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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT
ISLANDER AFFAIRS

Language learning in Indigenous communities

THURSDAY, 13 OCTOBER 2011

CANBERRA

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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
STANDING COMMITTEE ON ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER AFFAIRS
Thursday, 13 October 2011

Members in attendance: Mr Haase, Ms Grierson, Mr Perrett and Dr Stone

Terms of reference for the inquiry:

To inquire into and report on:

The Committee will 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.

WITNESSES

HOBSON, Mr John, Coordinator, Indigenous Languages Education, Koori Centre, University of Sydney.. 1

HOBSON, Mr John, Coordinator, Indigenous Languages Education, Koori Centre, University of Sydney**Committee met at 12:24**

ACTING CHAIR (Dr Stone): I now declare open this public hearing of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs inquiry into language learning in Indigenous communities. I would like to acknowledge the traditional custodians of this land and pay our respects to the elders past, present and future. The committee also acknowledges the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who now reside in this area. Please note that these meetings are formal proceedings of parliament. Everything said should be factual and honest, and it can be considered a serious matter to attempt to mislead the committee. This hearing is open to the public and is being audio broadcast live via the internet. A transcript of what is said will be placed on the committee's website. I might add that we have SBS television here. Are you comfortable with that, Mr Hobson?

Mr Hobson: Yes.

ACTING CHAIR: Thank you. I welcome Mr Hobson from the Koori Centre, University of Sydney, who will give evidence today.

Mr Hobson: Uwa, ngayulu John Hobsonnga, nintilpayi Koori Celtrelangurara Sydneyku Universityla, mununa pukulpa mulapa kuwari ngalya-ankula nyuranya watjantjaku, ananguku wangkaku. I am John Hobson, a lecturer from the Koori Centre at the University of Sydney, and I am very happy to come here today and speak to you about Aboriginal languages. As the Koori Centre's submission to the inquiry did not include any biographical information for me I will briefly provide some now.

ACTING CHAIR: Thank you.

Mr Hobson: I have spent the last 27 years working for and with Indigenous Australians in the documentation, maintenance and revival of their languages, 10 years of which have been spent in both towns and remote communities in Central Australia. I have worked at the Institute for Aboriginal Development on various dictionary projects, training translators and interpreters, teaching Aboriginal languages and cross-cultural understanding to whitefellas, and teaching Aboriginal people to read and write their own languages. I have supported four concurrent bilingual programs as linguist/literature production coordinator at Yipirinya School and I have trained Indigenous linguists, language workers and teachers from across Australia at the Batchelor Institute's Centre for Australian Languages and Linguistics.

I currently lecture at the Koori Centre, University of Sydney, where I teach Indigenous Australian studies and teacher education, coordinating units of study in academic literacy, speaking Gamilaraay and Indigenous languages revival. In 2005 I established a suite of qualifications in Indigenous languages education that train Indigenous teachers to teach their own languages—the only tertiary qualifications nationally. I was also the lead editor of the 2010 volume *Re-awakening languages: theory and practice in the revitalisation of Australia's Indigenous languages*, the first such publication nationally.

In 2012 I will be examining the feasibility of establishing an articulated suite of undergraduate qualifications in Indigenous languages education and revival. I speak a number of Aboriginal languages with varying levels of fluency, from some of the most vital to one undergoing revitalisation. I have worked alongside many Aboriginal people in their struggle to save their languages, from those who speak little English and can remember the first time they saw a white man or a car to those who hold teaching degrees and are seeking to reawaken their languages after generations of silence. I have seen and continue to witness Indigenous Australians exerting great effort to save or revive their languages, and they are achieving great things. I would never understate the value of their achievements. Ultimately, however, I despair for the future of those languages, which are our collective national responsibility. Most of the actions from our nation's past and those at present serve only to diminish them. The little that is offered by way of restitution is clearly not enough and languages continue to decline. My hope is that this inquiry may at last lead to the substantial change that is required. It is a test I would hate to see us fail.

