7

Preserving languages for future generations

7.1   Throughout the inquiry the Committee heard evidence about how critical the recording, storage and access of language materials was to both the maintenance and revival of Indigenous languages. These language materials comprise a range of different formats, including audio and video recordings, word lists, grammars, dictionaries and historical documents.

7.2   Language materials can be used to develop resources to ensure the transmission of languages and cultural knowledge from one generation to the next (for example, in children's books), or to recover lost or 'sleeping' languages. Therefore, good record keeping is integral for preserving languages for future generations.

7.3   The Committee heard evidence that the digitisation of language materials is vital both to preserving languages in the long term, and to ensuring that resources are accessible for people wishing to maintain or revive their Indigenous languages.

7.4   This chapter places an emphasis on enhancing networks as a practical method to ensure that Indigenous languages are preserved for the future, and examines best practice examples of good record keeping, including the sharing of new technologies to document languages and training. The chapter examines the range of evidence the Committee received in relation to the preservation of Indigenous languages, including the important role of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) as the largest repository for Indigenous languages material in Australia.

Enhancing existing networks

7.5   Currently the Indigenous Languages Support (ILS) program is the main source of funding for Indigenous languages maintenance and revival, and therefore forms a vital hub in the network of organisations and individuals who are engaged in language work.

7.6   The Office for the Arts has a network of Project Officers, which consists of staff based in Canberra and National Network offices located around the country. The role of network staff is:

> to act as the first point of contact for stakeholders within the regions, conduct detailed assessment of funding applications against the current guidelines, undertake risk assessments, manage funding agreements with organisations (including the monitoring and progression of activities) and to assist organisations, if needed, to meet reporting requirements. [1]

7.7   As ILS is one of a number of Indigenous programs run through the Office for the Arts, most staff have multiple responsibilities and do not work solely on administering ILS.

7.8   The Committee received evidence about the importance of regional language centres and other organisations that support the language maintenance and revival work of a number of communities, and who work to enhance a growing network.

7.9   For example, the Many Rivers Aboriginal Language Centre (MRALC) in NSW offer support for Aboriginal communities who want to revitalise their languages. MRALC currently supports seven languages along the NSW north coast. MRALC commented that they:

> work closely with Elders, and local language, culture and educational organisations to conduct research, publish accessible grammars–dictionaries and develop engaging educational courses and resources.[2]

7.10   The Mobile Language Team from the University of Adelaide provides similar support to Aboriginal communities in South Australia, particularly for language programs in Wirangu (in Ceduna) and Ngarrindjeri (in the Coorong region). According to the Mobile Language Team:

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1   Office for the Arts, *Submission 127a*, p. 4.
2   Muurrbay–Many Rivers Aboriginal Language Centre, *Submission 9,* Attachment 1, p. 1.

> These programs are strongly driven by community, and are seen as key initiatives that contribute to a strong, distinctive and cohesive cultural identity, and that have resulted in a set of teaching materials that will form the basis for cultural education activities for generations to come.[3]

7.11 Another excellent example of an organisation working within a region to support a range of communities to preserve their languages was the Papulu Apparr-Kari Aboriginal Corporation based in Tenant Creek. The centre supports the 16 language groups of the Barkly region of the Northern Territory.[4]

7.12 In the linguistically diverse Kimberley region of Western Australia, the Kimberley Language Resource Centre (KLRC) supports communities to provide assistance with language continuation for around 30 languages that are still spoken.[5] Similarly, the Wangka Maya Pilbara Aboriginal Language Centre supports the 31 languages of the Pilbara area of Western Australia.[6]

7.13 The Victorian Aboriginal Corporation for Languages (VACL) is the peak body for Aboriginal languages in Victoria and 'supports the operation of five Community Language Programs who work locally to research and develop language resources for the community'.[7]

7.14 The Committee heard evidence from groups that were formed to help facilitate the networking of Aboriginal language centres and projects, provide training and to provide an advocacy role. For example, the Eastern States Aboriginal Languages Group (ESALG) 'was established in 2008 to identify and address issues which are common to Eastern Australian Aboriginal Language communities'.[8] The ESALG is:

> looking at ways to support community language programs, and to set priorities for the effective use of the resources available and the engagement of a wide range of organisations to support the shared goals.[9]

7.15 Another key organisation is the Resource Network for Linguistic Diversity (RNLD); a not for profit organisation with over 650 members who 'are

3   The Mobile Language Team, *Submission 90*, p. 2.
4   Papulu Apparr-kari Aboriginal Corporation, *Submission 49*, p. 1.
5   Kimberley Language Resource Centre, *Submission 38*, p. 1.
6   Wangka Maya Pilbara Aboriginal Language Centre, *Submission 78*, p. 1.
7   Victorian Aboriginal Corporation for Languages (VACL), *Submission 152*, p. 1.
8   Eastern States Aboriginal Languages Group (ESALG), *Submission 25*, p. 1.
9   ESALG, *Submission 25*, p. 1.

working at all levels nationally and internationally to support and sustain Indigenous languages through diverse documentation and revitalisation activities'. [10] RNLD supports language activities through /the provision of training, resource-sharing, networking, and advocacy. [11]

7.16   A key role these types of organisations play is facilitating the networking of people working with Indigenous languages to share ideas, experiences and skills. The ILS program funds the biennial National Pulima Indigenous Language and Technology Conference, which has been organised by the Miromaa Aboriginal Language and Technology Centre. In describing the importance of the conference, Faith Baisden from the ESALG said that 'apart from all of the information that people get to share, it is picking each other's brains and getting moral support to go back out to your little centre and do what you do'.[12]

The Federation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Languages and Culture

7.17   The Federation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Languages and Culture (FATSILC) was established in 1991 as the peak body for community based Indigenous language programs in Australia.

