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13 March 2012

Committee Secretary
House of Representatives Standing Committee on
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600
AUSTRALIA

Dear Secretary,

Re: Torres Strait Regional Authority – Submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs: Inquiry into Language Learning in Indigenous Communities

Please find attached to this letter a submission from the Torres Strait Regional Authority (TSRA) in response to the Inquiry into Language Learning in Indigenous Communities.

TSRA considers the preservation and promotion of Indigenous languages, along with a wide range of cultural maintenance and development activities, as vital to Indigenous identity, culture and well being. The continued use of traditional languages builds a sense of empowerment and provides a fundamental set of reference points that assists our people to take on increased leadership roles and responsibilities, both in our region and beyond.

Worryingly, I note that the National Indigenous Languages Survey (NILS) Report 2005 identifies that the two main languages of the Torres Strait, Kala Lagaw Ya and Meriam Mir, are among 110 critically endangered Indigenous languages in Australia. The threat that this poses to the wellbeing of the communities of the Torres Strait makes language preservation and learning a priority for the region.

The TSRA believes that it is critical for traditional languages to be fully documented and recorded while there are still fluent speakers. It is also essential that communities in the region develop and package this valuable resource in order to make it accessible for future generations, wherever they may reside.

It is of some concern to both myself, and the elected members of the TSRA Board, that there have been public statements to the Committee which infer that the TSRA has not actively supported Torres Strait culture, arts and heritage activities in the region. Through its modest budget appropriation, the TSRA supported and encouraged traditional language use and learning across the Torres Strait region through open and transparent grant application and selection processes.

Over recent years, the TSRA has provided funding and resource support for Torres Strait Language projects such as the;
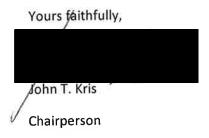
- Tagai College for the Miriam Mir Language Program
- Kalaulagauya Language Program
- Badu Island Foundation for Kala Lagaw Ya Language Program
- Buthu Lagau Sarai TSI Corp for Language Program on Poruma Island
- Masigilgal Mura Buai Language Restoration and Revival Project
- Saibai Island Arts and Language Project
- Kara Ged A Kara Mir – My Home & My Language project
- Tagai - Publication of Kulkalgaw Ya Dialect
- Pulilma National Indigenous Language Conference

This list of projects is by no means exhaustive. The TSRA has supported through its grants many activities which are underpinned or complemented by traditional language use. The range of cultural activities supported by TSRA not only focuses on languages, but includes a range of projects that focus on traditional song, storytelling, visual arts and traditional dance. It has also played a key role in the development and promotion of Torres Strait culture and arts across the region, nationally and internationally. The availability of TSRA funding for cultural activities and projects is openly advertised to the public and transparently reported on each year in the TSRA Annual Report, which is readily available to all agencies in the region and the general public.

While TSRA endeavours to meet the wide range of cultural aspirations of the region, it acknowledges that this task is broad ranging and requires all levels of government, along with the private sector to integrate their efforts. Achieving outcomes in the revitalisation of languages requires a holistic and targeted effort which is broader than the current scope of resources available to TSRA's Culture, Arts and Heritage Program. The TSRA response to the committee is premised on some important points which include:

- Cultural identity underpinned by a strong knowledge of traditional languages is fundamental to achieving Closing the Gap outcomes
- The TSRA agrees that languages should be included as part of the Education Curriculum
- The TSRA advocates for additional resources to be provided to the region aimed at the revitalisation and maintenance of language, and supports the establishment of a pool of community based and skilled Torres Strait language interpreters and translators
- The TSRA should be considered a key partner in the design and rollout of new Indigenous policies and programs (such as National Partnership Agreements), along with being provided regular updates on machinery of government arrangements that impact the delivery of Indigenous programs in the Torres Strait region
- The TSRA is well positioned and willing to align efforts with all stakeholders to coordinate language programs in Torres Strait island communities

I trust that this submission will be of assistance in the development of improved language programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. For further question please do not hesitate to call Mr Brian Riley, TSRA Program Manager, Culture, Arts and Heritage Program on █████████

Yours faithfully,

John T. Kris
Chairperson

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TORRES STRAIT REGIONAL AUTHORITY

SUBMISSION TO
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES STANDING COMMITTEE ON
ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER AFFAIRS

Inquiry into Language Learning in Indigenous Communities – Torres Strait Region

MARCH 2012

Torres Strait Regional Authority Submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs: Inquiry into Language Learning in Indigenous Communities – Torres Strait Region

This submission has been developed by the Torres Strait Regional Authority (TSRA) to provide a response to this inquiry. It comprises of three parts:

