

27 SEP 2011

Department of
Education and Training

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

Dear Sir/ Madam

The Queensland Department of Education and Training welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs *Inquiry into language learning in Indigenous communities*.

In 2010, more than 47,700 full time Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students attended Queensland schools, which is around 30 per cent of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. More than 40,300 were enrolled in Queensland state schools, of which 44 per cent attended in metropolitan areas; 13 per cent attended in provincial cities; 24 per cent attended in rural areas; and 19 per cent attended in remote areas.

The Queensland Department of Education and Training is committed to improving the education outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. The department's *Closing the Gap Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy* outlines the Department's strategic direction for state schools and regions to close the gap in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education disadvantage. A copy of which is available online at: <http://education.qld.gov.au/schools/indigenous/pdfs/closing-gap.pdf>.

The department also recognises the importance of languages to the achievements and well-being of students and their families and has recently released the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Languages Statement*. A copy of which is also available online at: <http://deta.qld.gov.au/indigenous/pdfs/abtsi-language-statement.pdf>.

I invite you to contact Ms Claire Gorman, Principal Policy Officer, Division of Indigenous Education and Training Futures on telephone [REDACTED]

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback.

Yours sincerely

[REDACTED]
Julie Grantham
Director-General

Ref: 11/263152

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Queensland Department of Education and Training

Submission - Inquiry into language learning in
Indigenous communities



Queensland Government

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1.1 INTRODUCTION

The Queensland Department of Education and Training (DET) values the opportunity to provide a submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs' *Inquiry into language learning in Indigenous communities*.

The submission will provide information on:

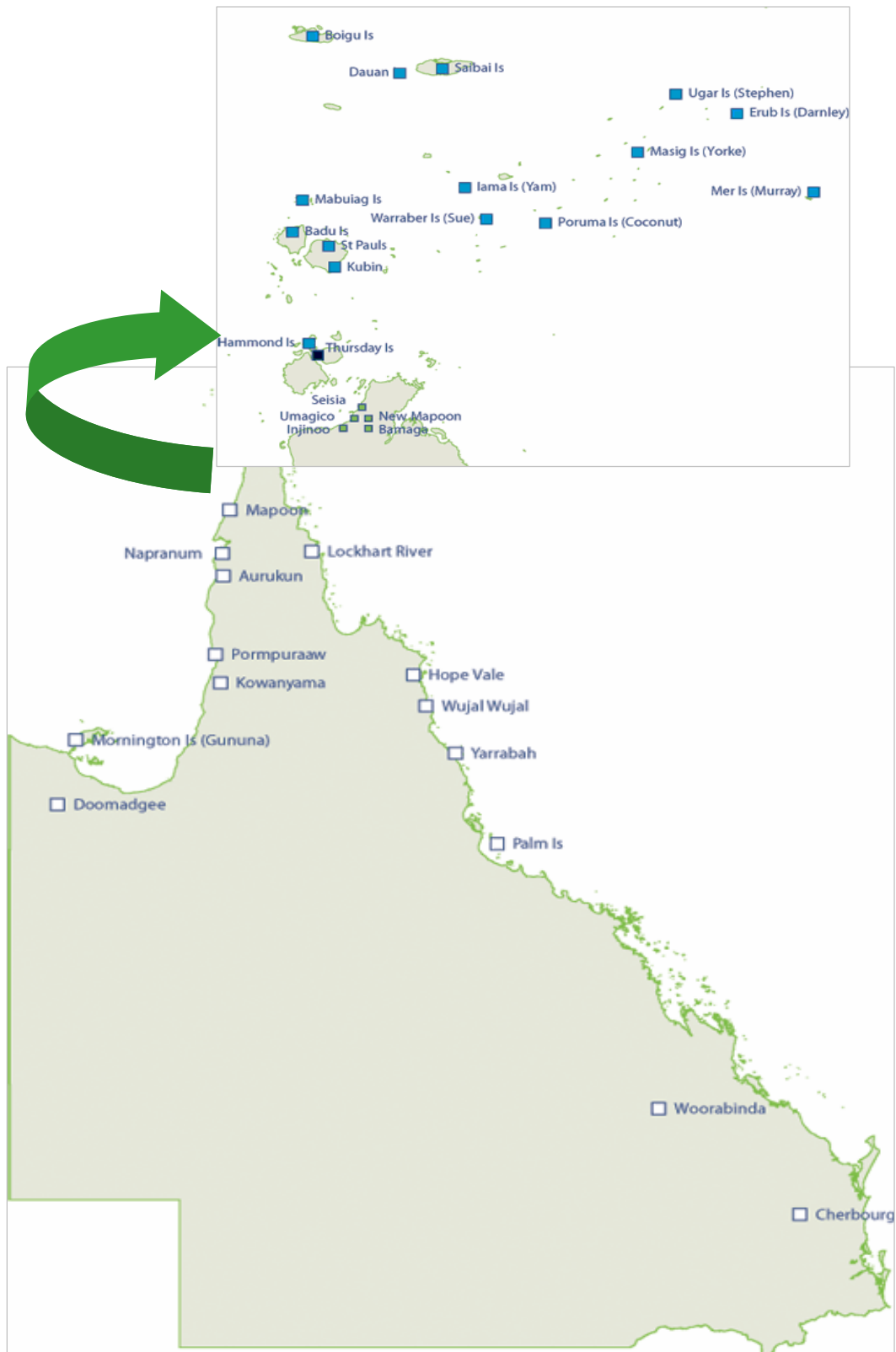
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in Queensland's Indigenous communities;
- the complex language situation in Queensland and the languages spoken by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in Queensland;
- the benefits of giving attention and recognition to Indigenous languages and the contribution of Indigenous languages to the Closing the Gap agenda and strengthening Indigenous identity and culture;
- measures being taken by DET to address building the English competency and learning needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander English as a second language (ESL) learners, and
- measures being taken by DET to support traditional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages in Queensland state schools.

