

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

TO THE

RECOMMENDATIONS

OF THE

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES STANDING
COMMITTEE ON ABORIGINAL AND TORRES
STRAIT ISLANDER AFFAIRS INQUIRY INTO

ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER
LANGUAGE MAINTENANCE

REPORT

"A MATTER OF SURVIVAL"
JUNE 1992

DECEMBER 1992

Preamble

An awareness of the importance of language and literacy issues has been increasing over the last decade and Australia's cultural vitality is now enhanced by the many languages spoken in our community. Similarly, the languages of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders are now receiving necessary and long overdue attention.

A key development in this regard was the landmark Australian Language and Literacy Policy (ALLP), which was released in August 1991 by the then Minister for Employment, Education and Training, the Hon. John Dawkins. This policy outlined arrangements for a national collaborative effort to improve our language and literacy achievements in the 1990's. Significantly, the ALLP included provisions to preserve, protect and promote the rights of indigenous Australians to use and develop Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages.

Australian Aboriginal languages are linguistically and philosophically complex. They are a major vehicle for expressing Aboriginality and Aboriginal ways of thinking. They are a symbol of identity for many Aboriginal people, being central to their self-esteem, cultural respect and social identification. The National Report of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (RCIADIC), made abundantly clear the unequal and disadvantaged position of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in our society at all levels. Recommendations recognised that there is a vital need for Government and funding bodies to reflect the importance of Aboriginal languages in the provision of funds to Aboriginal communities and organisations (Rec 55). In addition, recommendations 99 and 100 of the RCIADIC underline the necessity of recognition of language differences in the treatment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the justice system.

This report also stressed the importance of the reconciliation process which the Government initiated in 1990. In the process of reconciliation, nothing will be more significant than the steps taken to ensure that all Australians have a better understanding about Aboriginal peoples, their cultures, their languages, their history and contemporary society.

Under the Australian Language and Literacy Policy (ALLP), the Commonwealth adopted a National Aboriginal Language and Literacy Strategy, to supplement other initiatives under the ALLP and to target the special language and literacy needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. The Government has accordingly made a substantial financial commitment to this area, whereby the total level of funds devoted to Aboriginal languages and literacy initiatives increased from over one million dollars in 1991, to well in excess of eight million dollars in 1993.

This important national strategy contains three complementary elements: the Aboriginal Languages Initiatives Program; the Aboriginal Languages Education Strategy and the Aboriginal Literacy Strategy. These latter two strategies will be implemented by the Department of Employment, Education and Training (DEET), through the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy (AEP) from the beginning of 1993.

Under the National Aboriginal Language and Literacy Strategy, effective responses to Aboriginal languages and literacy needs are now being developed, including:

- . measures aimed at encouraging the use of Australia's Aboriginal languages;
- . measures aimed at ensuring Aboriginal literacy in English is raised to a level commensurate with all other Australians; and
- . effective arrangements to allow Aboriginal people to make decisions about Aboriginal languages and literacy issues.

In accord with this last point, and with the agreement of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC), the Aboriginal Languages Initiatives Program was transferred from DEET to ATSIC on 1 July 1992.

Recommendations and Responses

1. *The Commonwealth fund a language awareness campaign aimed at assisting all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities with living traditional languages to draw attention to the dangers posed to languages even strong languages. It should be integrated into the proposed network of regional language committees and should be primarily directed at self-help. Communities should be assisted in identifying steps they can take to strengthen their language and where training and other assistance may be obtained. Funding should be in addition to that proposed for the regional language committee network.*

1. An Aboriginal languages public awareness campaign is planned to commence later this year. This campaign, to be arranged by ATSIC, will be specifically aimed at promoting the network of regional Aboriginal language committees as a source of assistance to communities wishing to strengthen their languages.

A promotional campaign for the AEP, to be managed by DEET, is also planned to commence later this year. One of the campaign objectives will be to increase the level of participation of Aboriginal people in the AEP process. This campaign, will also promote the role of the Aboriginal Languages Education Strategy, an integral part of the AEP, in strengthening Aboriginal languages at the community level.

Both public awareness campaigns will be resourced from administrative funds not language program funds.

2. *The nature and importance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages should be highlighted in general public education activities conducted by Commonwealth, state and territory authorities concerning Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their culture particularly in areas where traditional language is still used.*

2. A secondary role of the ATSIC public awareness campaign will be to create an awareness of the importance of language maintenance among all Australians.