1. General Introduction to the Torres Strait Region, its Languages and the TSRA
2. TSRA Response to the Inquiry Terms of Reference
3. TSRA comments and recommendations relating to the National Indigenous Languages Policy 2009 - 2013

Part One - General Introduction to the Torres Strait Region, its Languages and the TSRA

1.1 The Torres Strait Region and its People

The Torres Strait Region is the area from the tip of the Cape York Peninsula, Queensland, through to the international border with Papua New Guinea. Within this region there are twenty recognised communities, eighteen of which are based on remote and isolated islands, and two based in the Northern Peninsula Area (NPA) of Cape York. According to the 2006 Population Census, it was estimated that 53,300 people identified as Torres Strait Islanders[1]. Approximately fifteen per cent of Torres Strait Islanders resided in the Torres Strait region, with the remaining 85 per cent residing in mainland Australian communities.

1.2 Torres Strait Languages

There are two traditional languages in the Torres Strait region. Meriam Mir, spoken in the Eastern Islands, has two distinct dialect groups, and Kala Lagaw Ya has four distinct dialect groups. A lingua franca known as Torres Strait Creole is also spoken as a common language shared between all the different languages and dialect groups. A summary of the languages spoken by Torres Strait communities is detailed in the table below.

Inner Islands		
English Name	**Traditional Name**	**Language**
Thursday Island Includes the wards of Port Kennedy and TRAWQ	Waibene	Torres Strait Creole All Torres Strait Traditional Languages and dialects
Horn Island	Ngurapai	Torres Strait Creole Kala Lagaw Ya (Kaurareg dialect) All Torres Strait Traditional Languages and dialects
Prince of Wales	Muralag	Torres Strait Creole Kala Lagaw Ya (Kaurareg dialect)
Hammond Island	Kiriri	Torres Strait Creole All Torres Strait Languages / dialects

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[1]This estimate includes 20,200 people of both Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal origin. Source 4713.0 - Population Characteristics, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, 2006 Latest ISSUE Released at 11:30 AM (CANBERRA TIME) 29/07/2011 Reissue: http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/7E0347AF3338F1E9CA2578DB00283CDB?opendocument

Outer Islands Near Western Cluster		
English Name	Traditional Name	Language
Banks Island	Moa Includes the two communities, Kubin and St Pauls	Kala Lagaw Ya
Jervis	Mabuiag	Kala Lagaw Ya (Mabuyag dialect)
Mulgrave	Badu	Kala Lagaw Ya

Outer Islands Top Western Cluster		
English Name	Traditional Name	Language
Saibai Island	Saibai	Kala Lagaw Ya (Kala Kawa Ya dialect)
Talbot Island	Boigu	Kala Lagaw Ya (Kala Kawa Ya dialect)
Mt. Cornwallis Island	Dauan	Kala Lagaw Ya (Kala Kawa Ya dialect)

Outer Islands Central Cluster		
English Name	Traditional Name	Language
Turtle Back Island	Iama	Kala Lagaw Ya (Kulkalgaw Ya dialect)
Yorke Island	Masig	Kala Lagaw Ya (Kulkalgaw Ya dialect)
Coconut Island	Poruma	Kala Lagaw Ya (Kulkalgaw Ya dialect)
Sue Island	Warraber	Kala Lagaw Ya (Kulkalgaw Ya dialect)

Outer Islands Eastern Cluster		
English Name	Traditional Name	Language
Murray Islands	Mer,Dauar and Waier	Meriam Mir
Stephen Island	Ugar	Meriam Mir(Erub/Ugar dialect)
Darnley Island	Erub	Meriam Mir (Erub/Ugar)

According to the National Indigenous Languages Survey Report, the traditional languages Kala Lagaw Ya, Kala Kawaw Ya (dialect) and Meriam Mir are in serious decline, with a declining number of fluent speakers, especially in the younger age groups. Results from this survey found that participants aged from 40 - 60+ years "understood well, spoke fluently and spoke often". People interviewed between 0 - 40 years "understood some words, and spoke some words on a daily basis".[2]

While in 2012 this data may still be representative of the status of Torres Strait languages, it can only be assumed that the use of languages may have declined further since the 2005 survey report. The decline in traditional language use was identified during a comprehensive community consultation process leading to the development of the Torres Strait and Northern Peninsula Area Regional Plan 2009-2029. This Plan

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[2] National Indigenous languages survey report (2005): *Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies* Canberra : Dept. of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts, 2005. http://www.arts.gov.au/sites/default/files/pdfs/nils-report-2005.pdf

recognises that a number of targeted initiatives are needed and notes that "for future generations it is important that our culture, heritage and art are not only sustained but developed". Key goals in the Plan are to "Protect, promote, revitalise and maintain Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal traditions and cultural heritage". As language is fundamental to cultural identity, there are a number of objectives that relate specifically to traditional language use and protection.[3]

Feedback from community consultations suggests that a decline in traditional language use can be attributed to such factors as a focus in the education curriculum on English language competency to achieve educational outcomes, certain employment requirements, generational gaps and pressures between elders and youth, and high rates of mobility of among Torres Strait families who leave the region to southern destinations.