1.2 ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER STUDENTS IN QUEENSLAND'S INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

Queensland has around 30 percent of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students with 40,375 Indigenous students enrolled in its state schools. Around 4,700 of these students are enrolled in schools located in Queensland's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

There is significant mobility of students from the communities into and out of urban and regional centres such as Cairns, Townsville, Rockhampton and Brisbane.

DIAGRAM 1 QUEENSLAND'S ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER COMMUNITIES



1.3 LANGUAGES SPOKEN BY STUDENTS IN QUEENSLAND'S INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students come to school from a diverse range of language backgrounds due to the rich and complex language situation across Australia.

In Queensland most students in Indigenous communities speak a contact language (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander creole or related variety) as their vernacular or everyday language. Contact languages, such as creoles and related varieties, are languages that have evolved through contact between people who speak different languages. A number of different creole varieties are spoken throughout Queensland. These creoles may not be officially recognised, but may be referred to in their communities through a range of names such as Murri, Broken, Slang, Lingo and Aboriginal English.

Many Torres Strait Islander students speak Torres Strait Creole, now known in the Torres Strait as Yumpla Tok. Although many students speak a creole or related variety, this in no way diminishes the importance attached to traditional languages for these students or their families and communities.

In a few areas, students may speak a traditional language as their strongest variety.

These areas include:

- Aurukun where students may speak a Wik variety as their first language;
- on Saibai, Dauan and Boigu Islands in the top west of the Torres Strait, where they may speak Kawa Kawaw Ya (KKY) as their first language or as a strong second, and
- far west Queensland from Camooweal to Urandangi where some children whose families have links to places to the west (such as Lake Nash in the Northern Territory) may speak Alyawarre.

Traditional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages refer to all the languages spoken within Australia prior to colonisation. These languages inform a holistic world-view of land, culture and identity, and are linguistically very different to English. Within Queensland, over 130 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language groupings have been recognised, with approximately 600 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages across Australia.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students may also have English as their first language.