The DEET managed promotional campaign will also be aimed at raising the awareness of the wider community to AEP achievements. In addition, it will specifically incorporate recognition of the nature and importance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages (and culture) which has been a major focus of the National Reconciliation and Schooling Strategy. This strategy, which recognises the importance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages and culture, includes:

the development of Aboriginal studies curricula and associated materials for all Australian students ;

the development of teacher education courses and teacher pre-service and in-service training to promote greater sensitivity towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders ;

the Sister Schools Scheme designed to promote greater direct contact between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and other Australian students to promote the process of reconciliation; and

the development of local strategies in schools with Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students to promote a greater understanding by all students of the local Aboriginal community and its history.

3. The Commonwealth ensure that trainee BRACS operators are encouraged during training to make greater use of local languages in their programming. The program content should continue to be decided by the community.

3. ATSIC recognises that a uniform coherent approach to BRACS training is needed and this will be addressed through the development of new policy guidelines. Where local programming has been regular, it has often been presented in local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages. ATSIC strongly supports the continuation of community choice in program content.

4. The Commonwealth should review the existing resources available through BRACS so that greater use can be made of this facility. The ongoing training of operators and maintenance arrangements for BRACS should also be reviewed to maximise their effectiveness.

4. An ideal operational BRACS model has been developed by ATSIC to facilitate the more effective use of BRACS facilities. After the implementation and trialling of this model in various locations, it is expected that a review will lead to a more efficient employment of funds and that training programs will be initiated in response to identified needs and priorities.

5. The Commonwealth undertake a campaign to ensure that communities and agencies are aware of the need to employ trained Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language interpreters where appropriate.

5. The Aboriginal languages awareness campaign which ATSIC will be undertaking will include information on the need to employ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language interpreters where appropriate.

6. **Agencies reliant on Commonwealth funding be funded for the employment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language interpreters where appropriate.**

6. The need for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language interpreters, where appropriate, is recognised. Commonwealth programs for Aboriginal advancement enable employment of interpreters by funded organisations where this is required. However, the funding implications of encouraging the widespread use of interpreters, need careful consideration.

7. **Government agencies use interpreters when talking to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities where Standard Australian English is not the vernacular.**

8. **Government agencies use translators where appropriate to ensure information they send to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities is delivered effectively.**

7. & 8. Interpreter and translation services are already available to Commonwealth agencies. The planned Aboriginal language awareness campaign will encourage the widespread use of interpreters when dealing with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities.

9. **Government agencies pay a skill loading to staff, other than interpreters, who have interpreter training and who may be called upon to interpret in their normal work.**

9. The Linguistic Availability Performance Allowance (LAPA), is already available to Commonwealth staff who have second language abilities (including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages) and make use of this knowledge in their normal work.

10. **The Commonwealth establish under ATSIC a separate national interpreter service for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages to ensure that people have reliable access to trained interpreters and translators. The service should be separately funded. Because of the number and geographic distribution of language speakers, a network service utilising existing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language resources where possible, would be most appropriate.**

10. ATSIC will research the viability of establishing a national interpreter service for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages.

It should be noted that some interpreter services exist. The Department of Social Security has established an

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Interpreter Service which has been operating since 1989. The Service provides information to and from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in their own language. The provision of interpreters aids communication and ensures Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients are aware of their obligations and responsibilities in respect of their DSS entitlements. DSS currently employs interpreters on a contractual part-time basis through eight Regional Offices. The Service has been extended to include an additional five Regional Offices following an expansion in this item announced in the Budget. The languages commonly used in each Regional Office are as follows:

Western Australia

Kalgoorlie	Wangkatja
Broome/Derby	Karajarri, Pidgin, Walmajari, Kriol
Kununurra	Miriwung, Jaru, Grajirrawung, Kitja
South Hedland	Nyangumarta, Manyjilyarra, Kariyarra, Ngarla, Nyamal

Northern Territory

Alice Springs	Mutpara, Junityan, Jarriman(Yarriman), Yinning, Gooniyau, Kukatja
	Warumungu, Alyawarre, Eastern & Western Arrente, Kaytej, Anmatyerre, Pintupi/Luritja, Ngaanyatjarra, Arrente, Pitjanjatjara

<u>Katherine</u>	Wardiman, Jowan, Myalli, Gupupunya, Gurindji, Nyman, Kriol.
------------------	---

Other organisations have established local interpreter services. For example, the NT Government, the Institute for Aboriginal Development (IAD) and the Perth Aboriginal Medical Service are all involved in providing interpreter services at a local level.