7.18   FATSILC's objectives include:

- Ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages are considered as core issue in the development of all policy and legislation relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australia
- Support and the maintenance of cultural practices and traditions so that they will survive for future generations
- Proved information and advice to government, non-government agencies and the general community relation to language issues
- Contribute to the development of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language policies and programs
- Provide consultative support to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language management committees, language centres, community groups including individuals, families and communities
- Promote the recognition and understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language skills, experience and

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10   RNLD, *Submission 130*, p. 2.

11   RNLD, *Submission 130*, p .2.

12   F Baisden, *Committee Hansard*, Brisbane, 6 October 2011, p. 20.

knowledge in languages, culture, arts and heritage through educational and employment programs, and

■ Encourage the training and development of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language workers and specialist language speakers.[13]

7.19   In previous years, FATSILC was funded to publish the *Voice of the Land* magazine, which provided a forum for people working with Indigenous languages to share 'program news, publications and language research, initiatives and conferences, cultural events and displays and any actions on policy matters and items of general interest to all.' [14]

7.20   Previously, FATSILC received funding through the ILS program but that funding ceased. As a consequence, the organisation has recently undergone a significant restructure and has reduced the number of elected board members from 17 to nine.[15]

7.21   The Chair of FATSILC, Mrs Barbara McGillivray, acknowledged that the formation and operation of FATSILC had been a difficult process and pointed to governance issues as being a major hurdle for the organisation:

> FATSILC I suppose has had its ups and downs, if I can say that. It has never been successful in the sense of having a national manager. It just did not work for some reason, and it has taken us quite a while to get to the stage where we were at last year, prior to 18 June, to push towards trying to get a restructure, because we knew that our board was too big. We had a board of 17 directors and 17 shadow directors, and it was just too hard for us to achieve good outcomes. It has been really hard trying to build our organisation up. [16]

7.22   Mrs McGillivray said that the restructure of FATSILC has resulted in a shift in focus for the organisation, towards advocating for communities who are working to preserve or revitalise their languages. [17]

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13   Federation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Languages and Culture (FATSILC), *Submission 97*, p. 2.

14   FATSILC, *Submission 97*, p. 2.

15   B McGillivray, FATSILC, *Committee Hansard*, Broome, 30 April 2012, p. 18.

16   B McGillivray, FATSILC, *Committee Hansard*, Broome, 30 April 2012, p. 20.

17   B McGillivray, FATSILC, *Committee Hansard*, Broome, 30 April 2012, p. 20.

National Indigenous Languages Centre

7.23   The National Indigenous Languages Survey (NILS) report recommended a feasibility study to be undertaken into the establishment of a national Indigenous languages centre. According to the NILS report:

> The functions of a National Indigenous Languages Centre would include high-level documentation of the languages and their situation, policy development and advice, a forum for Indigenous views, and either training of language workers or close liaison with a body or bodies carrying out this training.[18]

7.24   The 2005 NILS report stated that the feasibility study would need to work with key stakeholders, including:

- Relevant government departments led by the Language and Culture Branch (now located in the Office for the Arts).

- FATSILC

- AIATSIS, and

- Representatives of regional language centres and people working with Indigenous languages.

7.25   The *NILS report 2005* asserted that:

> Discussions on the establishment of a National Indigenous Languages Centre should consider the option of stronger formal links between these existing agencies as a key first stage in the development of the proposed centre. [19]

7.26   Part of the Commonwealth Government's National Indigenous Languages policy[20] is to conduct a feasibility study of a national Indigenous languages centre, although no action is being undertaken presently to initiate this study. Furthermore, it is difficult to determine what the feasibility study would comprise.

7.27   The Committee heard that both British Columbia (Canada) and New Zealand have centralised bodies dealing with Indigenous language maintenance and preservation.

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18   Office for the Arts, 'National Indigenous Languages Survey Report 2005' <www.arts. gov.au?sites/default/files/pdfs/nils-report-2005.pdf> accessed 3 July 2012, p. 107.

19   Office for the Arts, 'National Indigenous Languages Survey Report 2005' <www.arts. gov.au?sites/default/files/pdfs/nils-report-2005.pdf> accessed 3 July 2012, p. 107.

20   Office for the Arts, 'Indigenous Languages – A National Approach 2009', <www.arts.gov.au/indigenous/languages>, accessed 3 July 2012.

7.28   The Committee received evidence that the provincial government of British Columbia was supporting Indigenous languages maintenance and revitalisation through the development of a centralised government agency. Professor Lorna Williams told the Committee that, in British Columbia:

> The First Peoples Heritage, Language and Culture Council is a provincial Crown agency and so it is an agency of the Crown. But all of the council members and the directors and all of the advisory are first nations or Indigenous...