1.4 BENEFITS OF GIVING ATTENTION AND RECOGNITION TO INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES AND THE CONTRIBUTION OF INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES TO CLOSING THE GAP AND STRENGTHENING INDIGENOUS IDENTITY AND CULTURE

DET recognises the importance of languages to the achievements and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and their families and sees this as crucial to achieving our shared goal of closing the gap in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander disadvantage.

DET's *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Languages Statement* outlines that:

Greater understanding and shared ownership of our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages – traditional languages, creoles and related varieties – will contribute to the Australian identity of all students, schools and communities, and will sustain Queensland's unique Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander linguistic and cultural heritage.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages need to be recognised, valued and supported in schools, and in developing relationships with families and communities. Initiatives that develop culture and language have been found to be significant factors in increasing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' participation, attendance and achievements in schools.

DET has engaged Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators and community members to develop the 3 way strong language approach to support teachers to understand and respond to the complex Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language situation in Queensland.

Three-way strong builds on the phrase '2 way strong', which is used to describe the desire for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children to grow deep and strong understandings of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous cultures. Three-way strong includes the language perspective.

DET schools will:

- 1. Recognise and value the language varieties which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and communities are using for their 'everyday' talk*
- 2. Engage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student in learning and achieving in schools by teaching Standard Australian English explicitly, actively and meaningfully*
- 3. Support children's access to their heritage by maintaining, learning or researching their traditional languages and cultures.*

1.5 THE POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF INCLUDING INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES IN EARLY EDUCATION

DET believes there are benefits for including Indigenous languages in early education.

Supporting the inclusion of Indigenous languages can increase the access of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children to and participation in kindergarten and other early childhood education and care programs. In Queensland between 2008 and 2010 overall Indigenous children's kindergarten participation increased by 6 percent to 35 percent.

Early learning experiences through playgroups, child care and kindergarten, rich in both home languages and Standard Australian English can support early literacy and numeracy outcomes and transition into school.

The Queensland Government is committed to enhancing pre-Prep programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children to better prepare them for school through the implementation of DET's *Foundations for Success* guidelines.

Foundations for Success assists educators to plan, implement, document and reflect on a holistic early learning program for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children before the preparatory year in Queensland. The guidelines include significant principles and advice regarding language:

From birth, all children begin the process of acquiring the language/s, knowledges and skills of their culture through the relationships they share with the significant people in their lives. This knowledge empowers them with 'who they are' and 'where they belong'. Foundations for success provides educators with strategies to support young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children to move between their home, an early learning program and school. It helps children develop strong foundations with both the culture/s and language/s of their family and of the wider world, allowing them to move fluently across cultures without compromising their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identities.

First language/s are acquired from families and have been developing from birth, shaping the way children see and describe the world. In an oral culture, language is a powerful communicative tool. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who are fluent language users who will bring a rich repertoire of expression to an early learning program.

Through *Foundations for Success*:

Educators promote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's ongoing first language/s development by including adult first language speakers within the program at every opportunity. The program is language-based, rich in shared and sustained conversation and resources to support the development of children's first language/s in parallel with their developing awareness about Standard Australian English (SAE) as a second or additional language.

1.6 MEASURES TO IMPROVE EDUCATION OUTCOMES IN THOSE INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES WHERE ENGLISH IS A SECOND LANGUAGE

Students who speak Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander language(s) (traditional, creole or related variety) as their vernacular and who are in the process of acquiring Standard Australian English whilst at the same learning in and through English are ESL learners.

The Queensland Government has a substantial and diverse range of initiatives that aim to improve educational outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. The response to the terms of reference for the Inquiry will be limited to measures that directly relate to improving English competency and addressing the learning needs of Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander ESL learners.

Current initiatives are listed below:

1.6.1 Bridging the Language Gap Project

Bridging the Language Gap is a project funded by the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) under the national *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan 2010-2014*.

It is a cross-sector project involving the Queensland Department of Education and the Queensland Catholic Education Commission and will run from 1 June 2011 to 30 June 2013.

