



Submission No.127

THE HON SIMON CREAN MP

**Minister for Regional Australia, Regional Development and Local Government
Minister for the Arts**

Mr Shayne Neumann
Chair
Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs
Parliament House
PO Box 6021
Parliament House,
Canberra ACT 2600

04 OCT 2011

Dear Mr Neumann,

I am writing to you in regards to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs *Inquiry into language learning in Indigenous communities*.

The Australian Government is committed to promoting and supporting Indigenous languages. The Office for the Arts is the lead agency responsible for implementing the Australian Government's *National Indigenous Languages Policy* which was jointly announced by Minister Macklin and Minister Garrett in 2009. This Policy aims to: bring national attention to Indigenous languages; reinforce the use of critically endangered Indigenous languages; work with languages to Close the Gap; restore the use of rarely spoken or unspoken Indigenous languages; strengthen pride in identity and culture, and support and maintain the teaching and learning of Indigenous languages in schools.

The Office for the Arts is also responsible for administering a number of Indigenous funding programs, including the Maintenance of Indigenous Languages and Records (MILR) program which is central to the implementation of the *National Indigenous Languages Policy*. The program assists the maintenance and revival of Indigenous languages and aims to address the erosion and loss of these languages by providing funding to support community based projects by language groups, language research and coordination of language resources.

Please find attached the Office for the Arts' submission to the *Inquiry into language learning in Indigenous communities*. I will be actively monitoring the progress of the Inquiry with the hope of contributing further to these important issues in the future.

Yours sincerely,



SIMON CREAN

The Office for the Arts, Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs *Inquiry into language learning in Indigenous communities.*

Introduction: *the significance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages in Australia*

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, the ability to speak or use words and phrases of Indigenous languages is a critical factor in cultural identity and individual and community wellbeing. The pleasure of hearing the Indigenous cadence when listening to speakers of an Indigenous language engenders pride in our oldest living culture on earth and is a powerful source of inspiration and enrichment for all Australians.

Languages signify more than a means of communication; they have important ties and connections to knowledge, history, culture, identity, country and a people's world view. Further, being able to converse in one's own language helps produce a strong sense of self and a sense of cultural continuity, which have been linked to reduced rates of suicide amongst Indigenous youth in groundbreaking research in Canada¹.

Participation in and connections to Indigenous languages, culture and the arts are vital to the wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and promote better health, education and employment outcomes. Support for Indigenous languages and culture makes an important contribution to *Closing the Gap* and also contributes to broad government policy objectives, such as social inclusion. Languages are both an expression of culture and the vehicle through which culture is kept alive.

Context Setting: *the Australian Government's commitment to Indigenous Languages*

On 11 August the Minister for the Arts, the Hon Simon Crean, MP, released the National Cultural Policy Discussion Paper to encourage all Australians to provide their views on what the National Cultural Policy should include. The Discussion paper notes that Australia's Indigenous traditions of creative expressions stretch back millennia before European settlement. The opportunity to contribute to the shape of the National Cultural Policy highlighting the role Indigenous art, culture and language play in Australia's society demonstrates the Australian Government's commitment to addressing the challenges of language loss in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, recognising that these are unique and significant features of our broader cultural environment.

Support for Indigenous languages has wider benefits for Australia. It strengthens Indigenous culture and its role as an intrinsic and unique component of Australia's cultural landscape. Just as Indigenous culture is a major part of Australian culture generally and contributes to the way Australians see themselves and the way the world sees Australia, Indigenous languages are an irreplaceable part of Australia's living cultural heritage. The languages that underpin Indigenous culture and are linked to traditional knowledge make an important contribution to other aspects of Australian society, such as ecological research and related economic ventures based on bush medicines, land remediation and cultural tourism; and through contributing to an innovative and diverse culture and society.

The Office for the Arts is the lead agency responsible for the implementation of the National Indigenous Languages Policy (NILP), jointly announced by Minister Macklin and Minister Garrett in 2009. The NILP supports the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and draws on reports and consultation over many decades, including the 2005 National Indigenous Languages Survey Report. The NILP is a broad whole-of-government strategy to coordinate a national approach for ongoing strategic support for Indigenous languages. The Maintenance of

¹Hallett, D., Chandler, M.J. and Lalonde, C. (2007), "Aboriginal language knowledge and youth suicide", *Cognitive Development*, 22(3), 392–399.

Indigenous Languages and Records (MILR) program, administered by the Office for the Arts, underpins this Policy. The MILR program assists the maintenance, transmission and revival of Indigenous languages. It aims to address the erosion and loss of Australia's estimated 250 Indigenous languages by providing funding to support community based projects by language groups, language research and coordination of language resources.

Please find below the Office for the Arts response to the Terms of Reference, noting we have only responded to those specifically relevant to the work the Office for the Arts undertakes.

Terms of Reference 1:

The benefits of giving attention and recognition to Indigenous languages

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities are vocal in asserting the many benefits of supporting and recognising their languages. Whilst the empirical evidence base lags behind community voices, experiences and anecdotal reports, there is a growing body of research showing associations between Indigenous language use and other socio-economic outcomes. Although there have been no Australian studies completed to date that could demonstrate causal links between Indigenous language use and other outcomes, and whilst the findings of cross-sectional studies should be interpreted with care, the research outlined below and under ToR 2 supports the hypothesis and community view that future generations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples could substantially benefit from efforts and policies enacted now to maintain Indigenous languages. Through the MILR program, the Office for the Arts is actively working to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples receive support to maintain and revitalise Indigenous languages.