> It is financial resources, but also the fact that it is one of the Crown agencies of the province, so there is reporting to parliament and it is supported by legislation. That it is part of the government is what also makes the difference.[21]

7.29   The Australian Human Rights Commission referred to positive changes in language use in New Zealand following the establishment of the Maori Language Commission, which is 'an example of the successes which can be achieved by providing a framework for a coordinated response to Indigenous language policy and promotion'.[22] While acknowledging the significant differences in the Indigenous language situations between New Zealand and Australia, the Commission recommended that:

> in consultation with the National Congress of Australia's First People, a national Indigenous languages commission be established to monitor and regulate the maintenance and revitalisation of Australian Indigenous languages. [23]

7.30   Several organisations supported the development and funding of a national agency or body in Australia. For example, Australians for Native Title and Reconciliation (ANTaR) said that 'the establishment of such a body is an essential step that goes hand-in-hand with the creation of an effective national policy framework'.[24] ANTaR proposed that the establishment of a national centre could enable:

- the development of a consistent policy framework
- more effective use of the considerable expertise in Indigenous languages across Australia
- greater consistency in the administration of funding, and

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21   L Williams, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 15 September 2011, p. 2.
22   Australian Human Rights Commission, *Submission 31a*, p. 4.
23   Australian Human Rights Commission, *Submission 31a*, p. 4.
24   ANTaR, *Submission 23*, p. 108.

■ improved quality control in the delivery of programs, and more effective, transparent monitoring of their effectiveness.[25]

7.31   According to the former Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, Mr Tom Calma, such an organisation would have 'its eye on the big picture and can apply expertise to a complex language environment'.[26]

7.32   The National Congress of Australia's First Peoples (the Congress) expressed its 'disappointment that the commitment to progress a National Indigenous Languages Centre has not been acted upon by the Australian Government'.[27] The Congress urged the Committee to consider recommending the development of a national centre.

7.33   Conversely, Ms Sally Basser from the Office for the Arts did not see a need for a new national centre, and said that:

> our view would be that there is an existing body called AIATSIS which we fund to do a lot of language work. If one wanted to deem something or create something as a national language centre or service, one would build on what is already there with AIATSIS. There is a wealth of research and content in that organisation. It could perform that role in the future. There is an organisation that we have. We do not need a new one.[28]

7.34   In response, the Congress urged caution on the potential expansion of the role of AIATSIS:

> Congress notes that AIATSIS is a Commonwealth statutory authority within the Department of Industry, Innovation, Science, Research and Tertiary Education, therefore our concerns about independence from Government, and emphasis on community control, apply equally here. Any proposal to expand AIATSIS (or indeed another existing organisation) would need to be carefully considered after consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language experts and communities and would also require the allocation of substantial additional funding to ensure that the organisation can appropriately manage an expanded mandate.[29]

25   ANTaR, *Submission 23*, p. 8.

26   Australian Human Rights Commission, *Social Justice Report 2009*, 2010, p. 72.

27   National Congress of Australia's First Peoples, *Submission 139a*, p. 4.

28   S Basser, Office for the Arts, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 22 March 2012, p. 7.

29   National Congress of Australia's First Peoples, *Submission 139a*, p. 12.

7.35   Mr John Hobson was supportive of the idea of a national centre but urged caution because he thought 'it could be dangerous if it was poorly implemented or if it was set up in such a way that it was a controlling entity rather than a facilitating entity'.[30]

7.36   Mr Hobson commended the work of regional language centres, but said that 'there is a great need for national leadership in the field' and that 'often there is a gulf of information about what works and what does not work'.[31]

7.37   Mr Daryn McKenny's idea for a national centre placed an emphasis on empowering Indigenous people and equipping them with skills to maintain or revive their languages. Mr McKenny said that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people:

> need to join together. We do need to support each other. We need to be in a position to be able to recognise the diversity which does exist. This type of vision which I see for how we are evolving cannot all take place at government or institute level as such.[32]

7.38   The ESALG supported the development of state based language centres in providing specialist support for local language activities, and said that:

> the funding and resourcing of state based language centres has been considered by some to be an effective method of utilising high cost services and skills, for use on a needs basis by regional programs. These services could include linguist skills, administrative support, publication and resource preparation, mobile language teams, recording, negotiation with Government agencies, training and skills development.[33]

7.39   As Chapter 3 mentioned, the NSW Government has established the Centre for Aboriginal Languages Coordination and Development (CALCD). Mr James Christian from Aboriginal Affairs NSW said that the Indigenous community representatives that comprise the NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group will 'direct language work priorities for the centre. The centre will provide informed advice to the NSW government on the development of a revised Aboriginal languages policy and strategic plan'.[34]

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30   J Hobson, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 13 October 2012, p. 4.
31   J Hobson, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 13 October 2012, p. 4.
32   D McKenny, *Committee Hansard*, Newcastle, 9 September 2011, p. 12.
33   ESALG, *Submission 25*, p. 6.
34   J Christian, Aboriginal Affairs NSW, *Committee Hansard*, Sydney, 18 November 2011, p. 13.