1.3 The TSRA

The TSRA is a Commonwealth statutory authority which was established in 1994 under the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) Act 1989, now known as the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Act 2005. It is the peak Commonwealth representative body for Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal people living in the Torres Strait. The TSRA also performs separate functions under the Native Title Act 1993 as the Native Title Representative Body for the Torres Strait Region.

The TSRA has responsibility to:

- Formulate, coordinate and implement programs for Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal people living within the region;
- Monitor the effectiveness of these programs, including programs conducted by other bodies;
- Advise the Minister for Indigenous Affairs on matters relating to Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal Affairs in the Torres Strait;
- Recognise and maintain the special and unique Ailan Kastom of the Torres Strait Islander people living in the Torres Strait Region; and
- Undertake activities necessary to perform its function as defined by the ATSI Act 2005.

The TSRA is required under section 142D of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Act 2005 to formulate and implement a plan to guide the progress of the Torres Strait region. This plan, known as the Torres Strait Development Plan, is updated every four years to be consistent with the term of the TSRA Board.

1.4 TSRA Funding and Portfolio Budget Statement

The TSRA's funding appropriation was established from the budget of the pre-TSRA Torres Strait Regional Council under ATSIC, which included the then ATSIC program of art, culture, broadcasting and language. The program split was not mandated as to do so would have been too prescriptive and compromised the extent to which such decisions were self-determining. The TSRA annual budget appropriation and financial statements are outlined in a number of publicly available documents including, the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA) Annual Portfolio Budget Statements, and TSRA Annual Reports.

The TSRA is accountable under the legislative financial framework prescribed by the Commonwealth Authorities and Companies Act (CAC Act). TSRA funding appropriations are received via the Financial Management Act (FMA) Agency which is FaHCSIA. The TSRA revenue statement is articulated in the FaHCSIA Portfolio Budget Statements under Outcome 1,

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[3] *Torres Strait and Northern Peninsula Area Regional (NPA) Plan, the Elected Leaders of the Torres Strait and (NPA)*

"Progress towards closing the gap for Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal people living in the Torres Strait Region through development planning, coordination, sustainable resource management, and preservation and promotion of Indigenous culture"[4].

1.5 The TSRA Vision

NGALPUN YANGU KAABA WOEYDHAY, A NGALPUN MURUYGAW DANALAGAN MABAYGAL KUNAKAN PALAYK, BATHAYNGAKA (KALA LAGAU YA)

BUAIGIZ KELAR OBAISWERARE, MERBI MIR APUGE MENA OBAKEDI, MUIGE MERBI ARERIBI TONARGE, KO MERBI KEUB KERKEREM (MERIAM MIR)

NGALPAN MOEBAYGAL THOEPOERIWOEYAMOEYN, NGALPAN YA KUDUTHOERAYNU, NGALPAN IGILILMAYPA, SEPA SETHA WARA GOEYGIL SEY BOEY WAGEL (KALA KAWAU YA)

EMPOWERING OUR PEOPLE, IN OUR DECISION, IN OUR CULTURE, FOR OUR FUTURE

1.6 TSRA's Goals

The TSRA aims to improve the overall social and emotional wellbeing of Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal people living in the Torres Strait region. It aims to achieve this by:

- gaining recognition of rights, customs and identity as Indigenous peoples;
- achieving a better quality of life for all people living in the Torres Strait region;
- developing a sustainable economic base;
- achieving better health and community services;
- ensuring protection of the environment; and
- asserting native title over the lands and waters of the Torres Strait region.

1.7 The TSRA Culture, Art and Heritage Program (CAH)

In 2008–09 the TSRA finalised the Torres Strait Development Plan 2009–13, the fourth development plan since the establishment of the TSRA. The plan outlines seven new or revised TSRA program components (Economic Development; Culture, Art and Heritage; Native Title; Environmental Management; Governance and Leadership; Healthy Communities; Safe Communities), each of which has a number of desired outcomes and associated benefits. The following is an excerpt from the Torres Strait Development Plan 2009-13.

> The TSRA will form a Culture, Art and Heritage Program to support the regional outcomes. The aims of the program are to:
>
> - protect culturally significant sites and artefacts to ensure their longevity
>
> - revitalise traditional cultural practices (art, dance, language, and storytelling) among communities.