ACTING CHAIR: Thank you very much, Mr Hobson. Would you like to make an opening statement in relation to your submission?

Mr Hobson: I had not proposed to. I was of the understanding that I would be subject to questioning, and came here with a fairly open slate. The issues that we raised in our submission stand. The position is a strong one, certainly in relation to the teaching of languages. For those populations who are still speakers of their own languages as a first language we advocate that they should be taught in their own languages principally, then receive explicit English as a second language instruction in order to obtain a sufficient level of English to operate in their daily lives. I do not think that is being done at the moment. Most of English education that is provided to

people is first-language education and is essentially as effective as teaching local Canberra school kids in Turkish when they have no background in it and it is not spoken widely. The outcomes that have been achieved to date are largely predictable. I will leave it there for now. I am sure you will have questions.

ACTING CHAIR: I am sure we will.

Mr PERRETT: I am not sure if I have a quote down correctly, but you talked about keeping languages vital as being a compelling national responsibility.

Mr Hobson: Yes.

Mr PERRETT: Why is that so? Why is it important for the nation?

Mr Hobson: I think the languages of this land are exactly that—they are the languages that stem from the country; they are not an imposition from Europe. They belong here, they grew here, and I think as such they are part of the intangible cultural heritage of the nation. They are as important, if not more so, than anything that is housed down the road in the National Gallery or the National Library—more likely National Library, because they represent an immense body of knowledge that really we have only begun to scratch. If we lose them, they will be gone, once they are gone. Revitalised languages are not the same as the original languages—they cannot be. By the time revitalisation is necessary, we have lost so much.

Mr PERRETT: Could I play devil's advocate here, then, and say that in the National Library there are no living people on the shelves.

Mr Hobson: Sure.

Mr PERRETT: But what you are suggesting would seem to indicate that keeping it a vital requires it to be spoken and, in fact, by look your logic, we would even have to resurrect languages that are no longer vital or in fact are no longer even being spoken by anyone, but there might be linguistic records of those languages. Would that be the logical extension of your proposition?

Mr Hobson: There are two different goals. Whilst the language is alive—that is, being spoken by people—then I think it is imperative to keep that language alive. Once it falls from daily use and ceases particularly to be transmitted to the next generation—you only need to miss a generation and a language can be in dire straits. So if we can keep them preserved as spoken languages—'preserved' is a bad word; it sounds like pickled in formalin. It is kind of what happens in libraries. Languages in books—

Mr PERRETT: Yes, so you are not wanting to accurately record and have a CD sitting on a shelf somewhere, saying, 'That's one of our old languages.' Your thinking is beyond that—beyond recording the history of this nation; it is actually acting out and preserving the history of this nation?

Mr Hobson: Documenting languages is very important insurance against the future potential of loss from vitality. But if language is vital, like English, it is nice to have a library of literature but it exists and persists and will continue. So it is alive, it is vibrant, it is a living language and it will continue to change. From any forms we record it will change very quickly.

Once they cease to be spoken, we have an entirely different issue. AIATSIS, no doubt, holds large collections of documentation of various Aboriginal languages, but it is essentially, and increasingly in a digital world, virtual pickling. We can go in and look at them and appreciate them from outside the jar—a bit like a thylacine. I wonder what they would have looked like had they moved. We might have a tape of somebody speaking a language, like we have a tape of the thylacine, but it is not quite the same thing—it is a long way short of the same thing.

Mr PERRETT: I appreciate that. I am just being provocative to tease it out.

Mr Hobson: Of course. But those resources are of incredible importance if then people choose to revitalise their language. So to bring it back to life, or 'reawaken' it as many people would express it. There are many people around the country who are actively involved in that. There are languages which are growing which had passed from daily use.

Mr PERRETT: So organically that process is occurring, assisted by academia and governmental support at different levels—from what we have heard from other witnesses?