Analyses of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey (NATSISS) data show positive associations between language use, wellbeing and socio-economic variables. Whilst analyses such as these do not support arguments about causation, after controlling for many other factors in the model, some of the positive associations found are:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who speak Indigenous languages have markedly better physical and mental health; are more likely to be employed; and are less likely to abuse alcohol or be charged by the police;²
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander 13-17 year olds in urban and regional areas are substantially more likely to attend school if they speak an Indigenous language;³
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who speak, understand or learn an Indigenous language are more likely to gain a post-school qualification;⁴ and
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in remote areas who speak an Indigenous language are less likely to engage in high risk alcohol consumption and illicit substance use, and to have been a victim of physical or threatened violence.⁵

Given the centrality of language to strong Indigenous culture and the broader social benefits of functional and resilient families and communities, targeting support for Indigenous languages more effectively, as part of a wider national focus on Indigenous culture generally, will contribute to the overall wellbeing of communities. Through the NILP and the MILR program, the Australian Government contributes to the emotional and cultural wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The following case study highlights the important benefits of giving attention and recognition to Indigenous languages for community wellbeing and strong culture in Australia, and the success of a MILR funded project in achieving these benefits.

² Dockery, A.M., 2011, *Traditional Culture and the Wellbeing of Indigenous Australians: An analysis of the 2008 NATSISS in Social Science Perspectives on the 2008 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey*, 11-12 April 2011, Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, Australian National University, Canberra.

³ Hunter, B., 2007, *Cumulative causation and the Productivity Commission's framework for overcoming Indigenous disadvantage*, Australian Journal of Labour Economics, 10(3): p. 185-202.

⁴ Biddle, N., 2011, *Measuring and analysing Indigenous wellbeing*, Measures of Indigenous Wellbeing and Their Determinants Across the Lifecourse, 2011 CAEPR Lecture Series, CAEPR, ANU, Canberra.

⁵ Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011, *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander wellbeing: A focus on children and youth*, Canberra.

Case study: Ernabella Children's Choir uniting generations

The Ernabella Children's Choir, based in the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) Lands, SA has produced and recorded a CD in the traditional Pitjantjatjara language.

This community has a strong tradition of singing, with the original Ernabella Choir performing in Pitjantjatjara since the 1940s when Anangu and missionaries joined together to form the first choir. In 2006, the children's choir at Ernabella Anangu School was formed. The children singing in this choir are descendants of the original singers and perform at community events and celebrations.

Image source: Ernabella Anangu School
Artwork: Bradley Dunn



The choir helps re-engage school children who have had poor attendance at school. Elders work with the children, teaching Pitjantjatjara songs, traditions and culture. The project highlights the benefits of inter-generational transmission of language and traditional knowledge, as the choir has formed strong bonds between the children and the Elders. Participation in the choir has improved school retention rates, built confidence and prompted greater encouragement from family members. It is also helping keep Pitjantjatjara culture strong. This, in turn, helps build safe and strong communities.

There were 48 students who sang as part of the choir, 23 students involved in the development of the CD cover and 27 community members who sang with or supported the recording of the songs. Since recording the CD, the choir has won the Central Australia Eisteddfod Competition in Alice Springs, where it competed against much larger, independent schools.

The MILR program funded the Ernabella Children's Choir \$4000 in 2009-10 to produce and record this CD.

Terms of Reference 2.

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

The *Bringing them home* (1997) and *Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody* (1991) reports recognised that the ability to speak or use words and phrases of Indigenous languages was a critical factor in cultural identity and individual and cultural wellbeing; and the role of culture, including languages, in helping to heal damaged communities and support their members.

Strong cultural identity is intrinsically linked to having a connection with language which contributes to building healthy, safe and supportive communities. Having these outcomes, which the MILR program contributes to, is important to the Australian Government's *Closing the Gap* agenda. Support for Indigenous languages contributes to *Closing the Gap* targets by producing outcomes across six of the 'building blocks' endorsed by the Council of Australian Governments: early childhood, schooling, health, economic participation, safe communities, and governance and leadership.

Whilst the empirical evidence base relies heavily on qualitative research, international research which may not always be readily extrapolated to Australia, and cross-sectional studies which should be interpreted with care, the following is a summary of the growing body of literature linking Indigenous languages and culture to these 'building blocks'

Early childhood

- Traditional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures contain natural protective and wellbeing factors such as kinship networks; and language, culture and cultural identity have been found to be key protective factors that predict resilience in children.⁶
- According to the Australian Indigenous Psychologists Association, connection to land, family, culture and spirituality can protect against serious psychological distress.⁷
- Identifying, participating in and engaging with culture are essential to the development of strong and resilient Aboriginal children and young people.⁸

⁶ Resilience Research Centre, 2010, *The International Resilience Project*, available from: <http://www.resilienceproject.org/>.

