous languages to Closing the Gap and strengthening Indigenous identity and culture

The case in Norway shows that increased recognition of Indigenous languages has led to increased strength of community identity. Access to language training and use of Indigenous language in education has led to cultural revitalisation. This, in turn, has led to revitalisation of communities economically and socially.

□ The potential benefits of including Indigenous languages in early education

In Norway this has led to increased acknowledgment of identity within the Indigenous and non-Indigenous community. It has also led to greater access to education and jobs.

□ Measures to improve education outcomes in those Indigenous communities where English is a second Language

Communities that have Norwegian as a second language have been strengthened by the establishment of educational and research institutions within the communities. This allows the communities to become centres for learning and research, giving Indigenous people a sense of value as well as improved access to education (in both languages). Further, these have become important centres for the development of policy.

□ **The educational and vocational benefits of ensuring English language competency amongst Indigenous communities**

Indigenous people in Norway often speak Norwegian as well as English. This is facilitated by a focus on the importance of language competency in all education. This, added to Indigenous language competency, leads to better education, employment and social prospects.

Klara Hansen
PhD Candidate
School of Archaeology and Anthropology
The Australian National University

Associate Lecturer
Sociology and Anthropology Program
La Trobe University
Bundoora, 3086

