

## Resource Network for Linguistic Diversity

Submission to the

Parliament of Australia, House of Representatives

Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs

*Inquiry into Language Learning in Indigenous Communities*

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## Summary

This submission by the Resource Network for Linguistic Diversity

1. provides a brief background to RNLD and the work which the organisation is undertaking to support Australia's Indigenous languages,
2. reviews the clear and demonstrated benefits of Indigenous languages to the well-being and identity of Indigenous peoples, along with the importance of Aboriginal people controlling their own language work (response to Terms of Reference 1-4 set out by this Inquiry),
3. discusses what practices and resources are effective and needed for those key benefits to be attained (response to Term of Reference 7),
4. investigates whether effective practices are being implemented and realistic resources (staffing and funding) being made available in Australia (response to Term of Reference 8), and finally,
5. offers Recommendations to the Inquiry.

### 1. Background to the Resource Network for Linguistic Diversity and its work

The Resource Network for Linguistic Diversity (RNLD) <[www.rnld.org](http://www.rnld.org)> is a non-profit organisation that was founded and launched in July 2004 by co-directors Dr. Margaret Florey and Dr. Nicholas Thieberger. In creating RNLD, we recognised both the need for a peak training and resource-sharing organisation to target a comprehensive approach to Indigenous language activities, and the value of a network linking the wide-ranging expertise held amongst the diverse community of language maintenance practitioners.

**RNLD's mission** is to advance the sustainability of Indigenous languages and to increase the participation of Indigenous peoples nationally in all aspects of language documentation and revitalisation through training, resource-sharing, networking, and advocacy.

**Staff** — RNLD is a national organisation which is based in Victoria and is managed from its Melbourne office by its Senior Linguist, Dr Margaret Florey. RNLD's staff currently includes three part-time Aboriginal regional community trainers: Vicki Couzens (Victoria), Bradley Steadman (NSW) and Lesley Woods (WA), an education officer and two part-time administrative staff.

**Governance** — RNLD is governed by its four officers and a ten-member international Advisory Panel, six of whom are Australian. Current Australian members come from South Australia, the Northern Territory, Victoria, New South Wales and Western Australia, and include four Indigenous Australians. The panel provides input and guidance on RNLD's activities and policies.

**Membership** — RNLD's membership has steadily grown since its foundation. RNLD now has approximately 650 members who are working at all levels nationally and internationally to support and sustain Indigenous languages through diverse documentation and revitalisation activities. This membership base includes speakers and descendants from many language communities, language activists, linguists, staff of Aboriginal language centres and educational institutions, non-profit organisations, government departments, professional organisations, and allied industries. Our network of members is at the heart of RNLD's ability to coordinate the sharing of resources and to provide advice on a wide range of issues confronting language maintenance practitioners.

**Funding** — Since 2009, RNLD has primarily been funded by the Australian Federal government's *Maintenance of Indigenous Languages and Records* (MILR) grant scheme (administered by the Indigenous Languages, Culture and Repatriation section of the Office for the Arts). RNLD is currently funded for the 2011-2014 triennium.

**Activities** — RNLD's activities build from our four-pronged mission of training, resource-sharing, networking, and advocacy. The current goals of RNLD's activities are to:

- deliver grassroots training nationally through the *Documenting and Revitalising Indigenous Languages* (DRIL) program<sup>1</sup> in order 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,
- increase the use of endangered languages and support the reclamation of silent languages,
- enhance the functionality of Indigenous organisations and educational institutions supporting language work,
- strengthen Indigenous language work by bridging between Indigenous and non-Indigenous language workers and linguists,
- extend RNLD's role as a leading provider of online resources for language maintenance and documentation,
- engage nationally in policy development and raising awareness on issues confronting Indigenous languages.

This submission and our responses to the Terms of Reference are based primarily around these core areas of RNLD's expertise.

## **2. Benefits deriving from Indigenous languages — responses to the Inquiry's Terms of Reference 1-4**

### **TOR 1 — *The benefits of giving attention and recognition to Indigenous languages***

The many benefits of recognising and respecting Indigenous languages have been well rehearsed in community and academic publications, media reports, previous government inquiries and surveys (such as McConvell and Thieberger 2001; McConvell 2005). Australia is a signatory to a number of United Nations Declarations and Conventions which also enshrine such rights (for example, CBD 1993; UNESCO 2003; United\_Nations 2007). Official recognition of and public attention to Indigenous languages is a significant step towards respecting the rightful status of the languages and their communities in Australia's contemporary culture and its very deep history. These *are* Australia's Indigenous languages, the vessel for the transmission of Indigenous cultural practices through the centuries and to the present day. Indigenous languages are a powerful component of identity for many Aboriginal people, regardless of whether and how fluently the languages may be spoken. Recognition further benefits both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people alike through offering Australians an understanding of the rich and diverse ways in which languages capture and reflect the country and its peoples.