Mr Hobson: Yes, a combination of those things. I do not know of one where some level of all of those elements would not be present, but they would be quite different. There are some people who are largely going it alone. I think you had Marianne McKinnon-Kidd, one of our graduates, in. There is the work that she has been doing with Dunghutti. Apart from the facilitation of a TAFE framework in which to do their work, it has largely stemmed from the community, so they have been fairly independent. But to make significant progress all of those things help. However, ultimately the essential ingredient is the will and interest of the community. It cannot be done by government from outside.

ACTING CHAIR: We have had a lot of evidence, particularly from Queensland, but I am sure the member for Durack is very aware of the fact that a lot of Indigenous children and adults now speak what are called contact languages—sometimes Kriol. In the Torres Strait it is called Yumplatok, and so on. What status do you give those languages in terms of their preservation and helping teachers learn them better in order to see those as the language of community in some places?

Mr Hobson: I doubt we have too many pidgins going at the moment; they have probably all undergone creolisation and become first languages. Probably they are largely fairly vital—I have some experience in the field, but I am not expert—so their risk of passing is not great. They are growing and developing. I saw on Facebook a linguist in Ngukurr, in the Northern Territory, commenting about some completely new expressions and the directions that young speakers of Kriol in that community were taking it in. So it is a very vital and vibrant language.

In answer to the second part of your question, yes: as with communities where people speak a traditional and ancestral Aboriginal language as opposed to a contact language, for teachers in those communities to be able to speak those—that is, to speak to their students in a way that their students can understand—is essential. I would say that holds further down the continuum from Aboriginal dialects of English or Australian English. The capacity for teachers to speak to their students so that their students can understand, if we want education to be effective, is a no-brainer.

ACTING CHAIR: You mentioned the multilingual courses in the Northern Territory. You make a comment towards the end of your submission that you felt that they could be seen as very successful compared to situations where just English is expected to be spoken by the children. Do you want to expand on that and your experience of the Northern Territory program, where a small number of schools were seen to be teaching bilingually? Obviously there is a bit of a policy evolution happening as we speak in that space, if you like.

Mr Hobson: Yes.

ACTING CHAIR: Could you talk to us about that.

Mr Hobson: Certainly. I had quite a bit to do with various bilingual programs in the Northern Territory from the mid-eighties through to the mid-nineties, when a lot of them were flourishing in places like Areyonga, Yuendumu and various other communities. There were quite a lot of communities that were running bilingual programs. The students appeared to be doing very well in their own language. If their performance was tested in their own language, they were achieving exemplary results. Children would write large sections of text and would happily read big books. Teaching did not seem to be problematic, and classrooms were filled with Aboriginal community members who had status as teachers and were far more effective in the classroom than non-Indigenous speakers of English. I think there were great things happening. Unfortunately the bilingual program has, I think, at various times been politically unpalatable to both sides of the population and both political persuasions in the Northern Territory, and it comes at high cost, which aggravates the bureaucracy. For various reasons, I think that over time there has been a process of white-anting, which has led to its fall, and I think that has had some terrible consequences. It has led to poorer educational outcomes and things like the imposition of NAPLAN. Testing children in a foreign language will obviously produce appalling results, much the same as if I went down to a local school and did a literacy and numeracy test for some ACT children in Turkish; assuming there were no Turkish spoken around the school, they would do appallingly badly. We create a set of circumstances to produce the outcomes that we throw up our hands in dismay about.

Ms GRIERSON: I would like to follow up on the point that you just made about the NAPLAN. You said that there is documented success when there is bilingual education—for instance, when bilingual tests were used in the Northern Territory. Can you elaborate on that issue for us?

Mr Hobson: I cannot cite it, but I think Brian Devlin would be able to produce some. He and some of the other people who have been defending bilingual education have been able to make reference to where records are kept.

Ms GRIERSON: You would strongly make the point that that test could be more culturally sensitive across Australia?

Mr Hobson: If I spoke Pitjantjatjara, I would want my children to have their literacy and numeracy testing in Pitjantjatjara, particularly if they were being taught Pitjantjatjara in the school. To test them in English, I am reminded of a Monty Python sketch where they were able to prove that Hungarians had the same intelligence as penguins—both of them did equally poorly on an English IQ test.