⁷ Kelly, K., et al., 2009, *Living on the Edge: Social and Emotional Wellbeing and Risk and Protective Factors for Serious Psychological Distress among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People*, Discussion Paper No. 10, Cooperative Research Centre for Aboriginal Health, Darwin.

Schooling

- Research in Canada has shown that early childhood Aboriginal language and cultural programs lead to increased self-esteem, improved academic performance, improved school attendance, reduced drop-out rates and better proficiency in reading skills in both the Indigenous language and English.⁹
- Conversely, loss of language in Australia has been measured to have specific negative impacts on directly affected generations and high levels of acculturative stress have been found in children living in regional centres where language loss is occurring.¹⁰
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples with strong cultural identity and high participation in cultural activities are more likely to complete secondary school than those with moderate or weak identification and participation.¹¹
- Those that participate in cultural events, ceremonies or organisations; and speak, understand or learn an Indigenous language are also more likely to gain a post-school qualification.¹²

Health

- 'Aboriginal health' means not just the physical wellbeing of an individual but refers to the social, emotional and cultural wellbeing of the whole community.¹³
- A goal of the *National Strategic Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health* is to ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples enjoy a healthy life enriched by a strong living culture. A principle of the framework is recognition that improvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health status must include attention to spiritual, cultural, emotional and social wellbeing, as well as physical.¹⁴
- The *National Mental Health Policy 2008* also acknowledges that cultural identity is fundamental to the wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.¹⁵
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples with strong attachment to culture have significantly better self-assessed health.¹⁶
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders who speak Indigenous languages and participate in cultural activities have markedly better physical and mental health.¹⁷
- A ten year study in Central Australia found that connectedness to culture, family and land are contributors to significantly lower morbidity and mortality in outstation communities.¹⁸
- The study found that residents of communities where traditional languages and cultural practices are valued and maintained are less likely to be obese, less likely to have diabetes and less prone to cardiovascular disease than Aboriginal people across the rest of the Northern Territory.¹⁹

Economic Participation

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples with strong cultural attachment are significantly more likely to be in employment than those with moderate or minimal cultural attachment.²⁰
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who participate in cultural activities and who speak Indigenous languages are significantly and substantially more likely to be employed than those who do not.²¹

⁸ Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2010, *The State of Victoria's Children 2009: Aboriginal Children and Young People in Victoria*, State Government of Victoria, Melbourne.

⁹ Bell, D., 2004, *Sharing Our Success: Ten Case Studies in Aboriginal Schooling*, Society for the Advancement of Excellence in Education, National Library of Canada Cataloguing in Publication.

¹⁰ De Maio, J., et al., 2005, *The Western Australian Aboriginal Child Health Survey: Measuring the Social and Emotional Wellbeing of Aboriginal Children and Intergenerational Effects of Forced Separation*, Curtin University of Technology and Telethon Institute for Child Health Research, Perth.

¹¹ Dockery, A.M., 2011, 'Traditional Culture and the Wellbeing of Indigenous Australians: An analysis of the 2008 NATSISS' in *Social Science Perspectives on the 2008 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey*, April 11-12, Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research (CAEPR), Australian National University (ANU), Canberra.

¹² Biddle, N., 2011, 'Measuring and analysing Indigenous wellbeing,' in *Measures of Indigenous Wellbeing and Their Determinants Across the Lifecourse*, 2011 CAEPR Online Lecture Series, ANU, Canberra.

¹³ National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation, 2008, *Definitions: Aboriginal Health*. Available from: <http://www.naccho.org.au/definitions/abhealth.html>.

¹⁴ National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Council, 2003, *National Strategic Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health: Framework for action by Governments*, Canberra.

¹⁵ Commonwealth of Australia, 2009, *National Mental Health Policy 2008*.

¹⁶ Dockery, A.M., 2009, *Culture and Wellbeing: The Case of Indigenous Australians*, The Centre for Labour Market Research, CLMR Discussion Paper Series 09/01.

¹⁷ Dockery, A.M., 2011, 'Traditional Culture and the Wellbeing of Indigenous Australians: An analysis of the 2008 NATSISS' in *Social Science Perspectives on the 2008 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey*, April 11-12, Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research (CAEPR), Australian National University (ANU), Canberra.

¹⁸ Rowley, K.G., et al., 2008, 'Lower than expected morbidity and mortality for an Australian Aboriginal population: 10-year follow-up in a decentralised community,' *The Medical Journal of Australia*, 188(5): p. 283-287.

¹⁹ Rowley, K.G., et al., 2008, 'Lower than expected morbidity and mortality for an Australian Aboriginal population: 10-year follow-up in a decentralised community,' *The Medical Journal of Australia*, 188(5): p. 283-287.

²⁰ Dockery, A.M., 2009, *Culture and Wellbeing: The Case of Indigenous Australians*, The Centre for Labour Market Research, CLMR Discussion Paper Series 09/01.