Crucially, a causality between Indigenous health and the knowledge and understanding of Indigenous languages and cultural practices is now widely recognised. For example, Australia's Human Rights Commission has argued in relation to language loss that

"For the Indigenous peoples whose languages are affected, the loss has wide ranging impacts on culture, identity and health. Cultural knowledge and concepts are carried through languages. Where languages are eroded and lost, so too is the cultural knowledge. This in turn has potential to impact on the health and well-being of Indigenous peoples. There is now significant research which demonstrates that strong culture and identity are protective factors for Indigenous people, assisting us to develop resilience" (Human\_Rights\_Commission 2009: Ch. 3).

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<sup>1</sup> The DRIL training model is described in more detail in Section 3 and in Appendix 1.

Language loss is part of the devastating cluster of losses experienced by Indigenous communities internationally. Canadian linguist Prof. Patricia Shaw writes of the need to attend to what she has movingly described as the "duality of loss" associated with Indigenous languages — that is, loss encompassing both the loss of language from a scientific perspective and the personal/social psychology of loss (Shaw 2004). While non-Indigenous people may feel and act from a deep concern for the loss of linguistic diversity, and the loss to science of the rich linguistic and cultural knowledge that is held within languages, Shaw writes that for community members

"Because language is so intimately linked both to individual identity and to culture, it follows that loss of language, particularly under extreme and persistent colonial suppression, is tightly bound up with a deeply complex psychology of loss related to identity and culture" (2004: 183).

This loss and the accompanying sense of urgency concerning language revitalisation is heightened with every death in a community. The passing of elders triggers an intense and complex sorrow because the very personal loss to family and community converges with the loss of the knowledge of language and culture that their family and community members are yearning to learn and to pass on. Their death highlights the rapidly diminishing possibility for this to occur. We have seen in our work that, for some of the people close to those who have gone, working with even more intensity on their language offers a vital lifeline — a link both with the past and with the future. It is honouring the ancestors who have gone, and it is holding hope and faith for the children who are to come and for their children after them.

From among the complex causes of language loss, we call attention to the forcible removal of children in the Stolen Generations in Australia (Commission 2005) and the boarding school system in North America (e.g. McCarty and Watahomigie 1999; Linn, Naranjo et al. 2002; McCarty and Watahomigie 2004). Darrell Kipp, a Blackfeet educator and well known language advocate in the USA, potently argues that

"Language reminds people of the torture inflicted in the past. Language is a touchy subject. It's not something that many fluent native people initially like to listen to—it produces post-traumatic stress. We remind them, with our very presence, of the horrors inflicted upon them in the mission schools and the government schools and the public schools" (Kipp 2007).

The deep grief, hurt and anger deriving from all of these losses can stand as impediments to the restoration of intergenerational transmission of language and Indigenous knowledge. Recognising and giving attention to Indigenous languages begins to acknowledge those strong emotional responses to loss, and is often a necessary precursor to successful language programs. As language is a part of the wound, so too it must be part of the healing.

Giving recognition and attention to Indigenous languages can occur at many levels and take many different forms. At the international level, Australia has endorsed the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (United\_Nations 2007) and is a signatory to the Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions (UNESCO 2005). However, Australia is not yet a signatory to the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (UNESCO 2003). At the national level, the Australian Constitution does not yet recognise Indigenous Australians and their languages and cultural practices (Australian\_Government 2010). Taking the necessary political steps to rectify these gaps offers a powerful indicator to both Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians of the respect that Indigenous languages should be accorded, and the actions that must be taken to revitalise and maintain them.