Ms GRIERSON: Mr Hobson, we are both showing our ages because I remember—

Mr Hobson: Are we though?

Ms GRIERSON: You also mentioned that one of your priorities would be setting up a program to implement language nests as a strategy to maintain and revitalise languages. What do you mean by 'language nests'?

Mr Hobson: In New Zealand and particularly in Hawaii, the Kohanga Reo and Punana Leo systems of language nests provide a monolingual vernacular—I use the word 'vernacular' to mean aboriginal language—preschools so that ideally the mothers, or any parent, or grandparent would take the children along to preschool where either Hawaiian or Maori is exclusively spoken. The desire or the intention is to ensure a generation of first language speakers of the language. There is no problem in Hawaii or—

Ms GRIERSON: That is a proactive approach.

Mr Hobson: Absolutely. And it works. It works extremely well. I have been to those schools in New Zealand and in Hawaii, and it is quite miraculous. There is no problem with those children learning English. Some of the children are amongst the highest achieving students in the schooling systems. They produce remarkable things. There is no problem with them learning English. They are going to learn English anyway. They are surrounded by it. But this is a way of ensuring that they retain a first language speaker population. I would hark back to your earlier question: once that is lost, we have a system of a language in decay and heading rapidly towards death, because those children will grow and they will not be able to speak language to their children and they will not produce another generation.

Ms GRIERSON: You think a national Indigenous language centre should be established. What we have seen already is a process of local activism, grassroots activism and formalised activism around Indigenous language centres, like the East Coast School of Language, which is where I am from, and Wollotuka et cetera. Would there be a risk that a national Indigenous language centre could suppress some of that, or do you think it would enhance that?

Mr Hobson: I think it could be dangerous if it was poorly implemented or if it was set up in such a way that it was a controlling entity rather than a facilitating entity. But there is a great need for national leadership in the field. The regional community based language centres are doing a tremendous job. I deal with quite a few of them and have worked in some of them. But often there is a gulf of information about what works and what does not work. To some extent one can feel like there are a lot of people rushing around with fire extinguishers, because it is an emergency and people are doing whatever they think or hope might work. It would be wonderful if there was a national centre that could provide policy and educational guidance that gave people access to information about what does work in revitalisation and good second language teaching techniques. I see many people teaching language and often all they have is some ability in the language and good will. As you would be aware, we have been running a program to try and at least remedy that at a particularly narrow level.

Ms GRIERSON: Thank you.

ACTING CHAIR: Harry, have you got some questions?

Mr HAASE: My word, Chair.

Mr Hobson: Oops! Should I be worried?

Mr HAASE: No, you should never be worried. He is just a lamb! Thanks for being here, first of all, because you are truly committed to our particular issue—that is, the sustainability of Indigenous language. Our problem of course, as a parliamentary committee, is to justify in the minds of the majority of the parliament the significance of our inquiry and the significance of our endeavour. Given that we all accept that language is an evolving thing—and you mentioned a moment ago that, with the introduction of digital communication, we have Twitter and an abbreviation of the English language, and you accept that there is now an abbreviation of Indigenous language also used on those amenities—what argument can you put for us to report upon to our colleagues that prioritises the sustainability of what in many cases are dead languages? What priority should we give to sustaining artificially—if it were not artificially, you would not be wanting the involvement of government—those things that would be seen by many to be without general value in the community?

Mr Hobson: I accept the compliment but I would say there are many other people who have appeared before you and are yet to appear before you whose commitment is probable greater than mine. I get to live it second hand; they get to live it firsthand. At the risk of reducing my response to a somewhat banal level, apart from my comment about the value of the intangible cultural heritage of this nation, I think the other principle I would put across would be: we broke it; we should fix it.

Mr PERRETT: And we will be richer for so doing.