11. In implementing recommendation 99 of the Report of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, a stronger obligation be imposed on courts to establish a person's fluency in Standard Australian English in determining the need for an interpreter. This would include translating Aboriginal English where required.

11. This recommendation is supported in principle, although the Commonwealth is not in a position to direct courts. The Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department has been provided funding to develop a program for the use of interpreters for Aboriginal people in the courts. The program involves liaison and consultation with Aboriginal groups, State, and Federal Courts and legal bodies including Aboriginal Legal Services.

In addition, the planned Aboriginal languages awareness campaign by ATSIC will strongly encourage the use of interpreters in situations such as this.

It is noteworthy that in responding to the National Report of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, all State and Territory governments indicated their agreement and endorsement of recommendation 99. Several States have already implemented procedures addressing this issue.

The Minister for Higher Education and Employment Services in co-operation with the relevant state and territory ministers ensure that:

12. All teachers are adequately prepared by pre-service training to appreciate the special needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. This should include a general background in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, the history of ATSI people and their place in modern Australian society. This preparation should ensure that future teachers are trained to function sensitively and knowledgeably in cross-cultural situations and are aware of the socio linguistic difference of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students including those speaking Aboriginal English.

12. This recommendation is consistent with AEP principles and tertiary institutions may therefore apply AEP funds to these developments.

One of the main elements of the National Reconciliation and Schooling Strategy is the development of consistent and appropriate formal teacher education courses and teacher pre-service and in-service training. Two major strategies to improve teacher sensitivity and awareness of Aboriginal issues have been developed. These are:

- . a consistent approach to the coverage of Aboriginal issues in formal teacher training courses in Australia's higher education institutions with particular emphasis on appropriate coverage in teaching methods elements of such courses; and
- . a consistent approach to all teacher induction/pre-service and in-service training programs that are run by State/Territory education departments and other school systems (i.e. Catholic education systems).

Funds have already been made available from Projects of National Significance (PNS) for the Queensland Department of Education to manage and co-ordinate a national project on improving teacher pre-service and in-service training. This project is geared towards the development of an appropriate approach and modularised materials to sensitise teachers about Aboriginal issues for use in teacher pre-service and in-service courses in all States and Territories.

Higher education institutions delivering teacher education programs are also expected to address these issues in their Aboriginal Education Strategies, which form part of their institutional profile documentation.

13. More specialised training is provided to teachers before they are posted to more traditional communities. This should be followed up with in-service training to provide further specialist skills development while working in communities and other remote schools.

14. Teachers in remote community schools where the vernacular is other than English should have prior training in teaching English as a second language. Where teachers with specialist training in English as a second language are not available, departments should develop and implement appropriate in-service training. In-service training is needed for teaching assistants as well.

13. & 14. While these matters are primarily the responsibility of State/Territory governments, the Commonwealth is seeking to progress developments through the funding of projects under the National Reconciliation and Schooling Strategy outlined in the response to Recommendation 12. The Commonwealth has also drawn to the attention of schooling systems its priority of support for Aboriginal languages education activities during negotiations for the 1993-95 AEP triennium funding process.

15. The Minister for Higher Education and Employment Services in cooperation with the relevant state and territory ministers and tertiary institutions ensure that tertiary institutions provide more suitable programs for students from remote or traditional communities either through support for students while residing in urban areas or the provision of external studies.

15. This recommendation is supported in principle. However, a Review of Alternative Modes of Delivery in Higher Education scheduled to report by the end of 1992. The Review Committee has been appointed to report on ways to improve access to higher education programs and course materials which encompasses those difficulties encountered by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. The Committee has commissioned a number of studies which will provide information it needs in developing its recommendations. The studies will be undertaken by teams of consultants from various institutions and organisations and will include:

an evaluation of the use and potential of video-conferencing facilities within the higher education sector;

- . effectiveness and potential of state-of-the-art technologies in the delivery of higher education;
- . overseas experience in non-traditional modes of delivery in higher education;
- . use of technology to deliver higher education in the workplace.

Relevant recommendations from "a Matter of Survival", specifically recommendation 15, will be drawn to the attention of the Review Committee by DEET.

16. The Minister for Higher Education and Employment Services ensure that adequate resources are made available to training institutions providing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander remote area teacher education to meet the growing demand for such training and to ensure the maintenance of accreditation standards.