- Indigenous cultural industries provide economic opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. For example, the Indigenous visual arts, which are an expression of Indigenous culture intimately linked with traditional languages, are a multi-million dollar industry.²²
- In 2002, 12 percent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in remote areas received payment for making arts or crafts; performing theatre, music, or dance; or writing or telling stories.²³

Safe Communities

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who speak Indigenous languages, participate in cultural activities and have strong cultural attachment are less likely to abuse alcohol or be charged by the police.^{24 25}
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth in remote areas who speak an Indigenous language are less likely to engage in high risk alcohol consumption and illicit substance use, and to have been a victim of physical or threatened violence.²⁶
- Social, cultural, emotional, and spiritual wellbeing are building blocks toward overall mental wellbeing and are crucial in reducing suicide in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.²⁷
- A qualitative health study found that Indigenous ceremonies (kanyirninpa/holding) prevent self harm and suicide in desert communities in the southeast Kimberley region of Western Australia because they embed the participant in multiple supporting relationships across and within generations, preventing or ending social isolation.²⁸
- An evaluation of the Indigenous festivals Croc Fest, the Dreaming Festival and Garma, have found numerous benefits for those participating including empowerment, capacity building, social capital, exposure to positive role models, cultural security, cultural confidence, local leadership, economic opportunities and pride in Indigenous identity.²⁹

Governance and Leadership

- As legitimacy is grounded in culturally based standards, values and systems of authority, a cultural 'match' underlies good governance in Aboriginal and Torres Strait communities.³⁰
- Acknowledging, embracing and developing a strong sense of Indigenous cultural identity is vital in creating strong and smart Indigenous leaders.³¹

It is worth noting that the MILR program is one of a number of programs within the Office for the Arts that is providing support to strengthen Indigenous identity and culture. The Office for the Arts also administers the Indigenous Culture Support (ICS) program, which assists participation in a wide range of Indigenous cultural activities throughout Australia and enables the transmission of cultural knowledge across age groups. In 2010-11, this program provided \$7.2 million to over 130 projects that emphasised participation and achievements that enrich Indigenous culture, develop skills and encourage a strong sense of identity in communities; and encompassed activities such as theatre, dance, music, film, radio, cultural workshops and camps, traditional arts and crafts, Indigenous festivals, and storytelling. Over 46,000 people were involved in these projects and over 11,400 people received training or skills development. The Office for the Arts also supports Indigenous Employment Initiatives in the arts and culture sectors and provided \$19.16 million in 2010-11 to Indigenous arts and culture organisations for the employment of over 600 Aboriginal and Torres

²¹ Dockery, A.M., 2011, 'Traditional Culture and the Wellbeing of Indigenous Australians: An analysis of the 2008 NATSISS' in *Social Science Perspectives on the 2008 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey*, April 11-12, Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research (CAEPR), Australian National University (ANU), Canberra.

²² The Senate Standing Committee on Environment, Communications, Information Technology and the Arts, 2007, *Indigenous Art - Securing the Future*, Canberra.

²³ Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006, *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians: Involvement in Arts and Culture (cat. no. 4721.0)*, Canberra.

²⁴ Dockery, A.M., 2011, 'Traditional Culture and the Wellbeing of Indigenous Australians: An analysis of the 2008 NATSISS' in *Social Science Perspectives on the 2008 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey*, April 11-12, Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research (CAEPR), Australian National University (ANU), Canberra.

²⁵ Dockery, A.M., 2009, *Culture and Wellbeing: The Case of Indigenous Australians*, The Centre for Labour Market Research, CLMR Discussion Paper Series 09/01

²⁶ Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011, *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander wellbeing: A focus on children and youth*, Canberra.

²⁷ Krynska, K., G. Martin, and N. Sheehan, 2009, *Identity, Voice, Place: Suicide Prevention for Indigenous Australians - A Social and Emotional Wellbeing Approach*, The University of Queensland.

²⁸ McCoy, B., 2007, 'Suicide and desert men: The power and protection of kanyirninpa (holding)', *Australasian Psychiatry*, 15(Supplement) p. S63-S67.

²⁹ Phipps, P. and L. Slater, 2010, *Indigenous Cultural Festivals: Evaluating Impact on Community Health and Wellbeing*, Globalism Research Centre, RMIT University.

³⁰ Dodson, M. and D.E. Smith, 2003, *Governance for Sustainable Development: Strategic Issues and Principles for Indigenous Australian Communities*, CAEPR, ANU, Canberra.

³¹ Sarra, C., 2010, *Stronger smarter approaches to Indigenous leadership in Australia*, in *Closing the Gap in Education?*, I. Snyder and J. Nieuwenhuysen, Editors, Monash University Publishing, Melbourne.

Strait Islander peoples in roles such as arts workers, cultural officers, language assistants and broadcasting technicians, as part of *Closing the Gap* in employment outcomes.

Terms of Reference 6.

Measures to improve Indigenous language interpreting and translating services

Interpreting and translating services are not eligible for funding under the MILR program. Some of the MILR funded language centres do provide interpreter services on their own accord as a means of supplementing income. While the Office for the Arts ensures compliance with MILR program funding agreements, the day-to-day operations of the language centres, including provision of interpreter services, is a matter for each centre.