Mr Hobson: We will all be richer for so doing, yes. The difficulty for me is that I probably take some things as just such an article of faith that I no longer—

Mr Perrett interjecting—

Mr Hobson: Yes, I appreciate that you are trying to draw it out of me. It is making me conscious of the fact that I have these foundation stones which are not quite religious fervour but at that level perhaps. Yes, I think what we have done—I will not broaden it out—just in terms of Aboriginal languages, has been—I am trying to think of polite words. It has been like we have taken a wrecking ball to them. We have done untold damage, often with the best of intentions, but certainly at many times with indefensible intentions. But the outcome has been the same.

I think there is a principle of social justice. I know at other levels through your earlier inquiry into juvenile detention—I have not been into a juvenile detention centre lately, but some of our students are teachers within the corrective services system, so I have been into Bathurst jail and I have been into Parramatta jail. I have seen groups of adult Aboriginal men take to education like no-one has seen before in the prison because it is in their language; it is their stuff. The staff are just amazed by the level of enthusiasm—and they are all so keen; they are such great students. They pay far more attention and dwell on every word. I wish I could get my third-year non-Indigenous university students to pay as much attention to what I do in the classroom. I have witnessed that at that level, and it is rejuvenating thing for people. It starts to return to them a source of self-worth, which I think is a huge underlying problem in offending rates and so forth. It says not only that you are of value to yourself but that Australia values you: we as a nation recognise the importance of what you have and what you bring to the table. Because there have been 200 years of denigration and attempts, essentially, to eradicate.

I would say, again: what is going on with bilingual education in the Northern Territory, but also largely the fact that we only provide monolingual English education, not even English-as-a-second-language education. It is just standard: we teach you stuff in English. We continue to damage these languages and will continue to do so unless we turn around.

Mr HAASE: Given that dialects have tended to die out in many languages internationally with the change in the rate of travel, the opportunity to travel and the methods of communication, especially electronic and popular media, and given that that is naturally accepted as evolution, which of the many dialects across Australia that are still awake, although marginally sleepy in many places of many dialects, would you suggest to us ought to be maintained? How would you go about the process of selection, given that we would necessarily, in view of some of your solutions, be providing to communities those capable of speaking particular languages?

Mr Hobson: I think what you say is true in postcolonial countries, where there is a tendency towards a loss of dialects. However, in the UK and in America there are many, many regional dialects. I do not see them vanishing. I see them as quite strong and I do not see them diminishing to any great extent—certainly not to the same extent. The phenomenon tends to be far more obvious in the Third World, under the influence of English. But the variety of English dialects is still retained. For example, I do not think Australian English or New Zealand English are under any threat. They persist.

Mr PERRETT: Perhaps I can interject into that question, just to get some extra information. I am thinking of things like the movie *Valley Girl*—I know that was from the eighties or whenever! Even with modern communication, dialects will still stay strong. Is that what you are saying?

Mr Hobson: Some will pass, and new ones will come. You were talking about *Valley Girl*. That dialect might not live. It might rise and fall. Many of them rise and fall. We will have new dialects of English, I am quite sure. That is part of the vitality of English. It is where languages are under stress from a dominant external language that the situation of narrowing down to maybe one dialect is the case.

CHAIR: Historically I think we actually punished children if they spoke home languages in the school ground or on mission stations. We enforced monolingualism on the children and their parents.

Mr Hobson: Yes. That certainly did not help. On the second part of the question, I do not want to play Solomon. I would say we have six to 12 very strong languages in the country. When you make the language-dialect distinction, we can probably afford to talk in terms of language and allow people to deal with the dialectal variation internally. I think that is probably a little too close to the coalface to warrant selecting things out, such as the Western Desert language and other languages. Some are quite strong. I believe Murrin-Patha, in Port Keats, is rapidly growing—it is the fastest growing Indigenous language in the country. You might know it as Wadeye. Murrin-Patha has become a dominant language in Port Keats and is expanding quite rapidly.

We could probably identify some very strong languages that only need some support to remain vital. They are still being passed to the first generation. They are being spoken by all generations in the community and are in use as the daily vernacular. With a little support, they will stay strong. They are not as much in peril as some of the others. There probably needs to be something like a national fund, although the answer to this ultimately is not

just money. People must take on the language, speak it and commit themselves to speaking it to their children. It needs an enormous commitment from the community itself. But certainly, as with all things, funding helps.