7.40   Aboriginal Affairs NSW supported the development and funding of state
         based language centres. It urged the Committee to consider the
         Commonwealth Government working through the Council of Australian
         Governments (COAG) to establish:

>   State Aboriginal Language Centres to coordinate language work
>   and priorities across the State, and to identify and support regions
>   and communities not supported by a Regional Language Centre.[35]

7.41   In addition, Aboriginal Affairs NSW, proposed that the Commonwealth
         Government develop support through COAG for:

>   the establishment of targeted regional language centres to
>   coordinate and provide on the ground and hands on support to
>   Aboriginal communities working to revive or maintain their
>   languages. Aboriginal communities require sustained assistance to
>   identify language recordings and primary resources, develop
>   language learning materials and implement language learning
>   strategies. [36]

Committee comment

7.42   The Committee praises the work of all organisations, communities and
         individuals who are striving, often with very limited resources, to
         preserve Indigenous languages for future generations.

7.43   The Committee understands that FATSILC has had a difficult time in
         providing a national advocacy role for communities working with their
         languages, and acknowledges the pragmatic decision of FATSILC to
         restructure its organisation.

7.44   The Committee is not convinced that the creation of a national centre
         would work to better support the maintenance and revival of Indigenous
         languages. The Committee has reservations about adding another layer of
         bureaucracy to a network of organisations and people who are working to
         preserve their languages from the ground up. The Committee views a 'top
         down' hierarchical arrangement between a new national centre and the
         pre-existing, grass-roots network as inherently complicated, potentially
         wasteful in terms of the limited resources dedicated to Indigenous
         languages, and potentially damaging for programs that currently are
         working well.

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35   Aboriginal Affairs NSW, *Submission 98*, p. 3.
36   Aboriginal Affairs NSW, *Submission 98*, p. 3.

7.45   The Committee believes that effort should be focussed on enhancing existing networks and organisations to improve their capacity to conduct language preservation and revitalisation work. As recommended later in this chapter, the Committee sees benefit in funding AIATSIS to play an enhanced role in archiving, research and support for Indigenous languages.

7.46   The Committee notes that the ILS program is a key element in the network of organisations working with Indigenous languages in Australia. The Committee encourages closer links between ILS, its network, and AIATSIS. The Committee also encourages the sharing of and access to language materials developed with the support of ILS program funding.

7.47   In reviewing the evidence on the work that is presently being undertaken to preserve Indigenous languages, the Committee concludes that successful Indigenous language maintenance and revival activities share a number of important characteristics. They:

- can access appropriate funding

- are community driven by people that are passionate about working together to preserve their languages

- are integrated into a range of other cultural activities that emphasise the importance of the transmission of cultural knowledge

- can draw upon language materials and a solid knowledge base (including having access to linguistic expertise)

- have access to appropriate technology, and training in its use

- are integrated into a network of support, and

- can draw upon existing resources and apply them to a local context.

7.48   The Committee sees great merit in continued support for regional language centres as a way to provide practical and specialist support for people wanting to maintain or revive their Indigenous languages.

7.49   The Committee strongly encourages states and territories to take a regional responsibility for funding local language centres based on the principles outlined above. The Committee is encouraged by the efforts of the NSW Government in this regard, and believes that there is substantial scope and opportunity for other jurisdictions to play a similar role in providing community support for Indigenous languages.

7.50   The Committee has recommended an increase in funding of the ILS program to continue to support language projects across Australia.

However, the Committee firmly believes it is not governments' responsibility wholly to fund language centres or language projects.

7.51   Solid foundations in both Indigenous languages and English must be built through partnerships between governments and communities.

7.52   The Committee considers that recommendations in this report work towards opening up market opportunities for language centres through increasing the use of interpreting services, opening opportunities for philanthropic and private sector contributions, creating demand for the production of resources and collaboration with schools.

7.53   The Committee's long term vision is for community owned and operated language centres, which respond to the increased demand for Indigenous languages services and for these services to be valued nationwide.

Access to resources

7.54   As outlined in Chapter 2, of the 250 Australian Indigenous languages used at colonisation, it is estimated only about 18 remain spoken by significant populations. Some languages are spoken by only a few people and have been revitalised to be taught and spoken once more. Other languages have an active speaking population but not necessarily a documented record of the language.

7.55   The Committee received evidence of the need for better knowledge and skill sharing within the network of people working to preserve their Indigenous languages. Mr Hobson said that 'to some extent one can feel like there are a lot of people rushing around with fire extinguishers, because it is an emergency and people are doing whatever they think or hope might work'.[37]

Preserving languages through technology and training

7.56   The Committee heard that two of the important ways that the government can enhance existing networks are through the development and sharing of new technologies to preserve languages, and the training of communities to use those technologies and other best practices in their language work.

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37   J Hobson, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 13 October 2012, p. 4.

7.57   For example, Mr McKenny, the General Manager of the Miromaa
        Aboriginal Language and Technology Centre, said that:

> Aboriginal people today have struggled in finding the tools and
> the training to be able to assist them, to empower them to do
> language conservation themselves. We have had that struggle. We
> have had that problem ourselves. It has been through our learning,
> our experiences and our mistakes that we have set about creating
> those tools, using technology to assist us. [38]

7.58   In terms of new technologies, the Committee was impressed by the quality
        and usefulness of the Miromaa computer program and the training and
        support that was provided by the Miromaa Aboriginal Language and
        Technology Centre.[39] The Committee heard evidence that the Miromaa
        program is an easy to use database that helps people working with
        languages gather, organise, analyse and produce material to aid in
        language work.