An important issue to consider when discussing improving Indigenous language interpreting and translating is whether there are opportunities in linking the development of the Indigenous interpreting industry with other activities underway to support the maintenance of Indigenous languages and traditional cultural knowledge. The Office for the Arts recommends that measures to improve Indigenous language interpreting and translation services need to look beyond the suite of strategies that have been successful in developing interpreting in international languages in Australia. Indigenous languages and culture are unique, and it is therefore important that any strategies used to undertake Indigenous interpreting services are not streamlined and are developed in a culturally sensitive and appropriate manner.

Terms of Reference 7.

The effectiveness of current maintenance and revitalisation programs for Indigenous languages

The outcomes achieved by the MILR program reflect the effectiveness of the current work undertaken to maintain and revitalise Indigenous languages. The current performance frameworks used are being re-developed to capture both quantitative and qualitative data to better evaluate and demonstrate program outcomes. Furthermore, the guidelines of the Indigenous funding programs administered through the Office for the Arts are revised annually to improve program effectiveness and efficiency. In preparation for the 2012-13 funding round for these Indigenous programs, the Office for the Arts has been reviewing their program guidelines with a view to greater clarity in articulating funding priorities and reducing administration processes for applicants.

A crucial aspect to the effectiveness of the Indigenous programs run through the Office for the Arts is the work undertaken by the National Network of staff, locally based within the states and territories. National Network staff frequently consult and discuss program implementation and outcomes with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients in their region to ensure services are being provided to most effectively achieve the desired outcomes for the community. In addition, organisations are contacted following each funding round to give formal feedback regarding the effectiveness of the programs and if any improvements can be made.

An annual competitive funding round is held for the Indigenous programs administered by the Office for the Arts, which includes the MILR program. Annual and triennial (three-year) funding is available under the program. The program supports a broad range of projects including documentation and recording of languages, the development of language resources and language databases, assisting the development and delivery of programs through language centres as well as activities that promote Indigenous languages in the wider community. The MILR program does not fund projects based and held in the Torres Strait Islands, the Torres Strait Regional Authority administers Commonwealth funding through language and culture in this region. However, applications for funding relating to Torres Strait languages and culture that are based in Australia but outside the Torres Strait Islands region are eligible to receive funding from the MILR program.

Demand on the MILR program is significant. Each year, funding requests far exceed the total amount of funding available. In 2011-12, the program received 90 applications seeking approximately \$14.5

million against the 2011-12 budget of \$9.6 million. A total of 67 language activities, including 10 multi-year activities approved in previous funding rounds, are being supported in 2011-12. This includes activities such as community-run language centres and programs, research projects and resource development projects. A list of the activities funded by the MILR program over the last three years is available at the www.arts.gov.au/indigenous

Applications for funding are assessed against the program guidelines and assessment criteria. Initially National Network staff, who are familiar with the communities in each area, examine the applications. Their advice is then assessed by the relevant State Director who considers the needs of their particular state or territory and the relative quality of the applications. Finally, these preliminary assessments are considered in the context of the total funding available and the objectives of the program from a national perspective.

In spite of being vastly oversubscribed, the MILR program is achieving positive outcomes for Indigenous languages and supporting the strengthening of identity and culture and in 2010-11, over 7700 people were involved in the MILR program funded activities across Australia. Some achievements the MILR program has supported in 2010-11 are listed below*:

The MILR program is facilitating the continuation of Australian Indigenous languages

In 2010–11 the MILR program provided \$9.4 million to 78 projects across Australia.

- mobile language teams;
- total immersion language camps;
- early childhood language nests;
- language programs in detention/correction centres and prisons.

The MILR program is engaging communities, increasing the use of Indigenous languages in a range of fields and media, and promoting Indigenous languages to the wider public

- incorporated singing; theatre; animation; contemporary music and radio;
- expanded the use of language in the legal system and the health area; and
- promoted languages at festivals; in sport and in the media.

The MILR program is supporting use of information technologies and new media to engage youth, increase skills and to safeguard, transmit and promote Indigenous languages

- electronic games;
- language applications, software or content for iPods and mobile phones;
- on-line resources - databases.

The MILR program is supporting the sustainable development of community organisations in urban, regional and remote locations across Australia

- \$3 million to support organisations in remote Australia, including over \$1.3 million to support projects in priority remote service delivery communities;
- \$3.1 million to support regional organisations; and
- \$3.3 million to support organisations in major cities.

The Indigenous Employment Initiatives (IEI) which is linked to the MILR program is providing training and employment opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples

- In 2010-11, 36 of the 561 positions worked on MILR projects in roles such as language assistants and mentors.
- The MILR projects incorporated training, professional development or mentoring opportunities.

The MILR program is helping Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to connect with their language and culture and to share their culture with other Australians

* please note that 2011-12 figures for the following are not currently available.

The following case study highlights how the MILR program effective revitalisation of the Butchulla language.

Case Study: Butchulla language revival in Queensland

The story of the revival of the Queensland Fraser Coast-based Butchulla language is a remarkable one—from barely a handful of speakers to the recent call for the renaming of Fraser Island to its traditional name 'K'gari', meaning paradise in Butchulla.

The dramatic rise in speakers of the language—estimated to now be well over 200 people—can be attributed to innovative work of the Butchulla Language Program. As part of the program, language is taught as part of everyday life in households; it is also used in naming ceremonies and is published weekly in the local paper. Joyce Bonner, coordinator and co-founder of the program with the Butchulla Elders, discusses how it all began:

Butchulla dabba yawar-warray music students performing. Source: Butchulla Language Program.