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[4] Available at http://resources.fahcsia.gov.au/budget/2011-12/FaHCSIA_PBS-2011

The TSRA has made a concerted effort to address the need for revitalisation and maintenance of a wide range of Torres Strait Indigenous cultural practices, some of which target traditional language as a priority including the;

- Saibai Island Arts and Language Project (2009/10);
- Kara Ged A Kara Mir – My Home & My Language project (2009/10);
- Pulilma National Indigenous Language Conference (2010/11); and
- Tagai - Publication of Kulkalgaw Ya Dialect (2010/11).

The TSRA has also supported many community based activities across the region, nationally and internationally which are underpinned or complemented by traditional language use. These activities include those that focus on traditional song, storytelling, visual arts and traditional dance. The modest amount of TSRA funding for cultural activities and projects is delivered through two open grant funding rounds per year. TSRA's Culture, Art and Heritage grant funding guidelines and the timing of funding rounds are openly advertised both in newspaper advertisements and on the TSRA website **(Attachment A)**. All recipients of TSRA funding and a description of the type of activities funded are transparently reported on every year in the TSRA Annual Report to the Minister for Families Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA). The TSRA Annual Reports have won a number of awards and are readily available to the general public.

The TSRA has also developed the Gab Titui Cultural Centre which serves as a hub for arts and cultural development activities in the Torres Strait, and is considered the first keeping place for historical artefacts and contemporary Indigenous art in the region. The central focus of the Centre is to contribute to the maintenance, revitalisation and preservation of Torres Strait culture and the development and promotion of local Indigenous art. Established in 2004, the Gab Titui Cultural Centre is operated by the TSRA. TSRA supports more than 70 active artists across the Torres Strait and Northern Peninsula Area of Australia. The Centre has a Gallery Shop that provides an ethical outlet for Torres Strait artists to sell their work, maintaining at least 70 percent of local Indigenous product. The sales made through Gab Titui create economic opportunities for local Indigenous artists, as a large percentage of the earnings are returned directly to them. Gab Titui runs a cultural maintenance program through the Ephraim Bani Gallery, and is assisted by the Arts Development Officer who provides services to artists and art centres on the outer islands with whom the Centre works. The Centre supports local Indigenous artists to ensure that sales proceeds go back to the Torres Strait community.

Gab Titui runs an Arts Development program that services artists and art centres in the Torres Strait region. There are three incorporated and independent art centres currently based in the Torres Strait. These are Badhulgaw Kuthinaw Mudh on Badu Island, Erub Erwer Meta located on Erub (Darnley) Island and Ngalmun Lagau Minaral which is based on Moa Island in the community of Kubin.

TSRA would also welcome a clarification of the role of the Office for the Arts (OftA), now based within the Department of Regional Australia, Local Government, Arts and Sport. TSRA understands that OftA administers a range of Australian Government funding that supports Indigenous culture, languages and visual arts. TSRA understands that the responsibility for the Indigenous Broadcasting Program (IBP) transferred from OftA in July 2011 to the Department of Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy; however, to maintain the continuity of program administration, OftA staff will continue to administer the 2012-13 IBP applications.

While TSRA makes all endeavours to meet the cultural needs of the region, it acknowledges that this task is broad ranging. Achieving outcomes in the revitalisation of languages requires a holistic and targeted effort which is broader than the current scope of TSRA's Culture, Arts and Heritage Program activities.

Part Two - TSRA Responses to the Inquiry Terms of Reference

2.1 Terms of Reference 1:
The benefits of giving attention and recognition to Indigenous languages

Language is a fundamental aspect of Indigenous culture and is recognised by the TSRA as the cornerstone for Indigenous people in maintaining a strong cultural identity. The TSRA vision, "Empowering our people, in our decision, in our culture, for our future", underpins all program and administrative functions. The TSRA aims to utilise each traditional language as integral to program development, program implementation and in community engagement.

The TSRA has taken some steps to improve overall community engagement through the development and implementation of the TSRA Cultural Policy **(Attachment B)** and TSRA Cultural Protocols **(Attachment C)**. Attention to, and recognition of traditional language use are integral part of this approach.

In order for the TSRA to effectively deliver its programs to all communities in the region, it is imperative that individually tailored community specific engagement strategies are developed. This ensures that appropriate protocols are respected and that language is incorporated into engagement activities to ensure effective communication among all parties.

The TSRA encourages all government agencies throughout the Torres Strait region to use the Cultural Policy and Cultural Protocols which it has developed in order to achieve a more integrated and culturally appropriate engagement approach. The TSRA believes that this would improve government and community relationships, which in turn would maximise the efficacy of services and supports that aim to address Indigenous disadvantage.

