



Teaching Indigenous languages at school

Professor Jane Simpson will appear before the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs on Thursday 9 February, in relation to the Committee's inquiry into language learning in Indigenous communities. Professor Simpson strongly supports the right for Indigenous children to be taught in their home language and to develop and enrich it at school.

In her submission she highlights the urgent need for specifically trained English as an Additional Language (EAL) teachers to be used in schools where Aboriginal children do not have English as their first language. She urges that a sustained effort is required in professional development to teach teachers how to develop standard ways of explaining school ideas in traditional languages and creoles.

Professor Simpson believes that standards of attainment for past bilingual programs have not been satisfactorily worked out. She highlights the need for an assessment of proficiency in Indigenous languages to be on par with national proficiency testing for English literacy and language skills.

In addition Professor Simpson points out several administrative problems that should be rectified. One is that the Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples states that children have a right to be taught in their home language and to develop it and enrich it at school. However, in many states and territories this is left up to the Principal of the school to decide.

The Chair of the Committee Mr Shayne Neumann MP said: "the Committee will be interested to hear Professor Simpson's views on how Indigenous language learning in Australia could be improved. In particular, how Indigenous language should be appropriately embedded into early childhood education and sustained through primary, high school and tertiary education."

The hearing will be broadcast live from Committee Room 1R2, Parliament House, Canberra from approximately 12:15pm on Thursday 9 February 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