Why did you start the project? *I commenced the project as I was doing studies about Australian Indigenous languages in 1999. It was from this I had community people black and white asking could their children learn the Butchulla language as part of the LOTE program in the schools. As it was not part of the Queensland Education curriculum we were not able to initiate the language learning. Following this I met and consulted with the Butchulla Elders and we decided to teach it as a community project within Korrawinga.*

Who were the key community members speaking Butchulla? *The key members in our community would be the Butchulla Elders who are the knowledge holders. It is now our young ghundus and youth who are leading the way and portraying the language with pride and dignity. By performing in public it is giving them acknowledgement and self esteem and mainstream educators can tell them it is wrong because they have been taught by the proper members within our Butchulla language system.*

Was knowledge of the language limited to a small number of elders? Or did middle-aged members of the community still practice the language? *Due to our Butchulla Elders who were passing on, it came to my attention that our language needed to be maintained and revived for our future generations. This is where only a small handful of Elders who still knew some of the language, so we recorded and documented all information in a data base to commence classes to revive our Butchulla language. Some of our middle-aged community members have given Butchulla names to their new born by promoting the meaning. Greetings are used everyday within public speaking and responded in language by our students.*

What do you think are the key factors that have led to the project's success? *I believe the most common factor would be because it is community owned and community driven. Respect for ownership and culturally driven and taught by grass roots people who care about the identity which most schools lack. Our Butchulla Elders are part of the consultation processes and are involved with the planning and evaluation performances.*

The Korrawinga Aboriginal Corporation has received MILR program funding over a number of years. In 2011-12 the Butchulla Language Program will receive \$108,800 to continue the revival of the Butchulla language in the Fraser Coast region.

For more information on the Korrawinga Aboriginal Corporation and Butchulla Language Program visit [Korrawinga Aboriginal Corporation, State Library of Queensland](#).

The Australian Bureau of Statistics reports that between 2002 and 2008, the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who spoke an Indigenous language as their main language at home did not change significantly (12-11%). In 2008, 40% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples aged 15 years and over spoke, or spoke some words of, an Indigenous language, and 42% of Aboriginal and

Torres Strait Islander peoples living in remote areas spoke an Indigenous language as their main language at home.³²

There has been a decline in the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth who can speak an Indigenous language, from 18% in 2002 to 13% in 2008. However, 21% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children aged 3–14 years who did not speak an Indigenous language at home were learning one.³³

Census data has shown a decline in Indigenous language speakers among all age groups of the Indigenous population aged 5 years and over since 1996. However, it has also shown that some languages have had success in their revitalisation programs and as a result the number of speakers has increased. For example, the 2006 census shows that there were 34 Kurna and 159 Ngarrindjeri speakers, while previously figures for these languages were not available because it was considered that the languages were no longer spoken.³⁴ It is hoped that the 2011 census will provide greater availability of data about Indigenous languages following the findings of the 2011 review of the Australian Standard Classification of Languages. This review aimed to ensure that data is available for languages with few remaining speakers, and outcomes of the review include the separate identification of any Indigenous language for which there are three or more known speakers.³⁵

Terms of Reference 8.

The effectiveness of the Commonwealth Government Indigenous languages policy in delivering its objectives and relevant policies of other Australian governments.

Reports provided through the MILR program note that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and their communities recognise the critical state that Australian Indigenous languages are in and the cultural, spiritual and scientific loss to Australian society and future generations that will occur as this continues.

The National Indigenous Languages Survey (NILS) Report 2005, found that the situation of Australia's Indigenous languages is grave and requires urgent action. This report found that of the original number of over 250 known Indigenous languages, only about 145 are still spoken in Australia and the vast majority of these, around 110 are critically endangered — that is, spoken only by small groups of people, mostly over 40 years of age. All of Australia's Indigenous languages face an uncertain future if immediate action is not taken.

The Office for the Arts is the lead agency in the development and implementation of the NILP and Action Plan. Below are some of the key objectives of the Policy relating to the Office for the Arts, with actions currently taken to contribute to these objectives.

Objective: To bring national attention to Indigenous languages – the oldest surviving languages in the world; and the pressures they face.

Action:

- *Undertake a feasibility study for the National Indigenous Languages Centre recommended by the NILS Report.*

This topic will be addressed as part of a national survey currently being developed to update the 2005 National Indigenous Languages Survey report by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS), funded by the MILR program, in conjunction with Indigenous languages organisations. The second NILS report is expected to be delivered in late 2012.

³² Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2010, *The City and the Bush: Indigenous Wellbeing Across Remoteness Areas* (cat. no. 41020.0), [Australian Social Trends](#), September 2010, Canberra.

³³ Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011, *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander wellbeing: A focus on children and youth* (cat. no. 4725.0), Canberra.

³⁴ Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2010, *Year Book Australia 2010, Feature Article 3: Languages of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples - A Uniquely Australian Heritage* (cat. no. 1301.0), Canberra.

³⁵ Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011, *Australian Standard Classification of Languages, 2011* (cat. no. 1267.0), Canberra.