However, while giving attention and recognition to Indigenous languages is clearly beneficial, it is important that it is seen as the first of a series of strategies to support languages. Pat Shaw

has eloquently described the many ways in which Indigenous people have lost control over their own lives, including

"... loss of their ancestral lands , loss of the responsibility of raising their children in their own homes and villages, loss of control over their children's education, loss of control over the practice of sacred rituals of birth and death, loss of traditional healing practices, loss of the rich body of knowledge systems embedded in the oral traditions which sustained the cumulative wisdom of physical and spiritual well-being, loss of the right to speak their ancestral language, through systematic educational and political suppression, and persistent social denigration; and then the inexorable cline of loss of pride in speaking their native language; loss of the will to speak their ancestral language; loss of the ability to speak their parents' and grandparents' language; loss of the ability to even understand their elders speaking the traditional language; culminating, through loss of language, with a fractured loss of identity - all leading to a profound loss of trust in the external society and cultural system which has perpetrated these inter-related losses". (Shaw 2004: 185)

Decision-making and control over language programs by Indigenous people is a critical component in strategies to support Indigenous languages. Training in how to work with, and learn, and pass on languages offers not just hope but also tangible skills to ensure that Indigenous peoples' goals for their languages can be realised and their cultural and linguistic identity further strengthened. Training strategies are addressed in more detail below.

## ***TOR 2 — The contribution of Indigenous languages to Closing the Gap and strengthening Indigenous identity and culture***

The Federal Government's Closing the Gap policy (Australian\_Govt 2008) broadly addresses Indigenous disadvantage from the perspectives of health, education, and employment. Indigenous languages contribute to Closing the Gap in a number of different ways.

Within the health target, Closing the Gap looks to increase life expectancy across generations. Life expectancy relates not only to physical health but also to psychological health and well-being. This is particularly pertinent in an Indigenous context, in which psychological health is negatively impacted by many factors, including low self-esteem and struggles for identity. The links between these factors and Indigenous youth suicide have been widely recognised.

Some of the ways in which Indigenous languages can contribute to identity and well-being have been taken up under TOR1 above. Enhanced self esteem and a strengthening of Indigenous identity and well-being can derive from people learning and using even a little of their language. RNLD staff have seen this directly in our training work across the country, and one example serves to illustrate something of the power of learning one's language, even in adulthood. One participant in a 4-day DRIL training workshop in Queensland spoke in the first session about an international youth convention which she had recently attended. The young woman was proud and excited about having been selected to attend and had gained much from the event. However, she was also saddened and embarrassed that she had been unable to introduce herself in her own language as the other international participants had done. Over the several days of the DRIL workshop, B<sup>2</sup> began to learn how to read and pronounce her language. She started to construct simple sentences, and was quickly able to use this knowledge at a public event. Another of the participants in the DRIL workshop later sent feedback saying

"To be able to give A and B more structure on working with their own language and assisting to pronounce words and interpret the written language was fantastic, and will have long term benefits. I was able to see firsthand the pride in B as she was able to say her first words in [her

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<sup>2</sup> Initials have been used in place of full names to protect the privacy of participants. If identities are useful or necessary, please contact us and we will request permission to release names to the Inquiry.

language] that evening as she did a Welcome to Country ... and had over a thousand people saying hello back to her in her traditional language. Words cannot describe the feelings and emotions."

Within the educational sphere, Closing the Gap aims to raise reading, writing and numeracy achievements and increase rates for completion of Year 12. Indigenous language programs transparently contribute to these targets. The overwhelming evidence for enhanced literacy outcomes in first language (L1) programs is discussed under TOR3 below. Beyond that critical outcome, learning Indigenous languages in schools also helps to strengthen children's engagement with the school, their sense of identity, and their well-being. Silburn et al (2011: 33) found that

"Better student achievement is clearly associated with learning environments that are culturally safe, responsive and positive."

Language programs commonly bring members of the wider Indigenous community into the school, as teachers, cultural advisors, and so forth. Well-planned programs can thus serve to strengthen links between school and community.

In further support of the role of Indigenous languages in Closing the Gap, there is sound evidence that school attendance rates were higher when bilingual education programs were in place in the Northern Territory. Australian linguist Greg Dickson has analysed school attendance figures in the NT over the several years since bilingual education programs were dismantled and has demonstrated that attendance rates have steadily declined (see Kelly 4/11/2010; Dickson 11/5/2010; de Silva 14/12/2008; Simpson 2009). Dismantling bilingual education and losing its very positive educational outcomes is clearly counter to the Closing the Gap targets.

