

- first language assessments of Indigenous children entering early childhood education, and alternative NAPLAN methods and reporting for students whose first language is not English
- developing strategies for training Indigenous language teachers to ensure greater access to career and accreditation pathways
- developing a national framework of flexible and accessible training for Indigenous people to gain limited authority qualifications to teach
- compulsory EAL/D training for all teaching degrees, and mandatory EAL/D and cultural awareness training for teachers working in Indigenous communities
- improving community access to language materials through a dedicated Indigenous languages archive at AIATSIS, and the sharing of those materials with schools and educational institutions
- implementing and reviewing relevant international human rights instruments, and
- parliamentary leadership in the recognition and acknowledgement of Indigenous languages.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

The Committee has tabled the report in the House of Representatives. Most of the recommendations in the report were to the Commonwealth Government to take action.

Such action is the responsibility of the Executive Government rather than the Parliament.

The Government will respond to the Committee report by way of a written statement to the House of Representatives. The 43rd Parliament introduced a 6 month Government response timeframe to which every report should be responded to by the Executive Government.

The Government may accept, or partially accept, the Committee's recommendations, and announce its intention to take certain action. Some recommendations may be rejected and the Government may announce that it wishes to give further consideration to others. The Government may implement recommendations made by the Committee through changes in legislation or government administration or policy without publishing a formal response.

The government response will be published on the Committee's web site.

FURTHER INFORMATION

For more information regarding the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs and the inquiry into language learning in Indigenous communities please contact:

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A full copy of the report is available on the web at

<http://www.aph.gov.au/atsia>



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

OUR LAND OUR LANGUAGES

*Language Learning in
Indigenous Communities*

OUR LAND

OUR LANGUAGES

*This pamphlet provides an overview of the process and
the findings from the inquiry into language learning in
Indigenous communities*

September 2012

THE INQUIRY INTO LANGUAGE LEARNING IN INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs consists of seven Members of Parliament.

The Committee Chair approached appropriate Ministers for terms of reference for an inquiry into Indigenous languages. On 5 July 2011 the Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs and the Minister for the Arts jointly referred the inquiry.

The Committee was asked to inquire into and report on Indigenous languages in Australia, with a particular focus on:

- the benefits of giving attention and recognition to Indigenous languages
- the contribution of Indigenous languages to Closing the Gap and strengthening Indigenous identity and culture
- the potential benefits of including Indigenous languages in early education
- measures to improve education outcomes in those Indigenous communities where English is a second language
- the educational and vocational benefits of ensuring English language competency amongst Indigenous communities
- measures to improve Indigenous language interpreting and translating services
- the effectiveness of current maintenance and revitalisation programs for Indigenous languages, and
- the effectiveness of the Commonwealth Government Indigenous languages policy in delivering its objectives, and relevant policies of other Australian governments.

RECEIVING EVIDENCE

During the inquiry, the Committee aimed to find out about how the use of languages, including Indigenous languages and English, can assist in improving education, vocational and economic outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

The Committee invited submissions from interested organisations and individuals. The Committee also sought responses to a questionnaire that aimed to find out about specific language projects in communities across Australia.

The Committee received 154 submissions from a variety of sources, including Commonwealth, state and territory government departments, Indigenous representative organisations, land councils, Indigenous media organisations, language centres, linguists and a range of other academics, and many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and individuals.

The Committee conducted 23 public hearings in Canberra, Newcastle, Brisbane, Sydney, Adelaide, Utopia Homelands, Alice Springs, Broome, Halls Creek and Darwin, and held teleconferences with witnesses in Arnhem Land, the Pilbara, the Kimberley region, Innisfail, Perth, Victoria and Tasmania.

Whilst travelling to places, such as Newcastle, Utopia Homelands and Halls Creek, the Committee saw and heard first-hand Indigenous languages in daily use and recognised the significance of the link between language and culture.

The Committee was given a number of children's books, flashcards, DVDs, posters and other material displaying the richness of Indigenous languages and how language is being taught to our young people. The Committee thanks those that provided examples of the many language resources being developed around Australia.

A list of submissions, public hearings and transcripts of evidence can be accessed at:

<http://www.aph.gov.au/languages>

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee found that 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. The Committee consistently heard that the key to developing competency in Standard Australian English was for the child to be taught bilingually, with the first language used as the basis for learning in the earliest years. The Committee made 30 recommendations to government in key areas such as:

- incorporating an acknowledgement of Indigenous languages in the Closing the Gap framework
- expanding the Indigenous Languages Support (ILS) program and prioritising the development of language nests
- establishing a national Indigenous interpreting service and putting in place immediate measures to ensure competent interpreting services in the health and justice sectors
- developing careers for Indigenous language interpreters and translators through improved access to training and accreditation, and protocols to ensure that interpreters are used when required
- supporting Constitutional changes to include the recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages
- updating the National Indigenous Languages Policy with clear goals, accountability and reporting requirements
- enhancing the capacity of Indigenous language projects to maintain and revive languages through greater access to resources, including Deductible Gift Recipient eligibility and enabling Torres Strait Islander applications for ILS funding
- resourcing bilingual school education programs for Indigenous communities where the child's first language is an Indigenous language (traditional or contact)

"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." Yurranydjil Dhurrkay, Galiwin'ku, North East Arnhem Land