Through *Bridging the Language Gap*, personnel from 89 participating focus schools will be provided with significant professional development which will assist with building their capacity to identify, support and monitor Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander English as a Second Language / Dialect (ESL/D) learners in the process of learning Standard Australian English.

The project funds a two-year expansion of programs Queensland already had in place through it's Northern Indigenous Schooling Support Unit (ISSU).

1.6.2 Online Professional Learning Resources

Queensland is the lead agency for two cross-jurisdictional projects that will develop online professional development resources to support with building the capacity of teachers to meet the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ESL/D learners.

The *Teaching English as An Additional Language or Dialect Online Professional Learning Resource* project was initiated by the Senior Officers Network Indigenous Education (SONNIE) and the Indigenous Education Working Group (IEWG). To date participating jurisdictions are Queensland, New South Wales, Western Australia and the Northern Territory.

The project will develop a comprehensive professional development course in-line with the National Professional Standards for Teachers. It will align with professional development and registration requirements for participating jurisdictions and will possibly have links with universities.

The Resource is scheduled to be available for use by teachers from mid 2013.

The *English as an Additional Language or Dialect Online Package* is a project that was initiated by the Northern Alliance Remote Indigenous Schools (NARIS). It will be developed to align with the *TEAL/D Online Professional Learning Resource* with a slightly different scope. The project will provide teachers new to remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander schools pragmatic, practical strategies to assist them with their first 10 weeks in the remote context.

Both projects include a comprehensive consultation process which will involve liaising with jurisdictions and specialists in improving the English capacity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students whose vernacular is not Standard Australian English.

1.6.3 North Queensland Indigenous Schooling Support Unit – Language Perspectives Team

DET's Northern Indigenous Schooling Support Unit has a Language Perspectives Team that consists of teachers and linguists. The team conducts research on second language acquisition and vernacular languages, supports schools with building capacity to meet the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ESL/D learners, implements projects, including the Bridging the Language Gap project, and offers professional development.

Following are some current initiatives of the ISSU Language Perspectives team:

1.6.3.1 Adopt-A-School initiative

Teachers who are experienced at teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ESL/D learners work with schools and teachers to help build their capacity. They provide collegial in-class modelling of ESL approaches, co-planning and professional development sessions.

1.6.3.2 South-West Queensland Languages Project

A linguist is currently working with and alongside communities in Cherbourg, Cunnamulla and St George to describe and represent the contact language varieties spoken by those communities. Posters have / are being developed to assist with creating awareness about the language varieties. A report is being compiled about the language situation in the south-west Queensland region.

1.6.3.3 Vernacular Languages Project

Linguists have/are working with and alongside communities in Normanton, Mareeba and Yarrabah to describe vernacular languages and represent them on posters that will be used to build awareness of those varieties.

1.6.3.4 ESL EsSentialS workshops

The 4 day ESL EsSentialS workshop has been developed to provide an initial source of information for teachers who are working with Indigenous ESL students. The workshop also provides an opportunity to develop understandings and practical skills for the classroom.

The workshop ensures that teachers learn about the language situations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and their families. An awareness of the widespread

language shift towards creoles and related varieties that has occurred throughout Australia is a significant step in teachers understanding their students' backgrounds and how to provide for their learning needs.

The ESL EsSentialS workshops give teachers a framework, *Break it Down Build it Up*, to plan explicit language teaching for their students. This model caters for ESL students in classroom settings.