The Closing the Gap targets for education and employment are also enhanced by post-secondary education programs which focus on Indigenous language work. A growing number of Indigenous people are drawn to such programs offered through TAFEs and universities across the country. Representatives from Indigenous language and linguistic courses recently came together at a symposium on *Strengthening language maintenance through cooperative training strategies*, organised by the Resource Network for Linguistic Diversity<sup>3</sup>. Australian education and training programs included Batchelor Institute for Indigenous Tertiary Education, the Koori Centre at the University of Sydney (Master of Indigenous Languages Education), Central Gippsland Institute of TAFE Victoria (Certificate IV in Australian Language and Cultural Heritage), TAFE SA (Certificates III and IV in Learning and Teaching an Endangered Aboriginal Language) and the Resource Network for Linguistic Diversity (Documenting and Revitalising Indigenous Languages program).

The goal of the symposium was to provide an opportunity to learn about the diverse training programs for language documentation and revitalisation taking place across Australia and the Asia-Pacific region, and to discuss ways to strengthen cooperation and collaboration between programs. One of the core issues raised and discussed at the symposium was the importance of Aboriginal people being able to gain formal recognition and educational qualifications for their language work. This was stressed both for career path reasons and also because of the importance of receiving recognition for the skills involved in being a speaker of an Indigenous language and having the ability to teach an Indigenous language.

The Closing the Gap targets are further served by training models which strengthen confidence and autonomy and build readiness for post-secondary education programs such as those listed above. RNLD's *Documenting and Revitalising Indigenous Languages* program has had some rapid success in regard to this goal. One West Australian participant enrolled in a tertiary

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<sup>3</sup> Full details of the symposium program and presenters and PDFs of the presentations can be found at <<http://www.rnld.org/Linguapax-conference>>.

linguistics program at the University of New England after only two days in a *Documenting and Revitalising Indigenous Languages* workshop. In a feedback letter she wrote

"The recent formation of a grassroots language revitalisation and preservation program is very important in allowing Aboriginal people to continue to safe guard our heritage by been actively involved in preservation. The pilot program is also vital in recruiting local people to be trained in language work and to ensure the local community has access to skill development in the technical skills and knowledge of language and cultural preservation. For some people such as me the course has the added bonus of opening other opportunities and creating pathways for linguistic study and further education."

Several other DRIL participants have also indicated that they have a much clearer understanding of linguistics and language work and the range of courses that are available, and feel more confident in their ability to undertake further study. Two participants are currently considering university enrolment and several others are considering enrolment in some of the TAFE language programs listed above.

A number of other non-accredited Australian training strategies were also represented at the symposium on *Strengthening language maintenance through cooperative training strategies*, including the summer schools offered by the Victorian Aboriginal Corporation for Languages, intensive workshops in Miromaa software provided by Miromaa Aboriginal Language and Technology Centre Newcastle, and community training sessions in Lexique Pro software offered in WA and Queensland by linguistic consultants. All such models serve the Closing the Gap targets for education and employment by providing training specifically developed for the interests and needs of Indigenous people. These models increase skills and confidence, provide readiness for further education in a formal program, and readiness for employment in the fields of language teaching, language documentation and language revitalisation or professional development for people already working in these fields.

**TOR 3 — *The potential benefits of including Indigenous languages in early education and TOR 4 — Measures to improve education outcomes in those Indigenous communities where English is a second language***

Due to the widespread circumstance of language loss, there are now few places in Australia in which Indigenous children are learning their heritage language from their families and communities as their first language (L1). This is increasingly restricted to remote communities, and/or communities and towns across northern Australia. Such situations must be valued as they give the children a unique opportunity to grow up with a strong and healthy identity, and with all of the social and cognitive benefits of speaking two or more languages.

A very persuasive and long-standing international body of literature clearly demonstrates that using a child's first language as the medium of instruction in the classroom from early education provides the best foundation for education. In situations in which Indigenous children are learning their heritage language as their L1, bilingual and two-way programs provide the best possible educational pathway, both for retaining and supporting the Indigenous language and for English language learning. Where children commence education in languages other than their own L1 (such as the widespread use of education through the medium of English only), it is not only harder to achieve literacy in the second language, but the child also commonly accedes to pressure to speak the dominant language. Once the switch to a dominant language has begun, it is very difficult to maintain fluency in the L1.