Mr HAASE: What sort of parameters would you put on the test? This is our challenge. We have to deal with this. If we make a recommendation to fund the teaching of languages, the immediate next question is, which languages? How do you determine a language you will support, and to what degree? Do you do it on the basis of the numbers who will potentially speak it, did speak it and are speaking it?

Mr Hobson: All of these things are excellent criteria, and they will confound each other.

Mr PERRETT: Quilt coverage as well?

Mr Hobson: Quilt coverage?

Mr PERRETT: Like in those old language maps of Australia—if you have 10 in this patch and none in this patch will one give priority to the other?

Ms GRIERSON: The old Strehlow maps?

Mr PERRETT: Yes.

Mr Hobson: Maps are always a dangerous thing in Australia.

ACTING CHAIR: They involve borders.

Mr Hobson: I know it has been revised and rethought.

ACTING CHAIR: To help you in answering that question, I could extend it a little and ask: what languages are you training your teachers at your centre to teach? Is this according to what resources you have to teach those languages? How many non-Indigenous teachers do you have amongst your students, or are they all Indigenous?

Mr Hobson: They are all Indigenous.

ACTING CHAIR: So how do you make that choice yourself?

Mr Hobson: We do not. We use the language that they bring to the class. Whatever our students turn up speaking or wanting to speak—and they are not all speakers when they arrive—we ask our staff to obtain whatever materials are available and to bone up on that language and its structure. We do not attempt to teach people to speak their own language—it is beyond us to do so. We teach them to understand the structure of their language, the sound system, how words are formed, how words go together into phrases, phrases into sentences and sentences into text. We teach them linguistics for Indigenous languages but we recognise that we do not have the capacity to teach people in a particular language. Notwithstanding that, in the Bachelor of Arts we do offer a unit of study in a language from New South Wales, Gamilaraay. Some Aboriginal students certainly do that class but it would be mostly non-Indigenous.

To hark back to the earlier point, maybe it is not for the parliament to decide which languages are the ones to focus on. Something like a national Indigenous language centre, which had a steering committee of involved persons from across the nation, could go in camera and work that out for themselves. That would be a great act of self-determination. I am certain as many people would be unhappy with the outcome as would be happy, but it would certainly let the parliament off the hook. I know that is going to appeal to you all.

Mr HAASE: I am not keen on getting off the hook.

Mr Hobson: You like to be accountable?

Mr HAASE: I do.

Ms GRIERSON: I would think the organic nature of this revival and growth means it is vulnerable to intervention, or intervention that is insensitive to that, and I think that would be a big challenge.

Mr Hobson: Unfortunately, the bureaucracy has a tendency to try to create everything in its own image. To some extent I think that is what has belied the attack on the bilingual system in the Northern Territory; it does not suit the bureaucracy. The bureaucracy needs to be able to speak to people in English. Those Aboriginal languages are very annoying things, and they are expensive. Yes, I agree with you.

Ms GRIERSON: I would like to give you the opportunity to tell us a bit more about the students who are doing your Masters course and what they are then doing with that knowledge.

Mr Hobson: A great many things. Many come to us while working in a classroom—they are trained teachers or at least have some training. They might be TAFE educators or from the corrective services, so they are not necessarily all four-year degree teachers, but most of them have some university teaching and most would be degree teachers. They go back into their classrooms with some second-language methodology, a greater understanding of the structure of their language, how to produce materials and what works in second language

education. Currently, without it, most people are struggling—they are just winging it. Some people go back to be the first people to teach. Marianne McKinnon-Kidd, a former graduate with Dhangatti, has started up a program, and she used us.