2.2 Terms of Reference 2:
The contribution of Indigenous languages to Closing the Gap and strengthening Indigenous identity and culture

The TSRA recognises the fundamental contribution that Indigenous languages can make to Closing the Gap and strengthening Indigenous identity and culture. The TSRA is keen to be partner in the development of a regional Torres Strait Language Strategy and would work with other key agencies to more closely align Culture, Arts and Heritage Program activity to support its implementation. However, in order to do this, additional resources would be required.

2.2.1 Contributing to Closing the Gap

The TSRA notes the meeting of the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) in 2008 where the National Indigenous Reform Agreement was developed. In acknowledging the imperative to reduce the gap across a range of socio-economic outcomes, COAG determined that, **"Efforts to Close the Gap in Indigenous disadvantage must recognise and build on the strength of Indigenous cultures and identities".**[5]

The TSRA notes in particular the 2008/09 COAG commitment of $38.6 million towards interpreting and translating services as part of the Remote Service Delivery sites. However, the Remote Service Delivery National Partnership (RSD NP) only provides for the strengthening of interpreting and translating services in response to local needs *in priority locations*. Priority RSD locations have not included communities in the Torres Strait region. The TSRA also acknowledges that in addition to the employment of interpreters in each

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5 The National Indigenous Reform Agreement, Council of Australian Governments, 2008. Page 20.

RSD location, the Australian Government is responsible for working with the States and Northern Territory to introduce a national framework for the effective supply and use of Indigenous language interpreters and translators. The TSRA would welcome closer collaboration on this important endeavour.

OftA reiterates the COAG imperative by stating, "the fundamental role of culture in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and wellbeing means that initiatives that support Indigenous culture are also a foundation stone producing outcomes across the COAG building blocks" [6]. The TSRA endorses the aforementioned quote in relation to the connection between culture and Closing the Gap.

In acknowledging the research undertaken by OftA, the TSRA reiterates and supports some of the key conclusions where improved language and learning have contributed to Closing the Gap outcomes. TSRA supports the following research findings which were reported in the 2010 OftA paper, *Culture and Closing the Gap*:

Early childhood
- Traditional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures contain natural protective and wellbeing factors such as kinship networks; language, culture and cultural identity have been found to be key protective factors that predict resilience in children.

Schooling
- International research 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.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander 13–17 year olds in urban and regional areas are more likely to attend school if they speak an Indigenous language than those who do not.

Health
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who speak Indigenous languages and participate in cultural activities have markedly better physical and mental health.
- A ten year study in the Northern Territory found that Aboriginal people living in communities where traditional languages and cultural practices are valued and maintained, are less likely to be obese or suffer from to diabetes, and are less prone to cardiovascular disease, than Aboriginal people in the NT who were not connected to traditional lifestyles.

The TSRA has also independently aligned its organisational approach to program delivery by applying its cultural policy and cultural protocols across all program areas. This approach ensures that each of the TSRA program outcome statements recognises culture as central to achieving long term community outcomes.

2.2.2 Data on Languages provided by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS)

Data accumulated by the ABS in 2006 suggests that, "Torres Strait Islander people living in the Torres Strait Indigenous Region were the most likely to speak a Torres Strait Island language at home (73%) compared with 9% of Torres Strait Islander people living in the rest of Queensland and 1% of Torres Strait Islander people living in other parts of Australia. The most widely spoken Indigenous language by Torres Strait Islander people was Torres Strait Creole with a total of 5,300 speakers, or 12% of Torres Strait Islander people. The next most widely spoken Torres Strait Island language was Kalaw Kawaw Ya/Kalaw Lagaw Ya with 1,100 speakers or 2% of Torres Strait Islander people".

The ABS also reports that, "in 2006, 13% of Torres Strait Islander people living in the Torres Strait Indigenous

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6Culture and Closing the Gap, 2010 Office for the Arts, formally in Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, now Regional Australia, Local Government, Arts and Sport, Pages 1. http://www.arts.gov.au/sites/default/files/indigenous/closing-the-gap/ccg-factsheet.pdf

Region who responded to the language question spoke only English at home, compared with 82% in the rest of Queensland and 91% living in other parts of Australia"[7].

The TSRA notes the efforts of the ABS to develop improved methods in the collection of statistical data and information about Indigenous people across Australia. The TSRA has worked closely with the ABS to improve data collection methods and the quality of the data to achieve the best possible statistical outcomes across the Torres Strait. However, it must be acknowledged that the efficacy of data sets, such as Torres Strait data reported by the ABS would be enhanced by having access to a pool of appropriately skilled Torres Strait based language interpreters and translators.