In recent years, a number of documents have considered the inclusion of Indigenous languages in schools (such as Purdie, Frigo et al. 2008) and this is part of the current planning for

an Australian curriculum (ACARA 2011). In the summary of its findings, the most recent detailed study for Australia found that

Australian and international studies ... consistently suggest that when bilingual and/or culturally appropriate instructional approaches are delivered under optimal conditions they are efficacious in producing statistically significant and educationally meaningful improvements in school retention, attendance and learning outcomes of Indigenous children from traditional language home backgrounds (Silburn, Nutton et al. 2011: 47).

Finally, it is important to note that, as a signatory the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Australia has committed to the principles contained within that document. Article 14 of that document covers the rights of Indigenous people to the control of education systems and the languages used in education<sup>4</sup>.

### **3. What practices and resources are effective and needed for those benefits to be attained? — response to the Inquiry's Term of Reference 7**

#### ***TOR 7 — The effectiveness of current maintenance and revitalisation programs for Indigenous languages***

There are many different language revitalisation and maintenance strategies which have been developed internationally, and which have been used in different parts of Australia. These vary in their effectiveness, and overall it is crucial that strategies are responsive to specific local conditions. What works well in one location may be completely inappropriate in another location.

The most successful models of language revitalisation are those which are taking a holistic approach — focusing on intergenerational transmission, targeting the parent and child generations in language learning, embedding language learning in culturally appropriate contexts, and drawing on Indigenous methods for teaching and learning. The literature on language revitalisation increasingly emphasises the importance of the repair or restoration of paths of intergenerational transmission as the essential key to reversing language shift (for example, Fishman 1991; Fishman 2001). This point underlines the critical role of the home-community network in language transmission, revitalisation and maintenance (e.g. Nettle and Romaine 2000: 187). Here we select just a few of the most effective methods.

Language nests have been found to be extremely effective in beginning to rebuild a speaker population and the literature is replete with reports from Hawaii and New Zealand (for example, Benton and Benton 2001; King 2001). Language nests are a form of immersion programme which focus on pre-school age children. Typically, a small group of children comes together in a family atmosphere through the week to be cared for by older people who are speakers of the target language. Bringing together the grandparent and grandchild generations in a home-like environment replicates or repairs intergenerational transmission. Language nest programs also typically require parents to commit to learn the language alongside their young children. This is one of the most effective components of the program and one which differentiates it from school language learning programs. It ensures that the children enrolled in the language nest can continue to use the language they are learning within the home and community.

The Master-Apprentice program was developed in California by Prof. Leanne Hinton, who, along with others, has published widely about the model (see for example Hinton 1994; Hinton 2001; Hinton 2002). The Master-Apprentice scheme also models the repair of intergenerational transmission of language. An elder speaker is paired with a (usually) younger non-speaker from

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<sup>4</sup> The full text of Articles 13 and 14 is reproduced in Appendix 2 for ease of reference.



the community, and the pair is trained in one-on-one immersion techniques. The trained team commits to spending 10-20 hours per week together teaching and learning the language. This intensive model is widely used across North America in particular, and has made an impressive impact in rebuilding speaker communities. The Master-Apprentice program is now managed by the Advocates for Indigenous California Language Survival (AICLS) < <http://www.aicls.org/>>, which holds training workshops and hosts the relevant materials for the scheme on their web site.

Despite the fact that there are strong parallels between the situations faced by Indigenous languages in Australia and in North America, very few language communities in Australia have been able to implement a Master-Apprentice program. Two that have are Miriwoong, spoken around Kununurra in northern Western Australia (run by Miroma Dawang Woortlab-gerring Language and Culture Centre), and the Waalubal dialect of Bundjalung in NSW (run by Bradley Laurie and John Hobson from the University of Sydney's Master of Indigenous Languages Education program). It is an expensive undertaking to either travel to the United States for training and follow-up or to bring the Master-Apprentice training team to Australia to train new teams. The Californian trainers are very open and generous with their program and are happy for people to train themselves from the available written materials. In reality, it seems that this presents great challenges to language communities in which people are uncertain about how to proceed and particularly about how to immerse themselves successfully in a language which they rarely hear spoken. Discussions are currently underway between RNLD and the Maintenance of Indigenous Languages and Records program to try to build a pool of trained Australians who can train and support Master-Apprentice teams locally.