16. Commonwealth funding for higher education institutions takes the form of block operating grants. Each institution's operating grant provides for a specified level of student load according to their agreed profile. Institutions retain the flexibility to decide the level of funding allocated to individual courses. However, the Commonwealth does recognise that there are generally higher costs involved in providing support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Additional funds for this purpose are provided as part of operating grants and if an institution is servicing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students from remote areas (as does Batchelor College through its Remote Area Tertiary Education), this is taken into account when support cost funding is allocated.

The Minister for Higher Education and Employment Services in co-operation with the relevant state and territory ministers and teacher training institutions ensure that:

17. The availability of language teacher and linguistics training to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people be substantially increased.

18. Additional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander training bodies, particularly those with experience in providing remote area teacher training programs, be encouraged to offer on-site language teacher and linguistic training

19. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language training institutions should also provide interpreter training.

20. Language teacher, linguistics and interpreter training should be undertaken in co-ordination with prospective employers to ensure graduates will be employed.

17.-20. These recommendations accord with AEP goals which address the achievement of equitable and appropriate educational outcomes, including the maintenance and continued use of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages. Where appropriate, they will be drawn to the attention of relevant institutions by DEET.

Under the National Aboriginal Language and Literacy Strategy, additional funding will be available to achieve an increased provision of language teacher and linguistics training for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students at the TAFE level. This issue has been taken up in the AEP negotiations for the next triennium.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language training institutions and training bodies should be the focus in establishing interpreter training, e.g Pundulmurra WA, Batchelor College NT, and the Institute for Aboriginal Development NT. These institutions will be encouraged to expand into the area of interpreter training to increase training opportunities. There is a need for only a limited number of additional language institutions to be involved in this area.

Commonwealth support is already being provided under the AEP for linguistic training at Batchelor and Pundulmurra Colleges. To date, course development in this area has been undertaken in close co-ordination with prospective employers. Every encouragement will be given for this practice to be maintained. Linguistics training institutions such as these, will also be encouraged to run awareness programs for employers on the benefits of employing trained interpreters.

21. The Minister for Immigration, Local Government and Ethnic Affairs ensure that NAATI accreditation procedures for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language interpreters and translators are reviewed to better recognise demonstrated experience and not necessarily requires tertiary qualifications as a pre-requisite.

21. The National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters (NAATI), is a statutory authority incorporated under the Companies Act, whose shareholders are the States and the Commonwealth. The Department of Immigration, Local Government and Ethnic Affairs (DILGEA), currently represents the Commonwealth's interest on NAATI. DILGEA will draw this recommendation to NAATI's attention.

22. The Commonwealth formally endorse the structure for the delivery of the Aboriginal Languages Initiatives Program endorsed by the December 1991 Adelaide conference of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language organisations.

23. The Regional Aboriginal Language Management Committees and Centres be recognised as key reference points on indigenous language matters by schools, by institutions providing language worker and translator training and by Commonwealth, state and territory governments.

22. & 23. The Commonwealth has formally endorsed and provided funding to implement the recommended structure for the delivery of the Aboriginal Languages Initiatives Program. Regional Aboriginal Language Management Committees and Centres have been formally recognised by the Commonwealth as key reference points on indigenous language matters and funded. Under the AEP promotional campaign, schools and other educational institutions will be encouraged to use these committees and centres for assistance and guidance in indigenous language matters.

ATSIC also undertakes to inform all relevant agencies of the roles of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Languages Federation, Regional Aboriginal Language Centres and the Regional Aboriginal Language Management Committees.

24. The Minister for Employment Education and Training ensure that an external review of the Aboriginal Languages Initiatives Program is conducted at the end of 1994 which should include the adequacy of funding.

24. Agreed in principle. However, as ATSIC has only recently taken over the administration of this program, it has yet to consider what type of review should be undertaken and when it should be.

25. The Commonwealth ensure that funds allocated under the Aboriginal Languages Education Strategy and the Aboriginal Literacy Strategy are used appropriately by the state and territory governments and not used to replace mainstream program funds.

25. The basic philosophy of Commonwealth assistance under the AEP is that funding through the Aboriginal Education Strategic Initiatives Program is supplementary. As documented in the AEP Joint Policy Statement, the States and Territories have agreed that their finances will not be reduced as a result of receiving additional funding from the Commonwealth.

It is intended to establish with States and Territories, agreed data bases for the second AEP triennium (1993-95). These data bases will take stock of overall net resources

being deployed under the AEP, from the Commonwealth, States and Territories. This will allow preparation of a report on AEP funding arrangements which will be completed during 1993.