2.2.3   Strengthening Indigenous Identity and Culture

As the NILS survey suggests, language use and traditional cultural practise may be in decline in the Torres Strait. The TSRA believes that strengthening Indigenous identity and culture through traditional language use is a way of addressing the generational disconnect, as well as being an important step in improving the overall wellbeing in Torres Strait communities.

Connection to culture is vital to the emotional, physical and spiritual wellbeing of Indigenous peoples. Language is not only a communication tool but is the link to Indigenous knowledge systems. It encapsulates Indigenous perceptions, perspectives, and the world views that have been developed over generations. It is essential that efforts to document and record cultural practices are continued in order to ensure the maintenance of Torres Strait Indigenous knowledge systems.

The incorporation of Indigenous concepts to address modern social and health issues is critical and assists to empower Indigenous people to create culturally appropriate, community specific and sustainable solutions. Use of language, as part of this process, encourages Indigenous people to more actively participate, assists to build better understanding, and increases individual and community ownership in addressing issues.

2.3 Terms of Reference 3:
The potential benefits of including Indigenous languages in early education

The TSRA agrees that Indigenous languages should be included throughout the national education curriculum, and supports language being included in all levels of the education curriculum across the Torres Strait region.

Within the Torres Strait, traditional languages are taught in both primary and secondary school classes. The TSRA understands that qualified linguists and language speakers are employed by Education Queensland to provide these classes. TSRA aims to work more closely with education providers in the region to better align and support activities that improve and increase early education participation and engagement via the TSRA CAH Program and common funding rounds.

The TSRA notes research that suggests that the benefits of incorporating Indigenous language and culture in early education includes:

- reduction in anxiety experienced by Indigenous children when transitioning into full time schooling,
- an increase in knowledge retention,
- increased confidence and a willingness by children to attend school and participate in the education experience.[8]

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[7] ABS op cit.

2.4 Terms of Reference 4:

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

The TSRA supports the development of strategies to improve education outcomes in Indigenous communities where English is a second language, and will work actively with education providers in the region to assist in the development of measures to achieve this outcome.

2.5 Terms of Reference 5:

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

The TSRA understands the importance of English language competency for Indigenous communities as this is necessary for quality community and government relationships, for improving educational outcomes and for increasing employment and economic development opportunities. The TSRA supports local educational and vocational training providers to continue providing vocational opportunities to Indigenous communities in the region.

2.6 Terms of Reference 6:

Measures to improve Indigenous language interpreting and translating services

The need to establish a pool of local language interpreters and translators has been identified through ongoing community consultation and development planning processes. The TSRA recognises that there is a need to establish Indigenous language interpreting and translating services within the region. However, this initiative still requires further development and resource support.

The TSRA, through the Culture, Art and Heritage Program receives numerous requests to provide specialist advice on Torres Strait Islander language and culture. These requests are received from both the general public and other Local, State and Australian Government agencies.

Examples of this are:

Department of Juvenile Justice, NSW

A youth worker requested information about language words to assist a young Torres Strait Islander offender to develop knowledge about his cultural heritage as a basis for his rehabilitation program.

The TSRA assisted this department with the provision of general information such as phrases and greetings, a list of resources, and key contacts in communities to enable the boy to contact extended family members.

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8 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. Additionally, the Australian Human Rights Commission, 2009, Social Justice Report 2009. And 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.

Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian

The Commission would like to use Creole and English on either side of a bookmark when developing promotional material to communities in the Torres Strait.

This is an example of many requests that come through the TSRA. However advice on correct spelling and application of language in written form has not been formally determined and requires further discussion with key community specialists and qualified linguists. Torres Strait Culture is an oral culture and as such formalisation and standardisation of language into written form requires further development.

Language maintenance and revitalisation programs in the Torres Strait have been predominately in the domain of the educational institutions. The TSRA's role has been to support community requests for some focussed language projects that are generally community based or outside of the school curriculum.

While there are Torres Strait institutions that have actively worked together to ensure Torres Strait languages are documented and taught, these collaborations could be strengthened. Examples of where linkages could be strengthened are between the:

- Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education's Degree in Indigenous Languages majoring in Torres Strait Languages;
- Tropical North Queensland Institute of TAFE's Introduction to Torres Strait Languages course;
- TAGAI College Language and Culture Program, Individual and Community based Language maintenance projects (usually one-off funding);
- The TSRA Culture, Art and Heritage (CAH) Grant Program; and
- Queensland State Library's project, Culture Love.