Through the partnership with the MILR program, the AIATSIS language program seeks to provide a national co-ordination role between Indigenous language organisations, educational and research institutions and government agencies by: supporting the documentation and archiving of Indigenous languages; improving access to archived language material; supporting language maintenance and revitalisation programs; developing language resources and language databases to assist with the development and delivery of programs through language centres, including innovative projects using multimedia and new technologies; informing policy development through current research on the national situation for Australia's Indigenous languages; and delivering activities that promote Indigenous languages in the wider community.

- *Increase public recognition and appreciation of Indigenous languages by expanding the use of these languages across public and government functions.*

The following case study highlights how MILR program funding is working to expand public recognition and appreciation of Indigenous languages and culture.

Case Study - Indigenous All Stars vs NRL All Stars Match

The inaugural Indigenous All Stars vs NRL All Stars match was held at Skilled Park, Gold Coast, on the second anniversary of former Prime Minister Rudd's Apology to the Stolen Generation, 13 February 2010.

Australian Government support for an Indigenous Australian "war cry" at the match heralded a push to bring Indigenous languages and culture to national attention.

Funding of \$33,000 for a troupe made up of 40 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dancers from the Nunukul Yuggera Aboriginal Cultural Dancers and the Wakka Wakka Dance Troupe was provided through the MILR program.

Image source: © National Rugby League, Col Whelan.

In line with the Maori Haka, the performers opened the match, showcasing Indigenous language and culture with an enthusiastic sports crowd, National Rugby League (NRL) players and a national television audience. The war cry is derived from Stradbroke Island, Queensland, where the Nunukul Yuggera Aboriginal Cultural Dancers are based.

One of the key successes of the project was bringing to national attention the revitalisation of Indigenous culture and language in partnership with a major sporting code. With significant media interest, the project reinforced the importance of Indigenous languages and traditions, with some of the country's biggest sporting stars sharing their stories as well as their pride in being able to participate in the 'war cry'.

The project also allowed the Nunukul Yuggera Aboriginal Cultural Dancers to engage widely within schools and the sporting community leading up to the event, showcasing Indigenous languages and strengthening pride in identity and culture. In this context, the project supports the National Indigenous Languages Policy objective of increasing public recognition and appreciation of Indigenous languages by expanding the use of these languages across public and government functions.

The MILR program funding for the war-cry performance was provided in 2009-10 and 2010-11. The Office for the Arts is also providing funding in the 2011-12 funding round to support and promote Indigenous culture, art and language through the NRL All Stars event.

- *Support greater coordination and assistance amongst Indigenous language centres to maximise their impact nationally and to reach languages not currently supported.*

The MILR program currently funds a number of activities that support the coordination of language centres and groups throughout Australia to work together in promoting the revitalisation of Indigenous languages. For example, the Arwarbukarl Cultural Resource Association Inc. receives funding to facilitate the Eastern States Aboriginal Languages Group who work to identify and address issues which are common to Eastern Australian Aboriginal language communities; and to support the work for the Puliima 2011 National Indigenous Languages and Technology Forum. The Languages Forum, titled "Old Language –

New Voices” saw key stakeholders from throughout Australia and overseas come together to discuss the challenges and hopes for the revival and preservation of Indigenous languages.

Objective: Critically Endangered Languages: Reinforce use of critically endangered Indigenous languages that are being only partly spoken to help prevent decline in use and to maintain or extend their common, everyday use as much as possible.

Action:

- *The MILR program is investing \$9.6 million in 2011-12 on 67 activities around Australia supporting the revival and maintenance of Indigenous languages. This includes 10 multi-year activities that were approved in previous funding rounds.*

Activities funded by the MILR program in 2011-12 support critically endangered languages. For example, the University of Adelaide has been allocated \$105,320 to document traditional knowledge about seasons and time in the highly endangered Yankunytjatjara/ Antikirinya language of northeast South Australia and publish learning resources.

- *Increase use of new technology to broaden the impact of language maintenance and revival activities by local community Indigenous language centres*

Activities supported by the MILR program in 2011-12 will increase use of new technology to broaden the impact of language maintenance and revival.

The West Arnhem Shire Council has been allocated \$157,450 to undertake the ‘Minjilang endangered languages publications’ project. The aim of the project is to record and document the endangered language of Iwaidja, and produce bilingual (Iwaidja/English) language resources in digital and print form. The Minjilang endangered languages publications project is an Indigenous community-based recording and publishing project which was established on Croker Island in 2004. The central activities for 2011-12 will be the recording and documentation of the endangered language Iwaidja, and the production of bilingual (Iwaidja/English) electronic (online), print, audio, iPhone application and video publications. This involves developing a mobile, interactive, media-enriched bilingual dictionary and phrasebook application in Iwaidja and English downloadable from iTunes for use on iPhones.

- *Pilot Early Childhood Language Nests and Mobile Language Teams to supplement the work of language centres, especially in more remote areas that are not within easy reach.*

In 2011-12 the MILR program will continue to pilot Early Childhood Language Nests and Mobile Language Teams to supplement the work of language centres, especially in more remote areas that are not within easy reach.

