



Australian Education Union to contribute to inquiry into Indigenous languages

The Australian Education Union (AEU) will appear before the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs on Thursday 24 November, in relation to the Committee's inquiry into language learning in Indigenous communities. The AEU strongly supports the provision or reinstatement of bilingual education in communities where English is not the first language. It advocates that "enabling Indigenous children to be strong in their own cultures and languages is necessary to ensure high mainstream educational outcomes, including fluency in Standard Australian English."

In its submission to the Committee's inquiry, the AEU states that "international research on bilingual education provides clear evidence that children learn best in their first language, particularly in the early years of school, until they get stronger in their second language." The AEU urges all Australian governments to recognise this evidence and to provide quality bilingual education programs in communities where Standard Australian English is not the first language. The AEU says that without "sound English-as-a-second-language curricula, teaching methods and trained teachers", children will not learn Standard English effectively and "will have a slower start on learning other subjects." The AEU also warns that without appropriate bilingual education programs, many Indigenous teachers and communities will be alienated from schools and children will see their traditional languages as having no value. The AEU says that while it may seem self evident, "you cannot teach children to read effectively if they don't understand the language of the reading materials."

The Chair of the Committee Mr Shayne Neumann MP said: "the Committee looks forward to hearing from the Australian Education Union on measures to improve the learning of languages, including English, in Indigenous communities. If we are going to close the gap in Indigenous people's educational attainment, we need the engagement of high quality and suitably trained teachers delivering appropriate education programs." Mr Neumann added that "the Committee's inquiry will greatly benefit from the contribution of the Australian Education Union, whose members are working at the coalface on this critical issue."

The hearing will be broadcast live from Committee Room 1R2, Parliament House, Canberra from approximately 12:15pm on Thursday 24 November via:

<http://webcast.aph.gov.au/livebroadcasting/>

Information about the inquiry including the program can be found at the inquiry's website: www.aph.gov.au/languages

For media comment, please contact the Committee Chair Mr Shayne Neumann on (07) 3201 5300.

For background information, contact the Committee Secretariat on (02) 62774559 or atsia.reps@aph.gov.au