The Accelerated Second Language Acquisition method was developed by Stephen Neyooxet Greymorning in the United States (NSILC) as an immersion method for teaching Indigenous languages. As John Hobson notes (Hobson 2008), very little has been published on this method. However it is highly regarded by most people who are using it to teach their language. The ASLA method was recently demonstrated with great success by Michael Jarrett of the Muurrbay Aboriginal Language and Culture Co-op at the Puliima 2011 conference in Brisbane < <http://www.acra.org.au/puliima.html#Presentations>>.

The Indigenous language and culture centres model was first developed in Australia in 1984, with the foundation of the Kimberley Language Resource Centre in the northwest of Western Australia<sup>5</sup>. Language centres are typically established and managed regionally, and thus are more accessible to local language communities and better able to understand and meet their needs. Some of the activities of a centre include coordinating local research projects, training language workers in formal courses and through apprenticeship, acting as regional repositories and archives for data, linking linguists to partner on language documentation and conservation projects, and as resource production centres. The effectiveness of a language centre depends on its outreach to the language communities it serves. Although this varies from centre to centre across the country, language centres remain a very important model for providing resources more locally and regionally to language communities.

Other parts of this submission note the effectiveness of bilingual education programs in those locations in which Indigenous children are learning their heritage language from their families and communities as their first language.

Education and training programs are discussed in some detail under TOR2 above. In many ways, appropriate training is *the* most critical factor in ensuring that the potential benefits of

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<sup>5</sup> Links to the extensive national network of Australian language centres can be found on the RNLD web site <[http://www.rnld.org/language\\_centres](http://www.rnld.org/language_centres)>.

Indigenous languages to the well-being and identity of Indigenous peoples can be realised and that Indigenous people have the necessary skills to develop, implement and control their own language projects.

RNLD's *Documenting and Revitalising Indigenous Languages* (DRIL) program is an innovative national strategic training model with enormous local flexibility which has been specifically developed to serve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. This program aims to increase the use of Indigenous languages through providing customised local training to Indigenous community members in language documentation and revitalisation methods and practice. Its core aim is to strengthen the ability of individuals, family groups, community groups and Indigenous organisations to develop, run and manage their own language projects independently.

DRIL reaches across age groups and educational backgrounds to bring older and younger community members together in both training and projects, and encourages valuing and sharing of diverse skills between age groups. No previous experience or special skills are needed to take part in this program. It does not require any educational background and is adaptable to and inclusive of all literacy levels, and supports learning for people who do not meet the requirements for formal education or who have been deterred by earlier educational experiences.

The DRIL model combines intensive on-site workshops with online resources and materials and follow-up support. The DRIL curriculum currently offers 29 modules (tabled in Appendix 1) within the following seven topic areas:

- Developing a language project (D01-D05)
- Recording and archiving (R01-R05)
- Strategies for language revival and maintenance (S01-S06)
- Creating language resources (C01-C06)
- Literacy and linguistics (L01-L02)
- Publishing and presenting (P01-P02)
- Training and curriculum development (T01-T03)

Participants can choose any of the modules in these topics as a starting point, and can take part in the training individually, or with other people in their family, a small group in a community, or in the workplace.

DRIL is designed to complement the existing Indigenous languages programs provided in educational institutions. As noted above, it builds skills and confidence and offers a stepping-stone to formal training for some community members. Discussions are currently underway about enhancing pathways between DRIL and the existing accredited TAFE and university courses, and developing a possible accredited stream for DRIL.

Through the breadth of this program, DRIL is able to support the sustainable development of organisations such as Indigenous language centres (currently including Mirima Dawang Woollabgerring Language and Culture Centre and Wangka Maya Pilbara Aboriginal Language Centre) and Indigenous organisations such as Sharing Culture, which is developing curriculum and resources for school language programs. A number of DRIL participants are teaching their language in school language programs, and DRIL training provides skills which can enhance and broaden their language work. The DRIL 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.

#### 4. Are effective practices being implemented in Australia? Gaps between policy and practice — response to the Inquiry's Terms of Reference 8

##### TOR 8 — *The effectiveness of the Commonwealth Government Indigenous languages policy in delivering its objectives and relevant policies of other Australian governments*

The National Indigenous Languages Policy (NILP) (Australian Government 2009) was created in 2009. Its five objectives focus on the areas of public attention to languages, reinforcing use of languages, Closing the Gap, Indigenous identity and pride, and teaching languages in schools. The objectives each link to a set of loosely framed actions.