Griffith Wiradjuri Aboriginal Preschool Inc. will increase the use of the Wiradjuri language amongst preschool aged children, their families and the community in the Griffith region. Griffith Wiradjuri Aboriginal Preschool Inc. will engage children and the wider community in the Wiradjuri language through various day to day activities, including songs, rhymes, stories and daily routines; coordinate and involve elders and other community members in establishing a language nest which will help identify items of language still used and develop and distribute audio-visual materials to help educate the children's families and community.

Adelaide Research and Innovation Pty Ltd has been triennially funded by MILR to operate a Mobile Language Team in South Australia to provide high quality strategic services that assist maintenance and revival of Aboriginal languages in the wider South Australian population. The Mobile Language Team work to strengthen developmental factors that will improve the quality and long-term viability of community-based language maintenance and revival and expand the cohort of Aboriginal people who can plan and manage best practice Aboriginal language programs.

- *Consider Tax deductible status to Indigenous languages organisations through the Register of Cultural Organisations for maintaining and reviving Indigenous languages.*

On 19 April 2011 Minister Crean announced that Mr Harold Mitchell AC, the Executive Chairman of the Mitchell Communication Group, will chair a review of private sector support for the arts in Australia. The review is examining current government arrangements for encouraging private sector support and considering any potential enhancements to existing measures. The efficacy of the current suite of government measures, including tax incentive measures such as the Register of Cultural Organisations will be considered as part of the review. This may involve expanding the Register of Cultural Organisations to include Indigenous language organisations.

Objective: Strengthening Pride in Identity and Culture through Language Revival

Action:

- *Support community-based Indigenous language centres by increasing links with major national, state and territory cultural institutions to ensure that Indigenous languages material is properly preserved and made accessible appropriately.*

The Office for the Arts is actively working to strengthen and increase links between communities and cultural institutions through the various projects funded by the MILR program. These include:

Funding the Resource Network for Linguistic Diversity to increase the capacity of Indigenous community members to document and revitalise their languages through training, resource sharing, networking and mentoring. The Documenting and Revitalising Indigenous Languages (DRIL) program offers a new training method to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in communities and organisations who want to develop, run and manage their own language projects.

Funding to the Library Board of Queensland to implement two Language Discovery Research Workshops at the State Library of Queensland in Brisbane. This activity will provide professional development to 15 -20 Indigenous community language workers from across the State It will build community capacity, support local collections of language resources, link libraries and Indigenous Knowledge Centres with language activities and promote Indigenous languages to the broader Queensland community.

Funding a number of language centres throughout Australia, including the North Queensland Regional Aboriginal Corporation Languages Centre and the Wangka Maya Pilbara Aboriginal Language Centre in the Pilbara region of Western Australia.

- *Through the Indigenous Contemporary Music Action Plan, support music in Indigenous languages to increase the transmission of languages across generations to younger speakers, utilising festivals and multimedia to strengthen the focus on Indigenous languages and increasing broadcasting content in Indigenous languages.*

The Indigenous Contemporary Music Action Plan is based on principles of flexibility, sustainability and diversity and aims to focus support for Indigenous music so that the sector grows stronger. A key component of the Action Plan aims to strengthen links between culture, language and Indigenous contemporary music. In northern and central Australia in particular, music is preserving and transmitting Indigenous languages across generations. The fact that music attracts and engages so many young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples means it is an important force assisting the long-term survival of Indigenous languages. Coupled with this, Indigenous music sung in language is raising awareness and appreciation of Indigenous languages in wider Australia. A successful musician such as Geoffrey Gurrumul Yunupingu, for example, has been able to make a significant impact on the contemporary music market, rating highly on the ARIA mainstream charts while singing almost exclusively in his first language, Yolgnu Matha.

Underpinning the Indigenous Contemporary Music Action Plan is the *Breakthrough: Emerging Indigenous Contemporary Musicians Recording (Breakthrough)* program, administered by the Office for the Arts. This program was established as a Cultural Ministers Council (CMC) initiative that assists emerging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander musicians and groups to produce a high quality recording, suitable for broadcast and commercial release. *Breakthrough* aims to provide greater exposure for the talent and creativity of Indigenous musicians as well as increase national and international audiences for Indigenous contemporary music. Nine successful recipients have been provided funding for two pilot rounds with successful recipients also provided additional mentoring and promotional support. Three Indigenous artists/bands were supported in 2010-11 by CMC. Additional funding support was provided by the Maintenance of Indigenous Languages and Records program for the Iwantja Band, a fourth successful *Breakthrough* recipient in 2010, who recorded the majority of songs in language for their album *Palya* released in 2011.

- *Encouraging more grass-roots collaboration between language learning programs and Stolen Generation members and their organisations.*

The Office for the Arts recognises the devastating impact of fractured culture and the importance of valuing culture in healing this damage.

Many projects that receive MILR program funding mention that their activity will be of value to Stolen Generation members of their community and/or the applicants refer to discontinuity of transmission of culture and language because of the removal of children and break-up of families, and the importance of their project in helping to redress that problem. The Indigenous languages and culture programs that the Office for the Arts supports to strengthen connections to culture for the Stolen Generations will endeavour to collect information. This will enable the Office for the Arts to identify projects that are achieving outcomes for this group, to build on success and to help identify potential barriers to access for members of these generations.