7.59   Mr McKenny, said that:

> Our work in language conservation, documentation and training
> is not only recognised nationally but internationally, as not just
> necessary but inspirational, empowering and crucial in equipping
> Aboriginal people with the skills needed to rightfully manage the
> many aspects of caring for our languages.[40]

7.60   Mr McKenny said that the Centre is supporting over 100 language based
        activities nationally and is providing training in locations throughout
        Australia. The Miromaa software is available to Aboriginal and Torres
        Strait Islander people to use for free. Mr McKenny commented that:

> the six dialects of the Torres Strait Islands are being digitised for
> the first time by the people up at Thursday Island at Tagai State
> College. We sent a team of our staff up there. They sat with the
> people in the Torres Strait Islands to give them training. They are
> now digitising it. We are working closely with the Victorian
> Aboriginal Corporation for Languages based in Melbourne. The 38
> languages of Victoria are now being digitised, captured, for the
> first time through the aid of what we have developed. [41]

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38   D McKenny, *Committee Hansard*, Newcastle, 9 September 2011, p. 11.
39   D McKenny, *Committee Hansard*, Newcastle, 9 September 2011, pp. 9-15; N Hatfield, *Committee Hansard*, Brisbane, 6 October 2011, p. 10; RNLD, *Submission 130*, p. 6.
40   D McKenny, *Committee Hansard*, Newcastle, 9 September 2011, p. 9.
41   D McKenny, *Committee Hansard*, Newcastle, 9 September 2011, p. 11.

7.61   As previously mentioned, the Miromaa Aboriginal Language and
        Technology Centre organises and hosts the biennial National Pulima
        Indigenous Language and Technology Conference, and has developed the
        'Our Languages' website.[42] Mr McKenny described the website as a way
        to increase public awareness of the importance of language activities by
        'showcasing or giving all language activities around Australia an
        opportunity to have a presence, to tell their story and to share their
        experiences'. [43]

7.62   Dr. William Fogarty and Dr. Inge Kral said that technologies are driving
        language use in Indigenous communities more broadly. They provided
        the Committee with evidence that these activities were being driven by
        Indigenous youth:

>   Indigenous youth in remote communities are engaging with new
>   digital technologies at a rapid rate. They are demonstrating their
>   competence in this domain, particularly by engaging in creative
>   cultural theatre, festival, multimedia and music production or
>   digital cultural heritage projects. Such activities commonly
>   incorporate Indigenous languages (e.g. recording songs in
>   language on GarageBand or ProTools computer software, or
>   translating and transcribing language subtitles in film or other
>   audiovisual recordings). Youth with computer and media skills
>   are also taking on roles archiving and documenting local
>   community knowledge in databases of heritage materials where
>   repatriated items are enriched with annotations often in
>   Indigenous language.[44]

7.63   Ray Kelly Jnr. conveyed similar sentiments in Newcastle, saying that:

>   ... access to technology I believe is going to be a big thing for our
>   languages. It is a hassle to get any young people these days off
>   computers, off Facebook, off any type of technology. I feel that if
>   we can incorporate our language into those types of mediums we
>   will be fine.[45]

7.64   The roll out of the National Broadband Network (NBN) was greeted with
        optimism by Dr Nick Thieberger, who said that:

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42   Miromaa Aboriginal Language and Technology Centre, 'Our Languages',
     accessed 22 August 2012.

43   D McKenny, *Committee Hansard*, Newcastle, 9 September 2011, p. 10.

44   I Kraal and B Fogarty, *Submission 20*, p. 9.

45   R Kelly Jnr, *Committee Hansard*, Newcastle, 9 September 2011, p. 3.

> with the rollout of the NBN I think we have to see that there is going to be a lot more access in remote communities to repositories of information and we have to make sure that those repositories have good, digitised information and that it is locatable so that people can locate records of their languages.[46]

7.65   The Indigenous Remote Communication Association (IRCA) were cautious about the benefits of the NBN to remote communities. They said that:

> For remote Indigenous people, the best communications technologies enable audio-visual (face-to-face) communications where verbal language, sign and body language can all be conveyed. Text-based communications (email, letters, websites etc) is not appropriate for many remote Indigenous people. The NBN model of satellite-delivered broadband (asymmetrical, high latency, shared contention) to remote Australia is likely to limit the types of broadband applications such as videoconferencing, tele-health & interactive teaching applications and ICTV. Further, it will not support the expansion of mobile coverage to remote Indigenous communities. [47]

7.66   IRCA gave evidence that improved access to technology more broadly in Indigenous communities was needed. They said that:

> Beyond the rollout of broadband infrastructure, there is a need for improved IT access facilities, post-school training, and development of appropriate internet services and relevant content.[48]

7.67   In terms of training, the Committee was particularly impressed by the work of Mr McKenny and RNLD. RNLD has developed the Documenting and Revitalising Indigenous Languages program (DRIL). The DRIL program aims to:

> increase the participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in sustainable language work, and strengthen the ability of individuals, family groups, community groups, and Indigenous organisations to develop, run and manage their own language projects independently.[49]

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46   N Thieberger, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 16 February 2012, p. 2.
47   Indigenous Remote Communication Association (IRCA), *Submission 68a*, p. 3.
48   IRCA, *Submission 68a*, p. 3.
49   RNLD, *Submission 130*, p. 2.