The Minister for Employment Education and Training in cooperation with the relevant state and territory ministers ensure that:

26. English as a Second Language funding is distributed equitably to all children of non-English speaking background including those in remote community schools.

26. Commonwealth funding of English as a Second Language strategies is distributed by means of a needs based formula. In conjunction with State education authorities, this formula is currently being revised. The important issue of Aboriginality is being taken into account for the purposes of establishing equity in distribution. This will also address the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in remote community schools.

27. Bilingual or bicultural education be provided to all Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander children whose first language is other than English if sought by the relevant community and if there is a sufficient number of speakers to support a program.

28. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language communities serviced by a school determine which model of language teaching is appropriate for their school.

27. & 28. These areas are essentially matters of State and/or education provider responsibility. However, they do reflect principles of the AEP and providers may seek funds to develop activities.

Recommendation 27 is supported in principle, but implementation could be very resource intensive, especially for communities which are highly multilingual.

Some additional Commonwealth funding will also be available for bilingual education under the National Aboriginal Language and Literacy Strategy.

29. Ensure that bilingual education is clearly based on the maintenance model rather than the transfer-to-English model.

This is once again, primarily a State/education provider issue. It is recognised that the preferred approach is the maintenance model of bilingual education, subject to consultation with individual Aboriginal communities. Accordingly, the Commonwealth undertakes to draw this recommendation to the attention of the State authorities.

30. The Minister for Employment Education and Training encourage state and territory governments together with unions and ATSI representatives to develop an appropriate pay scale for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language speakers employed as such, to reflect the special skills they possess.

30. Prior to providing supplementary funding under the AEP, the Commonwealth enters an agreement with each education provider. This agreement, to which providers are co-signatories with the Commonwealth, requires that all workers employed under Commonwealth funding, be paid in accordance with an appropriate award. DEET will raise the case of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Language Workers during second triennium AEP negotiations.

At present there is no established award for Aboriginal Language Workers. ATSIC recognises that this is an important issue in need of resolution and will investigate options for ensuring the development of an appropriate award which recognises that appropriate pay scales should reflect the work being done not just the skills possessed by the workers.

31. The Minister for Employment Education and Training in consultation with the states and territories commission the preparation of curriculum material for the teaching of English as a second dialect. This should be funded separately from the Aboriginal Literacy Strategy.

31. The need for this type of curriculum is recognised. DEET will examine options for funding such materials, in conjunction with State/Territory authorities.

32. The Commonwealth fund an institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages within a university. The institute should have a predominantly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander board of management.

32. This recommendation is supported in principle. It should be noted that several higher education institutions have established centres for Aboriginal studies which include cultural maintenance activities. There are also two relevant Commonwealth funded Key Centres of Teaching and Research: the Aboriginal Studies and Teacher Education Centre located at the University of South Australia and the National Language and Literacy Institute of Australia (NLLIA), in Melbourne. This recommendation will be drawn to the attention of higher education institutions and the NLLIA.

Attention is also drawn to the extensive work and commitment of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS), in relation to

the recording and support of language maintenance efforts.

33. In the ongoing monitoring of state and territory strategic plans under AEP, the Commonwealth, in consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education organisations ensure the effective implementation of Goals 1 and 17,

33 In its role of coordinating the implementation of the AEP, DEET is concerned to ensure the effective implementation of all AEP goals. Each of the States and Territories currently formulate triennial Strategic Plans for Aboriginal education encompassing all education sectors. Participants in the planning process include: State or Territory departments and agencies responsible for pre-schooling, schooling and technical and further education; non-government education authorities and institutions; State or Territory post-secondary co-ordinating bodies; higher education institutions; and Aboriginal community representatives. These plans are reviewed annually by the States and Territories, in consultation with the Commonwealth.

The first goal of the AEP is to establish effective arrangements for the participation of Aboriginal parents and community members in decisions regarding the planning, delivery and evaluation of pre-school, primary and secondary education services for their children. The establishment and development of local Aboriginal Education Consultative Group networks is an important initiative in response to this goal, as is the promotion and development of Aboriginal Student Support and Parent Awareness committees.

Goal 17 of the AEP is to develop programs to support the maintenance and continued use of Aboriginal Languages. As evidence of Commonwealth support for this goal, additional funding is being provided for Aboriginal language education under the AEP in the second triennium.