Implementation and thus the effectiveness of much of NILP's third objective — working with languages to Close the Gap — and the fifth objective — supporting Indigenous language programs in schools — depends on the actions of national, state and territory education departments. The effectiveness of the policy consequently varies greatly across the country. In regards to these two objectives, it is currently least effective in the Northern Territory due to the dismantling of bilingual education. Most other states now include Aboriginal languages in the school curriculum, though the hours per week vary greatly. Where only one or two hours of language content are offered, it is impossible effective language learning to occur. At best, such a program raises awareness and raises the status of Indigenous languages amongst the wider population. As the Indigenous language component of the Australian curriculum (ACARA 2011) is still under development, it is not yet possible to assess its effectiveness.

The effectiveness of NILP's objectives two — Critically Endangered Languages — and four — Strengthening Pride in Identity and Culture — derives primarily from projects funded under the Federal Government's *Maintenance of Indigenous Languages and Records* program. From the perspective of a stakeholder with some twenty years of experience in the field of Indigenous language work, the MILR scheme is a well thought out program which strongly supports Indigenous ownership of language projects and effective training models to facilitate such ownership and successful outcomes. In our experience, MILR staff are well versed in the different models for language revitalisation and maintenance, and some of the effective models discussed in Section 3 have received MILR funding.

However, the funding currently provided under the MILR scheme falls far short of realistically permitting the revitalisation and maintenance of Australia's Indigenous languages. The 2011-12 MILR budget was \$9.6 million which is supporting a total of 67 activities. Although very impressive outcomes are being delivered by many of the projects funded by MILR, many more communities and organisations are unfunded for language projects. Given the urgency of the situation and the importance on maintaining Indigenous languages, it is extremely frustrating for Indigenous people and the wider community of language maintenance practitioners to know that certain models do work and can "Reinforce use of critically endangered Indigenous languages" (NILP Objective 2) and yet they cannot be implemented. For example, in the last three years of MILR funding only one trial of the Master-Apprentice scheme (in Western Australia) and one trial of the language nest model (in the Northern Territory) have received support.

In short, the NILP objectives address the key points for language revitalisation and maintenance and the *Maintenance of Indigenous Languages and Records* program is well thought out and provides strong guidance and support to funded projects. Yet the gap between good policies and effective implementation grows ever wider while more and more of Australia's Indigenous languages are becoming silent, and Indigenous people and language maintenance practitioners alike are becoming increasingly disheartened.

## 5. Recommendations

In the context of the discussion above, the Resource Network for Linguistic Diversity respectfully recommends that:

**RECOMMENDATION 1** — *Australia becomes a signatory to the UN Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage.*

**RECOMMENDATION 2** — *Recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages be included in the preamble to the Australian Constitution.*

**RECOMMENDATION 3** — *Article 14 of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples be implemented and steps be taken to ensure that Indigenous children are offered an education in their own language.*

**RECOMMENDATION 4** — *the language nest model, including L2 classes for parents, be widely trialled in a range of environments and language scenarios across Australia.*

**RECOMMENDATION 5** — *the Master-Apprentice model be widely trialled in a range of environments and language scenarios across Australia.*

**RECOMMENDATION 6** — *the number of hours dedicated to language learning in L2 Indigenous language programs in schools be increased at least to parity with non-Indigenous LOTE programs in schools to ensure a realistic opportunity for language learning.*

**RECOMMENDATION 7** — *the Maintenance of Indigenous Languages and Records grant scheme be strengthened and substantially increased to offer a realistic possibility for the revitalisation and maintenance of Indigenous languages.*

## Appendix 1 — RNLD's activities relevant to the Inquiry's Terms of Reference

RNLD actively seeks to respond to the varying linguistic, geographic and cultural settings across Australia in which Indigenous languages are spoken. RNLD's work builds from our four-pronged mission of training, resource-sharing, networking, and advocacy.

### Online resources and advice

Many language communities and organisations are based in remote locations and struggle to access the information and resources necessary to effectively run language programs, and to keep up to date with changes in technologies and methods. RNLD is addressing the need to pool expertise and build a network between people working to sustain Indigenous languages through its web site and use of social media. RNLD's clearinghouse of online resources <[www.rnld.org](http://www.rnld.org)> is an important facility for people involved in a wide range of language projects. It includes updated information on the methods and technologies available to document, archive, revitalise and maintain Indigenous languages, funding opportunities for language projects, capacity development programs, publications, and news items. The RNLD email discussion list has become an important resource which allows list members to ask questions about a wide range of topics, such as what equipment is most appropriate for particular projects, conditions, and budgetary constraints, or what software to use for language documentation and revitalisation projects, how to resolve software issues, who to contact in regard to particular languages, etc. Members use the list to advertise jobs (for example, in Aboriginal language centres), announce conferences, publications and the release of new software, equipment and so forth. Our Facebook group is now reaching out to more individuals and organisations in remote locations to offer access to a strong network of people involved in language work.