7.68   While DRIL is 'designed to complement the existing Indigenous languages programs provided in educational institutions', according to RNLD the program also:

> facilitates the stronger use of facilities such as AIATSIS and the National Library through training community members in the use of searchable archives, the rights to materials and the methods to access them. DRIL bridges between community language workers and linguists who aspire to offer more practical assistance to projects. Such partnerships are critical to the sustainability of language projects. [50]

Committee comment

7.69   The Committee commends those people and organisations that are drawing on new technologies and developing training techniques to empower communities to preserve their languages. The Committee sees this as a vital element in improving the capacity of the existing network to carry out the important work they are undertaking, and to enhance those skills in the future.

7.70   The Committee considers new technologies are the way forward for enabling people, particularly young people, to gain skills and knowledge in Indigenous language maintenance and revival.

7.71   The Committee notes that National Indigenous Television (NITV) is now part of the Special Broadcasting Service (SBS) family of digital, free-to-air channels. NITV is launching a new dedicated Indigenous television channel that every Australian household will be able to watch.

7.72   The Committee commends this move and the positive flow on effects this will have for a wider recognition of the value of Indigenous languages in Australia. The Committee is of the view that improving the exposure of the Australian public to Indigenous languages and culture will have significant positive effects for reconciliation and community wellbeing.

The Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies

7.73   AIATSIS is Australia's leading research, collecting and publishing institution in the field of Australian Indigenous studies. AIATSIS is a statutory authority that operates under the *AIATSIS Act 1989*.

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50   RNLD, *Submission 130*, p. 9.

7.74   AIATSIS's Library and Audiovisual Archive (AVA) are responsible for managing Australia's most extensive collections of printed, audio and visual materials on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, history and societies. To date, AIATSIS has been acting as a 'de facto national archive for language material'.[51]

7.75   In 2009, the Library's 'Australian Indigenous Languages Collection' was placed on the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) Memory of the World register to recognise its extensive and unique holdings.[52]

7.76   However, AIATSIS is neither required under its legislated function to carry out the comprehensive collection and storage of Indigenous language material, nor is it currently funded to do so. According to AIATSIS:

> The fact that the current language collection functions as a national archive is largely due to the foresight of several generations of the collections staff, and also due to the research conducted on Indigenous languages by AIATSIS researchers and researchers funded by the AIATSIS Research Grants Program (which was suspended for the 2012-2013 financial year due to the lack of resources).[53]

7.77   Under a three year funding agreement through the Indigenous Languages Support (ILS) program in 2010-11, AIATSIS has established an Indigenous Languages Unit. Under the agreement, the unit will:

> be the national coordinator linking Indigenous language organisations, educational and research institutions and government agencies. Its new staff will also run the second National Indigenous Languages Survey (NILS2) and community language workshops, and will work to improve communications and dissemination of information about Indigenous languages.[54]

7.78   Of concern to John Hobson from the Koori Centre was the decision by AIATSIS to discontinue its research grants scheme, which has been funding 'high quality linguistic, anthropological and archaeological

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51   AIATSIS, *Submission 154*, p. 3.
52   AIATSIS, *Submission 154*, p. 3.
53   AIATSIS, *Submission 154*, p. 3.
54   AIATSIS, 'Annual Report 2010-11' <www.aiatsis.gov.au/corporate/docs/AR10-11/Output%201-Research.pdf> accessed 24 July 2012.

research nationally for the last two decades'.[55] According to AIATSIS, the difficult decision was made because:

> AIATSIS funding from Government has fallen steadily over the past decade, in inflation-adjusted terms. Well argued submissions to Government over a number of past budgetary cycles seeking increased base funding, and/or exemption from the efficiency dividend, have been unsuccessful. We have now passed the point where all legislated functions, which relate to both our research and our related archival collection responsibilities, can be delivered, and in this context Council took the view that decisive action was called for.

> Whilst Council noted, and appreciates, the Government's decision to exempt AIATSIS from the additional 2.5% efficiency dividend in 2012-13, this will have no positive impact on ongoing funding.[56]

7.79   John Hobson thought that this:

> dramatically evidences the tenuous state of funding available to Australian language conservation and revitalisation and suggests an urgent need for the establishment of a substantial and ongoing funding base to support research into Indigenous languages and cultures into the future, as well as a significant boost in the funding levels for AIATSIS itself. [57]

7.80   The Committee heard concerns that the centralisation of language materials at AIATSIS made it difficult for people in communities to access that material. The Centre for Indigenous Technology Information and Engineering Solutions (CITIES) said that AIATSIS' rigorous protocols on accessing its resources were onerous for many people and communities. CITIES said that the process of getting appropriate permissions to use resources can 'drag on too long and the community loses faith that they will be able to access their resources'.[58] CITIES said that:

> The protocols around knowledge sharing hinder the process of returning these to the communities who are related to the speakers through language or kinship. While available in the AIATSIS

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55   Koori Centre, University of Sydney, *Submission 7a*, p. 1.

56   AIATSIS, *About AIATSIS Research Grants*, < www.aiatsis.gov.au/research/ grants/grants.html>, accessed 27 July 2012.