Some people have been slurped up into the bureaucracy to become curriculum officers—which is a good thing—or senior education officers, as they have been rapidly promoted. An interesting observation is that many of our graduates have often had an unhappy history working with the languages teacher of Indonesian or Japanese in their local school, but when they go back with the Masters they find they are treated as a colleague and their opinion on things is sought out. They often send us an email, or ring us up, or we meet them at a later date, and they say: 'People actually listen to me like I know what I'm doing now. I get respect, which I didn't get before. I was just an annoying person trying to oust the Japanese teacher.'

Ms GRIERSON: And what would be the ratio of Indigenous and non-Indigenous students in the course?

Mr Hobson: We only take Indigenous students.

Ms GRIERSON: You only take Indigenous students?

Mr Hobson: Yes. It is under a Commonwealth scheme that is funded as an away-from-base course. Students do not attend full-time; they come in for six one-week blocks. I will leave you with some literature in case you know anyone who wants to enrol. It explains the nature of the program. The Commonwealth is actually paying the travel, accommodation and meal costs for students to come to Sydney.

Ms GRIERSON: So it is accessible to Indigenous people?

Mr Hobson: Nationally. We do have Torres Strait islanders. We currently have a student from Bidyadanga, south of Broome. We have a student from Victoria. We have not had anyone down from the Territory yet. We have some Queenslanders.

Ms GRIERSON: Do you have any research students?

Mr Hobson: Not at this time. It is a masters degree by coursework.

Ms GRIERSON: Are there any research fellowships in Australia in this area at the moment?

Mr Hobson: If we could find a candidate at the university we would grab them straightaway—and several universities would.

Ms GRIERSON: I want to allow you a chance to put this on the record because it has been raised before. Do you think the lack of tax deductibility status for Indigenous language and research activities is a problem.

Mr Hobson: Unfortunately it is cutting off what could be a vast supply of philanthropic funds, which I would have thought would greatly interest government. None of the language centres run for profit. They hold lamington stalls in order to fund their activities, and cobble together grants from states and a range of Commonwealth funds to try and have some continuity of effort to give people hope that they will still have a job in three, six or 12 months.

Ms GRIERSON: And we would encourage all entities to apply for it because until you apply for it—

Mr Hobson: Certainly the maintenance of Indigenous language and records funds does a great job in that area. But standing at \$9.3 million it is sadly doomed to be grossly inadequate.

CHAIR: How many students have you had through your course? If an Indigenous person comes but they do not have any traditional language or contact language—they might come from Tasmania or south-eastern Australia, where there has been a loss of those languages—how do you deal with that in training them?

Mr Hobson: We have graduated 20 people with a masters degree and three with the graduate diploma in Indigenous language education. To date, no-one has taken out the graduate certificate. Four units—the first half of the year—is a graduate certificate; two more units is a graduate diploma; and four more, which includes a classroom-based research component, earns people the masters degree. I think we would take somebody who spoke Kriol, but we would regard that as stretching the limits of the field in which we operate.

CHAIR: So no contact languages, their traditional languages.

Mr Hobson: I do not think we would close the door. We have not had any one present with Kriol. It is a language that is not English that Aboriginal people speak in their daily lives. In linguistic terms we would not disqualify it. I would not describe it as an Australian language because it is a hybrid—it has a genetic relationship but it is another whole branch of the family, if you like. So it creates a difficult issue for us. I think we would take a Kriol student; I cannot see why we would not. I do not know of any programs in the nation that are actively teaching Aboriginal English as a second language. Of course, our teachers are going to be speaking the language as a second language. We do not get first language speaker teachers who would have been operating in a bilingual

school coming to us for training because they are already trained teachers, they are already fluent speakers, so they have no need. They are not teaching a second language program; they are teaching a first language program. They do not need our qualification; it would be redundant. The big area of need is—

CHAIR: Sorry, but we will have to finish there because there is a division in the House. Thank you. Before I close the public hearing, I call upon a member of the committee to move that the committee authorise the publication of the evidence given before it at the public hearing today, including publication on the electronic parliamentary database.

Mr HAASE: So moved.

CHAIR: There being no objection, it is so resolved.

Committee adjourned at 13:04