As mentioned previously, the TSRA supports a range of grant applications from both community organisations and individuals. An example of one project provided in section 2.2 of this submission, outlines the type of language projects that TSRA funds. The TSRA will continue to support these types of projects and work towards strengthening community capability in developing language programs that enable better coordination of language projects.

The table below outlines some examples of projects that have received TSRA funding support:

RECIPIENT	ACTIVITY
Tropical North Qld Institute of TAFE	Language and Cultural Awareness Project
Tagai State College	Publication of Kulkalgaw Ya dialect
Torres Shire Council (auspice) various participants	2011 Puliima National Indigenous Language Conference
Buthu Lagau Saral	Language Project on Poruma Island
Port Kennedy Association	Record and Document Language Project
Torres Strait Indigenous Regional Council (TSIRC)	Saibai Arts and Language Project
TSIRC	Masigilgal Mura Buai Language Restoration Program
Torres Strait Indigenous Media Assoc. (auspice) Benny Mabo (project director)	Kara Ged A Kara Mir – My Home and My Language (Meriam Mir Phrasebook)

2.8 Term of Reference 8
The effectiveness of the Commonwealth Government Indigenous Languages Policy in delivering its objectives and relevant policies of other Australian governments

The TSRA fully supports the objectives and actions identified in the National Indigenous Languages Policy as a means of addressing the serious problem of language loss in Indigenous communities. The TSRA is committed to ensuring that the best possible services are provided within existing funding parameters as part of providing more culturally appropriate services to the communities in the region. It must be acknowledged though, that the resources available to undertake this activity have not substantially changed since the establishment of the TSRA.

Given the status of the two major traditional languages of the Torres Strait, increasing TSRA's capacity to facilitate long term strategies to counter Indigenous language loss in the region is a priority. The TSRA is well positioned to achieve this through the extension of the Cultural Policy and Protocols framework, aligning its grant funding guidelines to support closer collaboration among agencies, use of the network of Rangers in communities, and through developing community art centres as cultural hubs across the region.

3. TSRA Response to National Indigenous Languages Policy 2009 - 2013

National Indigenous Language Policy Objectives 2009 - 2013.	Actions	TSRA Comments	TSRA Recommendations
1. National Attention: To bring national attention to Indigenous languages – the oldest surviving languages in the world; and the pressures they face.	• Undertake a feasibility study for the National Indigenous Languages Centre recommended by the NILS Report. • Increase public recognition and appreciation of Indigenous languages by expanding the use of these languages across public and government functions. • Support greater coordination and assistance amongst Indigenous language centres to maximise their impact nationally and to reach languages not currently supported.	The TSRA Cultural Policy and Protocols have been distributed throughout the region and to all relevant agencies. The TSRA is working with all levels of government in the region through the Integrated Service Delivery Framework to ensure that robust Cultural policy and protocols are integrated into service delivery. The TSRA supports activities that aim to increase the use of traditional languages and has incorporated traditional languages into all key strategic and organisational planning documents.	The TSRA is well positioned to assist in the development and implementation of language learning strategies in the Torres Strait region. However, additional resources would need to be secured for a concerted approach in the region to overcome pressures faced by Torres Strait languages. TSRA would welcome discussion and feedback on how it could best align existing Culture, Art and Heritage resources to add value to outcomes sought by all levels of government, including the not-for-profit and private sector.
2. 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	• The Maintenance of Indigenous Languages and Records program, administered by the Office for the Arts, is investing $9.6 million in 2011-12 on 67 activities around Australia supporting the revival and maintenance of Indigenous languages. • Increase use of new technology to	National Indigenous Languages Survey 2005 identified both key traditional Torres Strait languages as critically endangered. The TSRA supports the use of new technologies to broaden the impact of language maintenance with particular	TSRA recommends a review of funding arrangements for strategies to address endangered languages in the Torres Strait region. This will ensure that the Torres Strait region is able to both identify gaps and maximise the benefits derived through integrating existing resources to meet the region's language needs.