57   Koori Centre, University of Sydney, *Submission 7a*, p. 2.

58   Centre for Indigenous Technology Information and Engineering Solutions (CITIES), *Submission 24a*, p. 3.

audiovisual library, Indigenous people are denied access by distance and the lack of information about what is there. [59]

7.81   Similarly the Eastern States Aboriginal Languages Group (ESALG) commented that 'community members feel a sense of disconnection from the collecting institutions in which much of their historical language information is held', and that there was a 'lack of staff within these institutions to support community in research ventures'.[60]

7.82   In response, AIATSIS detailed its protocols to accessing material:

> The AIATSIS Library and the Audiovisual Archive (AVA) provide access to materials in its collection in accordance with:
>
> - The Copyright Act 1968 (mainly S48-S53);
> - The AIATSIS Act 1989 (section 41(1) which requires individual access and use agreements with owners or their delegates as specified in deposit agreements and section 41 (2) which recognises the possible existence of sensitive material in the collection other than that covered by section 41(1);
> - The Privacy Act 1988;
> - The AIATSIS Audiovisual Archive Code of Ethics.
>
> AlATSIS does not own most of the unpublished material in its collections. In many cases individual manuscript or audiovisual collections will have their own deposit agreements which are a form of legal contract where the Institute is the custodian of the material and where ownership is retained by the depositor.
>
> The Library and AVA follow access protocols that are defined by the above legislation and long-standing AlATSIS practice. The protocols try to ensure that the intent of the legislation is observed and the interests of the creators/owners (both Indigenous and non-Indigenous) of the material are acknowledged in the provision of access to their material. The protocols were also designed to protect personal or sensitive cultural information.
>
> The following factors contribute to the time it takes to process a request for material held in the AlATSIS collection:
>
> - Some agreements are quite restrictive whereby permission must be requested each time the item is copied.
> - Owners may be difficult to locate or slow to respond, and very occasionally may deny access.

59   CITIES, *Submission 24*, p. 4.
60   ESALG, *Submission 25*, p. 4.

- Some materials are not in a useable format, such as reels and cassettes. They need to be digitised before copies can be distributed. Digitising to archival standards is a slow, labour-intensive and expensive process.

- Some materials are not adequately documented, for example, photographic collections may be deposited without captions and many audio collections arrive without documentation. This can make material relevant to a client's request hard to find.

- The limited funding has compelled AIATSIS' digitisation program to target the most 'at risk' collections in its race against time to preserve holdings, as older formats deteriorate or playback equipment becomes obsolete or difficult to maintain. The unfortunate outcome of this is limited servicing of requests from community and researchers. That is, the AVA currently only accepts requests for digitised materials.

- Limited staffing has caused the Library to implement a target of a 25 working day response time for requests.

  On the other hand, the number of requests for materials held in the AVA increased by 46% between 2008-2009 (431 requests) and 2010-2011 (631 requests) while the number of the staff remained the same.[61]

7.83   Dr Kazuko Obato from AIATSIS stressed that digitisation of the AVA was critical for ensuring that language materials were appropriately preserved, and for making them accessible. Dr Obato said that:

> the process is very slow for us to actually create the conditions to access the material and also to digitise the material. Something we are looking at is how we could improve these kinds of obstacles. One problem is the lack of funding.[62]

7.84   Dr Doug Marmion from AIATSIS agreed. Referring to the range of formats of materials held in the AVA, he said that it 'is a major project to digitise all of these into standard formats which will ensure their long-term preservation and usefulness'.[63]

Committee comment

7.85   The Committee is aware there are community concerns about access to Indigenous languages material at the AIATSIS archive.

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61   AIATSIS, *Submission 154*, p. 1.
62   K Obato, AIATSIS, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 7 July 2011, p. 1.
63   D Marmion, AIATSIS, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 7 July 2011, p. 1.

7.86   The Committee believes that community access to such materials is critical for the preservation and revitalisation of Indigenous languages.

7.87   The Committee is of the view that the best method of preserving Indigenous languages for the future is through good record keeping, which involves the deposition of language materials in a central archive with proven good archiving and cataloguing practices, and the timely digitisation of materials.

7.88   The Committee believes a central archive of Indigenous languages materials has the benefit of ensuring that communities have access to languages materials when those materials are appropriately stored, catalogued and in a digital format.

7.89   The Committee has reviewed AIATSIS' protocols on accessing its archives and concludes that those protocols are consistent with the relevant Acts and represent robust and appropriate practice. The protocols adequately consider the complex issues around ownership and the cultural sensitivities and financial aspects that may ensue.

7.90   The Committee commends AIATSIS for carrying out the role of a de facto national Indigenous languages archive when it has not been specifically funded to do so, commends the staff who have managed the collection over several decades, and the researchers who have been responsible for generating much of the material held in the AVA.

7.91   The Committee is of the view that AIATSIS is capable of carrying out comprehensive collection, storage and digitisation of Indigenous language material if it is appropriately resourced to do so.

7.92   The Committee urges the Commonwealth Government to support AIATSIS as the central repository responsible for preserving Australia's Indigenous languages. This support needs to be directed specifically towards promoting the timely digitisation of the archive's world-leading collection, and equitable access for people wishing to use the collection.

Recommendation 28 – Dedicated Indigenous language archive

7.93   **The Committee recommends that the Commonwealth Government include in the 2013-14 Budget increased resources for the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies to carry out the storage and digitisation of Indigenous language materials.**

7.94   The Committee is concerned that budgetary constraints have forced
         AIATSIS to discontinue its research grants program, which has been one
         of few avenues for Indigenous people and other researchers to fund
         research into Indigenous languages for the past two decades. The
         Committee urges the Commonwealth Government to consult with
         AIATSIS to determine an appropriate and sustainable funding model in
         order for it to recommence its research grants program.

Recommendation 29 – AIATSIS research funding

7.95   **The Committee recommends the Commonwealth Government consult
         with the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
         Studies to determine an appropriate and sustainable funding model in
         order for it to recommence its research grants program in the 2013-14
         Budget.**

7.96   The Committee reiterates its view that good record keeping is critical to
         the preservation of Indigenous languages. The Committee is aware that
         ILS funding recipients generate a wealth of Indigenous language material,
         some of which is deposited in the AIATSIS archive. The Committee
         considers it essential that a copy of language material and resources
         assembled through funding granted under the ILS program should be
         deposited with AIATSIS.

Recommendation 30 – Archiving of ILS language material

7.97   **The Committee recommends that the Indigenous Languages Support
         (ILS) program funding guidelines be amended to include a stipulation
         that a copy of any language materials developed by ILS funding
         recipients must be deposited with the Australian Institute of Aboriginal
         and Torres Strait Islander Studies' Library or Audio-Visual Archive.**

Concluding comments

7.98   The Committee has presented a set of recommendations that chart a future for Indigenous languages and assist our Indigenous youth to grow strong in culture and in heritage and with the skills and opportunities to participate fully in the Australian society and economy.

7.99   Incorporating an acknowledgment of the place and importance of Indigenous languages in Closing the Gap will ensure that languages become part of the delivery and the outcomes of the many programs delivered under this framework by Commonwealth, state and territory governments.

7.100   Expanding the ILS program, and prioritising the development of language nests, will enhance the opportunities for communities to develop language resources and take up the role of teaching their children. The use of bilingual education in areas where the Indigenous first language is dominant must be considered. The overwhelming evidence was that children learning in a bilingual environment can grow and prosper in a bilingual or multilingual way and have improved Standard Australian English outcomes.

7.101   NAPLAN tests may contribute to the disengagement of non English speaking students at a young age. NAPLAN seeks to measure knowledge and skills across a range of competencies and language should not be a barrier to these assessments and the Committee has recommended an alternative assessment tool for all students learning English as an Additional Language/Dialect.

7.102   Establishing a national Indigenous interpreting service will enhance communications with Indigenous people around critical services, and also provide opportunities for language centres to train and employ language speakers.

7.103   Flexible and accessible career and accreditation pathways for Indigenous teachers have been a large focus. Strategies must be developed for training Indigenous language teachers and to provide school support and mentorship.

7.104   High numbers of Indigenous students with a first language or dialect other than Standard Australian English are attending schools in urban, regional and remote areas. Compulsory training in English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EAL/D) for all teachers would aid teachers to provide a productive learning environment rather than a confusing one.

7.105   These are critical recommendations and the Committee urges the
         Commonwealth Government to act quickly to announce their
         implementation.

7.106   This report builds on the Mabo decision of the High Court of Australia in
         1992 which recognised the occupancy of the Indigenous peoples and their
         ongoing connection to the land. That decision was a vital step in
         redressing past wrongs and it acknowledged the richness of Indigenous
         heritage and its place as a living culture.

7.107   However, twenty years on from that decision and we have failed to close
         the gap on Indigenous disadvantage. Over these two decades billions have
         been spent providing various services, assistance and programs to
         improve outcomes for Indigenous peoples. We are making progress, but
         progress is slow. And over these two decades we have seen the decline of
         many Indigenous languages just as we have seen the rise of Indigenous
         youth disconnected from their culture, failing at schooling, lacking a sense
         of identity or future, and ending up in the criminal justice system as the
         Committee reported in the 2011 report *Doing Time – Time for Doing*.

7.108   Sadly, it is these tragic outcomes that dominate many media stories.
         However there are positive stories that are not being heard – and many of
         these stories are about language and about communities working together
         to preserve, revitalise and sustain their Indigenous languages. These
         communities are raising their children strong in first language and able to
         speak SAE and make choices for their future.

7.109   It is the desire of this Committee that in 2012, twenty years since the Mabo
         land decision, the next vital decision is made by governments and by all
         Australians to recognise and value Indigenous languages. Through land
         and language we can close the gap.

7.110   The Committee believes all Australians should have pride in the
         Indigenous languages of our country. Indigenous languages bring with
         them rich cultural heritage, knowledge and a spiritual connection to the
         land.

7.111   Yurranydjil Dhurrkay from Galiwin'ku in North East Arnhem Land
         stated:

> Our language is like a pearl inside a shell. The shell is like the
> people that carry the language. If our language is taken away, then
> that would be like a pearl that is gone. We would be like an empty
> oyster shell.[64]

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64   Coordinating Support for Indigenous Scriptures, *Submission 65*.

7.112   Language is inseparable from culture, kinship, land and family and is the foundation upon which the capacity to learn, interact and to shape identity is built. Under the Closing the Gap framework, valuing Indigenous languages can make a substantial impact in areas of education, employment, health, justice and wellbeing.

7.113   Indigenous languages will hold different meanings to different Australians. For some it is their first language, and the language of their country. For others it is the language of the area and place in which they reside. For all Australians, Indigenous languages are about who we are as a nation, about the place we call home, the country we live in, and the land we call Australia.

Mr Shayne Neumann
Chair