### Documenting and Revitalising Indigenous Languages (DRIL) training program

The major activity for which RNLD is funded under the MILR scheme is to develop and implement the *Documenting and Revitalising Indigenous Languages* (DRIL) program. The DRIL model builds on the training work which RNLD's Senior Linguist, Margaret Florey, has carried out through the past twenty years (see, for example, Florey 2002; Florey 2004; Florey 2007; Florey 2008; Florey 2009; Florey and Himmelmann 2010).

In 2010-2011, the pilot phase of the DRIL training program was launched and has successfully supported fourteen languages across five states: Western Australia: Gajirrabeng (K37.1), Kariyarra (W39), Mirawoong (K29), Ngarla (W40), Nyangumarta (A61), Nyul Nyul (K13), Tharrkari (W21), Wajarri (A39), Warnman (A62), and Yinhawangka (A48), Queensland: Kabi Kabi (E29), Victoria: Djab Wurrung (S26), the Northern Territory: Yolngu Matha (Manggalili) (N137), and New South Wales: Ngiyampaa (D22) and Paakantyi (D12).

These languages range in strength from those still spoken by all generations and transmitted to children, to languages which have not been actively spoken for many years. Participants have included individuals (e.g. Wajarri, Nyul Nyul, Paakantyi), family groups (e.g. Kabi Kabi, Djab Wurrung, Yolngu Matha), school language teams (e.g. Paakantyi, Ngiyampaa), Indigenous organisations (e.g. Sharing Culture) and language centre staff (e.g. Mirima Dawang Woorlabgerring, Wangka Maya), with ages ranging from four years through to elders.

## DRIL modules

<b>Topic</b>	<b>Code</b>	<b>Modules</b>
Developing a language project	D01	<i>Developing and managing a language project</i>
	D02	<i>Funding and grant-writing</i>
	D03	<i>Finding language materials</i>
	D04	<i>Linking up</i>
	D05	<i>Policy development</i>
Recording and archiving	R01	<i>Equipment</i>
	R02	<i>Recording methods</i>
	R03	<i>Working with audio and video recordings</i>
	R04	<i>Transcribing</i>
	R05	<i>Archiving audio and video recordings</i>
Strategies for language revival and maintenance	S01	<i>Identifying language needs</i>
	S02	<i>Language maintenance</i>
	S03	<i>Language revitalisation</i>
	S04	<i>Language reclamation</i>
	S05	<i>Language awareness</i>
	S06	<i>Language and youth</i>
Creating language resources	C01	<i>Storybooks</i>
	C02	<i>Audio resources</i>
	C03	<i>TV, film and video</i>
	C04	<i>Dictionaries</i>
	C05	<i>Online resources</i>
	C06	<i>Photography and illustration</i>
Literacy and linguistics	L01	<i>Linguistics</i>
	L02	<i>Literacy and Orthographies</i>
Publishing and presenting	P01	<i>Writing about your language</i>
	P02	<i>Making presentations</i>
Training and curriculum development	TO1	<i>Curriculum development</i>
	T02	<i>Sharing your skills</i>
	TO3	<i>Where to from here?</i>

## Appendix 2 — United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

### Article 13

1. Indigenous peoples have the right to revitalize, use, develop and transmit to future generations their histories, languages, oral traditions, philosophies, writing systems and literatures, and to designate and retain their own names for communities, places and persons.
2. States shall take effective measures to ensure that this right is protected and also to ensure that indigenous peoples can understand and be understood in political, legal and administrative proceedings, where necessary through the provision of interpretation or by other appropriate means.

### Article 14

1. Indigenous peoples have the right to establish and control their educational systems and institutions providing education in their own languages, in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning.
2. Indigenous individuals, particularly children, have the right to all levels and forms of education of the State without discrimination.
3. States shall, in conjunction with indigenous peoples, take effective measures, in order for indigenous individuals, particularly children, including those living outside their communities, to have access, when possible, to an education in their own culture and provided in their own language.

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