much as possible.	broaden the impact of language maintenance and revival activities by local community Indigenous language centres. • 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. • Consider tax deductible status to Indigenous language organisations through the Register of Cultural Organisations for maintaining and reviving Indigenous languages.	reference to the number of Torres Strait Islanders not currently residing in the region.	
3. Working with Languages to Close the Gap: In areas where Indigenous languages are being spoken fully and passed on, making sure that government recognises and works with these languages in its agenda to Close the Gap.	• Given the centrality of language to strong Indigenous culture, and the broader social benefits of functional and resilient families and communities, better targeting support for Indigenous languages as part of a broader national focus on Indigenous culture generally, will contribute to the overall well-being of Indigenous communities. • COAG has committed $38.6 million towards interpreting and translating services as part of the new Remote Service Delivery sites. The Remote Service Delivery National Partnership (RSD NP) provides for the	The TSRA notes in particular the 2008/09 COAG commitment of $38.6 million towards interpreting and translating services as part of the Remote Service Delivery sites. However, the Remote Service Delivery National Partnership (RSD NP) only provides for the strengthening of interpreting and translating services in response to local needs *in priority locations*. Priority RSD locations have not included communities in the Torres Strait region. The TSRA also acknowledges that in addition to the employment of interpreters in each RSD location, the	The TSRA recommends the establishment of a pool of Torres Strait Islander language specialists/linguists, translators and interpreters in order to enhance strategies that aim to Close the Gap. The TSRA seeks to work in partnership with the State Government in implementing community based language programs through language specific funding opportunities and/or programs throughout the Torres Strait. The TSRA would also welcome an invitation to participate in the development of national framework for the effective supply and use of

	strengthening of interpreting and translating services in response to local needs in each of the priority locations. In addition to the employment of interpreters in each location, the Commonwealth is responsible for working with the States and Northern Territory to introduce a national framework for the effective supply and use of Indigenous language interpreters and translators. It will include protocols for the use of interpreters and translators.
	
	• Components of the proposed national framework include:
	
	    - development and strengthening of Indigenous interpreting services through establishing mentor/coordinator positions, providing base salary funding for interpreters and administrative support of interpreters;
	
	    - training and accrediting Indigenous interpreters – development of nationally consistent curriculum material for training and provision of training leading to accreditation and expertise in particular subject areas;
		Australian Government is responsible for working with the States and Northern Territory to introduce a national framework for the effective supply and use of Indigenous language interpreters and translators. The TSRA would welcome closer collaboration on this important endeavour.	Indigenous language interpreters and translators

	- increasing supply of Indigenous interpreters through development and establishment of a national recruitment and retention strategy, with localised flexibility; - increasing demand for interpreters through increased training for government and non-government employees working in relevant locations; translation of government information products. • Consideration could be given to forming a National Reference Group of Experts to advise on future directions of policy on Indigenous interpreters. Each of the components would involve contributions from the Commonwealth and from each of the jurisdictions.		
4. **Strengthening Pride in Identity and Culture: To restore the use of rarely spoken or unspoken Indigenous languages to the extent that the current language environment allows.**	• 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. • Through the Indigenous Contemporary Music Action Plan, support music in Indigenous	An acknowledged and accepted regional authoritative or peak body for language and culture in the Torres Strait does not currently exist.	The TSRA encourages agencies with responsibility for delivering activities outlined under this policy objective to provide regular updates on project progress to the TSRA in order to ensure greater coordination in cultural maintenance activities and reduce duplication. In particular, TSRA will seek to develop closer working relationships, in terms of policy development and implementation with the Office for the Arts.

	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. • Potential collaboration with the Songroom Project, Sing Australia, Australian community Business Network and Foundation for Young Australians to work with communities where languages have been lost to promote language revival. • Encouraging more grass-roots collaboration between language learning programs and Stolen Generation members and their organisations.		The establishment of this body may be possible through TSRA's CAH initiatives such as the Gab Titui Cultural Centre. Along with the three incorporated and independent art centres currently based in the Torres Strait, being Badhulgaw Kuthinaw Mudh on Badu Island, Erub Erwer Meta located on Erub (Darnley) Island and Ngalmun Lagau Minaral which is based on Moa Island in the community of Kubin. Additional resources would need to be secured in order to strengthen the networks between these centres to undertake the functions of a peak body.
5. Supporting Indigenous Language Programs in Schools: To support and maintain the teaching and learning of Indigenous languages in Australian schools.	• The Government recently commissioned the Indigenous Language Programs in Australian Schools – A Way Forward report, which revealed that between 2006 and 2007 over 16,000 Indigenous students and 13,000 non-Indigenous students located in 260 Australian schools were involved in Indigenous language programs, covering over 80	The TSRA will continue to support non-curriculum based traditional language and cultural activities and align existing CAH funding guidelines to support improved educational outcomes for Indigenous students in the Torres Strait.	The TSRA is supportive of the language programs within schools.

	different Indigenous languages. • Significant funding for languages education is being provided to the states and territories through the National Education Agreement for languages, allowing jurisdictions flexibility to determine how funding is allocated. Funding can be used to support and maintain Indigenous language programs operating in government schools. • $56.4 million is also being provided over 2009 to 2012 through the Schools Assistance Act 2008 to support the teaching of languages, including Australian Indigenous languages, in non-government schools.	