1.6.3.5 School-based research projects

The Language Perspectives team conducts school-based research projects including:

- *White Rock Longitudinal Study* has revealed that many Indigenous students at this urban primary school in FNQ are ESL learners, despite enrolment data indicating otherwise. Now in its 4th year, it is showing positive correlations between Indigenous students' level of spoken SAE and their results in standardised tests. Furthermore, most Indigenous ESL students are not attaining levels of SAE sufficient for accessing classroom learning independently and are therefore dependent on teacher knowledge and skills to teach the "language load" of classroom concepts and content. Angelo, Baskerville & Smith (forthcoming)

- *Woree State High School Study* demonstrated that there are many "hidden ESL learners", especially with Indigenous language backgrounds in this urban high school in FNQ. Students whose families and communities have experienced language shift to creoles and related varieties (which often have no standardised nomenclature) require language awareness in order to be able to self-declare their language backgrounds. Many of the identified ESL learners were at Bandscale levels in speaking and writing where they would not be able to actively and independently participate in classroom learning through SAE without considerable language support from teachers. Carter (forthcoming)

- *Bundamba State High School study* showed how ESL learners at beginning and intermediate levels (Bandscale levels 1-2 and 3-4 respectively) have literacy pathways which are clearly differentiated from L1 SAE speakers' in terms of vocabulary counts, quantity, errors and features of syntactic complexity. ESL learners begin to overlap with lower literacy SAE speakers' pathways at consolidating levels (Bandscale levels 5-6), where both groups of learners require

focussed teaching of complex language in order to express complex ideas powerfully. This study also revealed many potentially “hidden ESL learners” in this metropolitan high school, as well as many identifiable ESL students who had not attained levels of SAE sufficient to access classroom learning without significant language teaching, (Angelo & Carter, 2009, unpublished)

- *Understanding Children’s Languages Project* (UCLAP) researched and consulted on the development of a PD framework to address identifiable gaps in early childhood educators’ (ECE) awareness and knowledge about language (language backgrounds, multilingualism, second language acquisition and language analysis). The report emphasised the need to go beyond merely providing information (one-off PD workshops, websites, booklets etc) to assisting educators with applying that information in teachers’ own specific contexts. Teachers’ confidence levels are thereby increased so that language practices become embedded and consequently available for sharing with others. Education Queensland, 2009

1.6.4 Other DET initiatives, policies and procedures

1.6.4.1 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Languages Statement

The DET Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Languages Statement provides the basis to assist Queensland educators and school communities to support the languages and cultures of their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students within the school context.

1.6.4.2 Embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Perspectives

Strategies for administrators and teachers to embed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives across all areas of school practice, including language, giving all students access to a balanced educational curriculum.

1.6.4.3 English as a Second Language / English as a Second Dialect Procedure

This procedure has been developed to provide a clear definition of ESL learners and outline the responsibilities of schools and regions. It is inclusive of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ESL/D learners.

1.6.4.4 Bandscale documents

DET's Bandscales for ESL Learners and Bandscales for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Learners support teachers to monitor the English acquisition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and other ESL learners.

1.6.4.5 English as a Second Language (ESL) in the classroom

The professional learning community, *ESL in the classroom*, supports teachers and schools in meeting the needs of ESL learners within a whole-school approach.

It outlines the knowledge and understandings necessary for identifying, planning and responding to English as a second language/dialect (ESL/D) learners in Queensland schools. It also contributes towards providing all students with equitable access to learning.

1.7 INFORMATION ABOUT MEASURES BEING TAKEN BY DET TO SUPPORT TRADITIONAL ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER LANGUAGES IN QUEENSLAND STATE SCHOOLS

The Queensland Studies Authority P-10 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Languages Syllabus provide opportunities for students to develop knowledge of and communication skills in the target Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Language. The syllabus promotes active engagement and communication between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.

DET is supporting Queensland state schools to implement the syllabus and is in the process of developing support guidelines for Principals and is investigating other modes of support for implementation of the syllabus.

1.8 CONCLUSION

DET's *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Languages Statement* states that:

Reconciliation is a key priority of the Queensland Government. Greater understanding and shared ownership of our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

languages – traditional languages, creoles and related varieties – will contribute to the Australian identity of all students, schools and communities, and will sustain Queensland's unique Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander linguistic and cultural heritage.

This important Inquiry into language learning in Indigenous communities is a valuable opportunity to contribute to the process of reconciliation and to improving life and educational outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. DET welcomes the opportunity to provide further information to the Inquiry upon request.