

# Appendix 3: Indigenous Languages – A National Approach

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## 1 The importance of Australia's Indigenous languages<sup>1</sup>

The most recent report on Indigenous languages in Australia, the National Indigenous Languages Survey (NILS) Report 2005, found that the situation of Australia's Indigenous languages is grave and requires urgent action. Of the 145 Indigenous languages still spoken in Australia, 110 are critically endangered. All of Australia's Indigenous languages face an uncertain future if immediate action and care are not taken.

The Australian Government is committed to addressing the serious problem of language loss in Indigenous communities.

It requires coordinated action among the bodies involved in support of Indigenous languages, including government, language organisations and educational and research institutions.

The proposed approach draws on reports and consultation over many decades, including the NILS report and feedback through the Maintenance of Indigenous Languages and Records Program.

## 2 Objectives

1. National Attention: To bring national attention to Indigenous languages – the oldest surviving languages in the world; and the pressures they face.
2. Critically Endangered Languages: Reinforce use of critically endangered Indigenous languages that are being only partly spoken to help prevent decline in use and to maintain or extend their common, everyday use as much as possible.
3. Working with Languages to Close the Gap: In areas where Indigenous languages are being spoken fully and passed on, making sure that government recognises and works with these languages in its agenda to Close the Gap.
4. Strengthening Pride in Identity and Culture: To restore the use of rarely spoken or unspoken Indigenous languages to the extent that the current language environment allows.

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<sup>1</sup> Australian Government Department of Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts, *Indigenous Languages – A National Approach. The importance of Australia's Indigenous languages*. At [http://www.arts.gov.au/indigenous/languages\\_policy](http://www.arts.gov.au/indigenous/languages_policy) (viewed 3 September 2009).

5. Supporting Indigenous Language Programs in Schools: To support and maintain the teaching and learning of Indigenous languages in Australian schools.

## 3 Actions

### National Attention

- Undertake a feasibility study for the National Indigenous Languages Centre recommended by the NILS Report.
- Increase public recognition and appreciation of Indigenous languages by expanding the use of these languages across public and government functions.
- Support greater coordination and assistance amongst Indigenous language centres to maximise their impact nationally and to reach languages not currently supported.

### Critically Endangered Languages

- The Maintenance of Indigenous Languages and Records program, administered by the Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts, is investing \$9.3 million in 2009–10 on 65 projects around Australia supporting the revival and maintenance of Indigenous languages.
- Increase use of new technology to broaden the impact of language maintenance and revival activities by local community Indigenous language centres.
- Pilot Early Childhood Language Nests and Mobile Language Teams to supplement the work of language centres, especially in more remote areas that are not within easy reach.
- Consider Tax deductible status to Indigenous languages organisations through the Register of Cultural Organisations for maintaining and reviving Indigenous languages.

### Working with Languages to Close the Gap

- Given the centrality of language to strong Indigenous culture, and the broader social benefits of functional and resilient families and communities, better targeting support for Indigenous languages as part of a broader national focus on Indigenous culture generally, will contribute to the overall well-being of Indigenous communities.
- COAG has committed \$38.6 million towards interpreting and translating services as part of the new Remote Service Delivery sites. The Remote Service Delivery National Partnership (RSD NP) provides for the strengthening of interpreting and translating services in response to local needs in each of the priority locations. In addition to the employment of interpreters in each location, the Commonwealth is responsible for working with the States and Northern Territory to introduce a national framework for the effective supply and use of Indigenous language interpreters and translators. It will include protocols for the use of interpreters and translators.

- Components of the proposed national framework include:
  - development and strengthening of Indigenous interpreting services through establishing mentor/ coordinator positions, providing base salary funding for interpreters and administrative support of interpreters
  - training and accrediting Indigenous interpreters – development of nationally consistent curriculum material for training and provision of training leading to accreditation and expertise in particular subject areas
  - increasing supply of Indigenous interpreters through development and establishment of a national recruitment and retention strategy, with localised flexibility
  - increasing demand for interpreters through increased training for government and non-government employees working in relevant locations
  - translation of government information products.
- Consideration could be given to forming a National Reference Group of Experts to advise on future directions of policy on Indigenous interpreters. Each of the components would involve contributions from the Commonwealth and from each of the jurisdictions.

### **Strengthening Pride in Identity and Culture through Language Revival**

- Support community-based Indigenous language centres by increasing links with major national, state and territory cultural institutions to ensure that Indigenous languages material is properly preserved and made accessible appropriately.
- Through the Indigenous Contemporary Music Action Plan, support music in Indigenous languages to increase the transmission of languages across generations to younger speakers, utilising festivals and multimedia to strengthen the focus on Indigenous languages and increasing broadcasting content in Indigenous languages.
- Potential collaboration with the Songroom Project, Sing Australia, Australian Community Business Network and Foundation for Young Australians to work with communities where languages have been lost to promote language revival.
- Encouraging more grass-roots collaboration between language learning programs and Stolen Generation members and their organisations.

### **Supporting Indigenous Language Programs in Schools**

- The Government recently commissioned the Indigenous Language Programs in Australian Schools – A Way Forward report, which revealed that between 2006 and 2007 over 16,000 Indigenous students and 13,000 non-Indigenous students located in 260 Australian schools were involved in Indigenous language programs, covering over 80 different Indigenous languages.

- Significant funding for languages education is being provided to the states and territories through the National Education Agreement for languages, allowing jurisdictions flexibility to determine how funding is allocated. Funding can be used to support and maintain Indigenous language programs operating in government schools.
- \$56.4 million is also being provided over 2009 to 2012 through the Schools Assistance Act 2008 to support the teaching of languages, including Australian Indigenous languages, in non-government schools.
- Several jurisdictions are currently establishing programs to strengthen the teaching and learning of Indigenous languages in schools, including a proposal by New South Wales to develop national senior secondary Indigenous languages courses.

#### 4 Indigenous languages and literacy and numeracy

- The Government is committed to languages education and recognises the important role that Indigenous language learning plays in some schools, particularly bilingual schools.
- The learning of English is also a fundamental skill that all Australians, including Indigenous Australians, must have in order to maximise their learning opportunities and life chances.
- All Australian governments through the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) processes have committed to halving the gap in the reading, writing and numeracy achievements between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students within a decade.
- The Government is providing \$56.4 million over four years to provide extra assistance to schools to enable them to expand intensive literacy and numeracy approaches that have been successful with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and provide professional development support to assist teachers to prepare Individual Learning Plans for Indigenous students.

#### 5 National curriculum

- The National curriculum is being developed by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, initially in English, mathematics, science and history. A second phase of subject areas will be developed in languages, geography and the arts.
- Indigenous perspectives will be written into the National Curriculum to ensure that all young Australians have the opportunity to learn about, acknowledge and respect the language and culture of Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders.