



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

## Official Committee Hansard

# HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT  
ISLANDER AFFAIRS

**Language learning in Indigenous communities**

FRIDAY, 18 NOVEMBER 2011

SYDNEY

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
STANDING COMMITTEE ON ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER AFFAIRS**

**Friday, 18 November 2011**

**Members in attendance:** Mrs Griggs, Mr Husic, Mr Neumann 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.

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**BALSAMO, Ms Fabienne Mary, Senior Policy Officer, Australian Human Rights Commission**

**KISS, Ms Katie, Director, Social Justice Unit, Australian Human Rights Commission**

**Committee met at 09:14**

**CHAIR (Mr Neumann):** 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 welcome everyone here to the New South Wales parliament today here in Sydney. I want to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land upon which we meet and pay our respects to their elders past, present and future. We also acknowledge the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who now reside in this area.

Please note these are formal meetings of the parliament. Everything said should be factual and honest, and it can be considered a serious matter to attempt to attempt to mislead the committee. This hearing is open to the public and is being audio broadcast live via the internet. The transcript of what is said will be placed on the committee's website.

I welcome representatives of the Australian Human Rights Commission. Thank you for coming. Do you wish to make a brief introductory statement before we proceed to questions?

**Ms Balsamo:** Yes, thank you. I, too, would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land, the Gadigal people of the Eora nation, and pay my respects to their elders past and present. Thank you for the opportunity to present at this inquiry. Both Katie Kiss and I are attending on behalf of Mr Mick Gooda, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner.

As the committee is no doubt aware, Indigenous languages are critically endangered in Australia. Prior to colonisation Australia had 250 distinct languages; now about 150 of them have totally disappeared. Many of the existing languages are fragments of original languages mixed with creole and English. The national survey of Indigenous languages found that only 18 languages are full languages and spoken by all people in all age groups, so without intervention it is estimated that Indigenous language usage will be severely compromised in the next 10 to 30 years. This has significant human rights implications in relation to language rights and also in relation to the realisation of cultural rights because, as the committee will appreciate, language and culture are interlinked.

To briefly address the inquiry's terms of reference that refer to the benefits of recognising Indigenous languages and closing the gap, I am going to mention some local and international studies and examples that point to the improved outcomes in health, cognitive ability, employability and access to land rights when Indigenous people are able to speak their languages.

Firstly, there is benefit in being connected to one's mother tongue while learning a second language, as it is shown to improve resilience, wellbeing and cognitive ability. The United States National Academy of Sciences found improved cognitive function and greater brain plasticity in bilingual children compared with non-bilingual children. In Australia, the loss of language has been measured to have negative impacts. The Western Australian Aboriginal Child Health Survey found high levels of acculturative stress in children living in regional centres where language loss was occurring. With the understanding that bilingualism and multilingualism actually enhance cognitive development in children, a number of states in South-East Asia have countrywide initiatives to promote and practice bilingual education in schools through a UNESCO project.

Secondly, Indigenous languages increase the employability of Indigenous people. In fact, in certain industries they give Indigenous people a competitive advantage over non-Indigenous people. For example, Indigenous Australians are increasingly being employed as rangers in industries that are preserving the biodiversity of Australian ecosystems. Traditional languages have vast vocabularies for naming species and describing their ecology—knowledge that is little known to Western science. Indigenous knowledge is also being used in fire abatement processes aimed at reducing greenhouse gas emissions. This knowledge benefits all Australians and has been used in environment protection. Some of it informed the Garnaut review into climate change. The art and tourism industries also provide an important stream of employment, and language and culture are obviously an important component of this. The benefits from Indigenous cultural industries flow to other Australians. According to the *ABS Yearbook of 2004*, 39 per cent of potential Chinese visitors expressed interest in Indigenous cultural products. As you know, Indigenous people can be employed as translators and interpreters and that COAG commitment of \$38.6 million provides jobs for people who speak their mother tongue, so clearly it is an employability advantage for Aboriginal people.

Thirdly, the cultural knowledge that is contained in language has also been essential for Indigenous Australians to demonstrate their connection to country when they are making native title claims. Here the preservation of language is linked to basic entitlements to land rights and land justice.

Finally, Indigenous languages have intrinsic value to Indigenous people. Phyllis Darcy, who is an Awabakal descendant in New South Wales, described it thus: 'Language is very important to us. It is our connection to our ancestors. Our life blood comes from the land, and language holds the secrets to the connection to land.'

These are a few examples that show the maintenance and strengthening of Indigenous languages and culture are important contributors to closing the gap and improving the life chances of Indigenous Australians. I have a number of initiatives that work that I could describe, if the committee is interested.

**CHAIR:** That would be fine if you could just outline those. We are very happy to take recommendations, I can assure you.

**Ms Balsamo:** There are many more. Some of these are Australian and some of these are international. Internationally, language movements that have been shown to be successful are successful when they become a national responsibility, and constitutional and statutory recognition has had some of the most significant impacts. For example, Ecuador has a provision in its constitution that recognises Indigenous languages alongside Castilian, and this has increased the uptake of the language and obviously lifted its status.

New Zealand acted to protect the Maori language through the Maori Language Act 1987, and New Zealand local governments and other public institutions display all information in bilingual formats. Schools reflect the diversity of language and the Ministry of Education supports both Maori medium and English medium education.

You are probably very well aware of the language nests, and the commission strongly supports the language nests in preschools that are run by local Indigenous language speakers and there are immersion programs, but it does require the coordination of policy and resources over a number of portfolio areas across state, territory and Commonwealth governments.

We would also like to recommend, and I know the committee has spoken to people from the Australian Literacy and Numeracy Foundation, the First Language program. As you know well, that program not only develops and archives language material but it also involves community members in the development of local language materials and provides learning resources for the next generation of language speakers.

To address the final term of reference, it is the commission's view that, while the national approach to Indigenous languages policy is a good step to preserve languages in principle, there are too many barriers for it to have achieved its stated aim to improve coordination between those who are already working to support Indigenous languages—and that was the ministerial statement when it was launched. The divide between Commonwealth, state and territory policy is a large obstacle in the implementation of coherent direction in language preservation in Australia.

Cooperative federalism is a worthy aspiration though it is rarely a straightforward process and is often reliant on Commonwealth funding incentives and COAG funding agreements. At the moment funding to support the national policy comes from the Indigenous Languages Support Program with a budget, as you know, of about \$9.4 million. The funds are distributed on a grants basis. Our issue with it is that language groups need to be in a position to apply for funds, and overall a grants program is not a coherent funding strategy for preserving language. It lacks consistency and also the ability to ensure that there is an even distribution of funds and coverage of language groups where need is greatest. Unless there is targeted investment and consistent mechanisms to promote approaches that work, it is unlikely in our view that the national approach will reverse the language decline. It is also the commission's view that the benefits of Indigenous languages could be realised if Australia had a consistent and coordinated national approach managed through a national institution that provided targeted funding and ongoing monitoring. In New Zealand this is achieved through the Maori Language Commission that has responsibility for five distinct areas: maintaining a language database of the Maori language; developing language standards and certifying translators and interpreters; distributing funding for Maori language initiatives; promoting Maori language activity and communicating that across New Zealand; and providing advice to the minister, state agencies and educational institutions. This approach appears to be working. The uptake of the Maori language in New Zealand is steadily increasing. While Australia has more than 100 spoken languages compared with a single Maori language, we think it is still possible to develop a similar institution that provides a consistent model for funding, monitoring and resourcing of Australian Indigenous languages. At the moment we think that it is more of a scattergun approach.

I would finish up by saying a number of human rights are engaged in relation to Indigenous languages though perhaps the most important one is Article 13 of the Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous People that says:

Indigenous people 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, operations and persons.

There is much work to be done in Australia to achieve this objective. That concludes our statement. Thank you.

**CHAIR:** Thank you. Before I open up questions for other committee members I want to pick up a couple of things you said. You talked about language policy being a national responsibility—they were exactly your words—and you talked about there being a large obstacle in terms of cooperative federalism. Can you comment on the variations between the states and territories in their commitment to language policy? There is reference to contradictions between Commonwealth policy and the states and territories. Can you also comment on that?

**Ms Balsamo:** In the *Social Justice Report 2009* there is a chapter on languages in which we identify all the different policies in the states and territories, the differences between them and also the inconsistencies with the then very new national policy. Whilst I do not know the detail of many of the policies, I think the greatest inconsistency is between the Commonwealth and Northern Territory policies, particularly in relation to the bilingual education policy in the NT. In fact, the national policy has had no impact on that Northern Territory policy. Whilst the stated intention is to preserve languages, it is the commission's view that the scrapping of the bilingual program in the 10 schools where it was operating goes against everything that local people and communities have sought to develop over decades in developing their languages and preserving their languages.

The other point relates to a tension in national policy as it is experienced by the states. That is, the NAPLAN testing regime to some extent puts an unusual pressure on states whereby they think it is in direct competition with Indigenous languages and that in order to achieve literacy results somehow there is a conflict with Indigenous language learning. I am not sure whether there is a clear understanding that a bilingual approach is in fact an English literacy approach, it is an English language learning approach, and that that misunderstanding has led to people saying, 'We don't want people learning their languages, we want them learning English.' So on that level I think there is a policy disconnect or perhaps a misunderstanding about the intention there. I am not aware and I cannot give you any details as to whether other states have changed their policy as a result of the national policy. To date I am not aware.

**Dr STONE:** Thank you for your excellent submission and introduction. I agree with you, New Zealand is doing great work. Without using this as an excuse: they have one language in a small country compared with our situation in Australia. But that is no excuse for us not to learn from the elements that have worked in New Zealand. The majority of Indigenous students or pupils, certainly across Northern Australia—that is, Queensland, WA, Northern Territory—speak a creole very much as their everyday language. The traditional languages are continuing to decline often in the face of Kriol, which is a fully functioning, evolving language. But, given that, it seems to me that there is often a stigma attached to the speaking of Kriol. It is downplayed in terms of being a legitimate language. It is sometimes called 'poor English' or even a 'bastardised language' compared to traditional Aboriginal languages or English. What is your view of a better understanding linguistically of the emerging contact languages, the evolving contact languages, and how they are legitimate? Also, what is your view of Aboriginal English and the whole business of properly respecting the languages that children bring to school in the first instance and teaching English as a second language so that those children retain their home languages? I know that is a bit complicated as a first question.

But then I would also like to ask you about reviving languages, say, in Tasmania and Victoria, where people have a great urge to have language but it is very difficult for them to find remnants of their language, given our colonial history.

**Ms Balsamo:** Your first question is really complex.

**Dr STONE:** Take Kriol example in the first instance, because it does not seem to feature in your submission as a reality. A lot of our traditional languages are struggling with numbers of speakers remaining, but we have this vibrant Kriol in different parts which is emerging and evolving like all languages do.

**Ms Balsamo:** I can only speak in terms of what it might mean in an education sense. Whilst I have not taught in a school with a lot of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander students, I know that it sometimes makes it more complex for teachers to teach standard Australian English because there is a mixture of English in the creoles. To the extent that they are languages, they are rich and vibrant and they are the form of communication, the commission would absolutely support the resourcing of these languages. Katie, you might want to say something on that, too.

**Ms Kiss:** No.

**Ms Balsamo:** From an educational perspective, I know that it becomes complex in terms of teaching standard Australian English. I have reserve classrooms where teachers struggle to teach children the difference between what is standard English when there is a lot of Kriol mixed in. You can almost trace a line along the Stuart Highway in the Northern Territory where Kriol is strongest and then, as you move out, the traditional languages are stronger. Your second question is about—

**Dr STONE:** Communities have lost a lot of their language, particularly in Tasmania and Victoria, because of the very early colonial history where people were not allowed to speak their languages—they were mixed with other Indigenous people in protectorates and so on and forced to speak English. In Victoria, Eve Fesl—you might remember Eve, an Indigenous linguist, or perhaps she was before your time—did work in the eighties at Monash to bring a New South Wales language into Victoria, with the permission of the New South Wales people, to develop it up as an alternative language for some Victorian Indigenous people. Part way through that project, the New South Wales group, I understand, withdrew that permission and so the program never ended up being a language to be taught to Indigenous Victorians. Have you got a view on how we support Aboriginal communities who want some traditional language revitalise their language, or is it going to have to be an adoption of someone else's language, with their permission, because it is just beyond us to be able to reconstruct a language which was not written down in the 1790s, 1810s or 1820s and to all intents and purposes would seem to be extinct?

**Ms Balsamo:** The first thing I would say to that is that obviously there is enormous pride when people can speak their language, even if it is just fragments or parts or some words of their languages. In promoting, say, the Maori Language Commission and the work that they do, I think there is enormous need in Australia for coordinated archiving of language to create a national database that takes the pieces of the language that are still there and gives that language back to those communities where possible. You also talked about communities being given other languages.

**Ms Kiss:** The key to your introduction to that question is about 'with permission' and the level of engagement and consultation that needs to take place with communities about how they do develop languages and how they revitalise their own languages. The Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples article 14(3) talks about the responsibility that states have to work with communities in providing culturally appropriate education, including that people have access to their own cultures and their own languages. Obviously, consultation needs to take place with communities that have predominantly lost their language on how they want to go ahead in revitalising either their own or taking on other forms of languages, including Kriol. In terms of applying other people's languages to communities where they have predominantly lost their languages, I think that needs significant consultation.

As you would be aware, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australia consists of a very diverse range of peoples and, more commonly, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are taking their own identities rather than identifying as a more broader collective. Their identities are significant in relation to their own languages. There needs to be a planned strategy about how to go ahead in doing this, and that probably needs to be built into the national plan, but it needs significant consultation and engagement nationally with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples about how that might progress.

**Mrs GRIGGS:** Fabienne, you have spoken a number of times already about the national body. Could you provide some more comment on how you see that working in terms of, as Sharman said, the difference between New Zealand, where there is one language, and here, where there are multiple languages. What do you see as the key part of that organisation?

**Ms Balsamo:** I think I used the words 'coordination' and 'coherence' in a national strategy. In 2005 there was a very comprehensive survey of the state of Indigenous languages in Australia and perhaps that needs to be updated or more work needs to be done on that. It is a huge job. Then approaches that work need to be directed to the different language status in each language group, where those languages exist or where they are fragments, so that, if it is a revitalisation program, we are using the very best revitalisation strategies and that is what is being funded through this national body, using the best evidence and consulting with local communities.

**Mrs GRIGGS:** Do you see that there are any parts that can be pulled into that body that are already working in different jurisdictions or do you think that it needs to—

**Ms Balsamo:** Start again?

**Mrs GRIGGS:** Yes; start from scratch.

**Ms Balsamo:** No. I think that there are excellent programs—I have pointed to a few—throughout Australia: fantastic music programs, literacy programs and approaches. Obviously there is not going to be a one size fits all, but—

**Mrs GRIGGS:** Do you have some examples of some things that you think are working?

**Ms Balsamo:** I cannot think of the name, but there are a number of these music outback programs that go into communities and they do a bit of the same as the language and literacy foundation, where they use the older people to tell the stories, to write the stories. They then use the language and they write music with the children and they get the children singing the songs in schools. We know that music is an incredible medium for learning language, even a second language. Bringing great programs like that to everybody would be terrific. The main point I am making is that, if you have a grants program, it really should not be reliant on the advocacy of groups to be able to get that money to their communities. I really do think that certain communities—perhaps desert communities particularly—that are not as well resourced as other communities are not getting the same resourcing.

**Mrs GRIGGS:** Any remote communities probably.

**Ms Balsamo:** That is right, yes. The more remote, the less the capacity they have to be the full bottle on what is out there in terms of bringing resources in. I also think that, given what is happening right throughout Europe and South-East Asia in terms of bilingualism and the extensive and vast research about the bilingual approach—and I mean this not specifically in a LOTE sense; I mean working with Indigenous communities and minority language groups—this has been shown to be an excellent strategy to learn the dominant language in any area, but it needs to be appropriately resourced. I think the issue in the Northern Territory has been that it has been an ever-diminishing program and always under attack. Since its heyday of the seventies, it has been declining. With strategies like that, using the best international evidence and national programs that work—in consultation, as Katie says, with local communities—we could do much better. I also think a national institution would enhance the status of languages in Australia. I think it is even a perception issue as well.

**Mrs GRIGGS:** How do you think it would?

**Ms Balsamo:** In New Zealand they have a national language week. We know that they have the Maori language and Maori is used in parliament and it is used everywhere and can be used in courts but, if we did have a national Indigenous languages week, people in their local regions and areas could be engaged in the language of that area. All Australians, I think, would feel some sort of affinity.

**Mrs GRIGGS:** You talked a little bit about remoteness. Do you think they would be able to be engaged in a program like that or not?

**Ms Balsamo:** I think schools—a lot do not have the local council anymore; it is more regionalised, but—

**Mrs GRIGGS:** I am from the Northern Territory and I am particularly interested in things that you think can work. We have got a big issue in that we cannot even get our kids to school, particularly in the remote communities. I am trying to work out what we can do to engage them and would like to learn from some of your experience and what you think we could do.

**Ms Balsamo:** I also think that a national body should be research body as well that investigates things like the effect of, say, a music program like Music Outback that goes into a school and works intensively with students on programs like that and look at whether there is a bounce in attendance at that school and to start to do some tracking of this.

I want to talk briefly about the bilingual program. You will know well Yirrkala School. I had a quick look at the enrolment and attendance data of that school and I noticed that in 2008, before they made the changes to the bilingual program, which was in early 2009, that school had 214 students. In 2011 there are only 155 students at that school. The school attendance rates in 2008 were in the 60 per cent range. I think you measure quarterly attendance, but they were around the 60 per cent range. Now the attendance rate in the fourth collection that you did this year is 49.9 per cent. I cannot be sure that there is a direct correlation between the scrapping or reducing of the bilingual program and the traction of parents and communities in that school. But it seems to me like there should be at least some investigation to see whether that is the case.

I had a look at your schedule of hearings. You are not having a public hearing in the Northern Territory?

**Mrs GRIGGS:** Yes, we are.

**CHAIR:** Yes, we are going to the Northern Territory and Western Australia and South Australia in the New Year. We were supposed to be here this week—'outback', if I can put it like that in a good Australian colloquialism. But President Obama frustrated in our attempts to go outback.

Can I raise an issue. As part of our *Doing Time—time for doing* report, the committee travelled extensively in New Zealand. Dr Stone and I were there. We spoke with cabinet ministers; we spoke with people at the front line in cultural awareness, employment services; we looked at youth courts; we travelled across the country in relation to it. They were very proud of lots of different things but at no stage did they provide us with any empirical

evidence—to use your comment in relation to approaches that work, best international evidence—that the Maori Language Commission was effective in what it was doing. We spoke to many, many people. So if you have any evidence that would assist us in that regard, because you recommend we undertake that, we would appreciate that. Believe you me, we spoke with a lot of people and there was no evidence at all given to us in relation to the success or otherwise of that particular commission. We would appreciate, seeing you have recommended it, that you provide us, if you could, with some evidence in relation to that. We asked the New Zealanders about those sorts of things. In many ways we were told: 'It's a good idea. There is support on the ground. It is terrific. It is like the youth courts.' But where is the evidence in relation to the fact that we would spend millions of dollars in relation to this particular project without any empirical evidence that it has worked internationally? So if you have any evidence that would be terrific.

**Ms Balsamo:** I have and I can provide that on notice.

**CHAIR:** That would be great.

**Ms Balsamo:** I might be able to find something quickly. The evidence that I have is the uptake of language and the increase in speakers of the Maori language. What is most interesting is the cohort that have taken up the Maori language. It is people aged between 20 and 30. There has been a real increase in the number of Maori speakers in that age cohort. That was the thing I found most interesting. There is data.

**CHAIR:** I am certainly not adverse to recommending to the committee that we do this, but we certainly did not in New Zealand and we do not currently have evidence that would justify your recommendation—and neither deal in terms of your evidence so far. So if you have any evidence to give to the committee, we would appreciate that very much.

**Dr STONE:** If I could follow up on that, Chair, just briefly, we were most keen to carry off that evidence. Obviously you can imagine why. But it was in areas of recidivism for adolescent youth who had been totally immersed in Maori culture and language courses in their detention places; it was in relation to employment, school retention and school outcomes. That is where we had troubles—having any data.

**CHAIR:** We visited prisons and the like but we could not get the evidence. We had a lot of enthusiasm about it but very little empirical evidence in relation to it.

**Ms Balsamo:** I looked for research in Australia in order to talk about things like resilience, wellbeing and reduced recidivism but there is almost nothing in Australia. We do not have to follow the exact model of New Zealand; we should obviously tailor it to our particular needs. We can provide evidence, though, from the United States. There is good evidence from the United States that being connected to one's home language and culture is a protective factor. The data is particularly relevant for people who are in out-of-home care, probably the most marginalised young people. So there are data and statistics on that. But Australia really does need to start to build a case.

**CHAIR:** We do not have a problem with accepting and believing; that is why we are having this inquiry. We believe strongly that fostering and promoting language in Indigenous communities is a good thing in closing the gap. But we simply do not have the evidence to justify recommendations going forward to the federal government to spend millions of dollars on an Indigenous commission, nor did we get it on our extensive trip to New Zealand. We would appreciate any empirical evidence you have that would justify it.

**Dr STONE:** One of our problems with the national policy on Indigenous language is that there is no additional funding, as you would be aware. Since those times, we have seen, as you have reminded us, a bilingual education program in the Northern Territory flounder with the alternative program with some of the hours of English at the beginning of the day. Is it four hours?

**Ms Kiss:** Yes.

**Dr STONE:** All teaching must be at the beginning of the day. That makes you wonder how many hours are left in the day for most primary school aged kids after they have spent the first four hours on English, so I think there is also the issue of quality of program across our country. It is not enough to simply say, 'Of course, the kids have teachers aides who are speaking the home language or traditional language in the school so it must be okay.' They also have to be able to describe programs in terms of their actual structure, their performance and their quality and compare them one with another in different places to see measurable outcomes.

**CHAIR:** Thank you very much for coming and thank you for your evidence. We look forward to your additional evidence in relation to the recommendation. A transcript of your evidence will be available from Hansard. Please check it and make any alterations or additions you wish to make—corrections, that is.

**PHILLIPS, Ms Jacqueline, National Director, Australians for Native Title and Reconciliation**

**VISWANATHAN, Mr Rajiv, Researcher, Australians for Native Title and Reconciliation**

[09:53]

**CHAIR:** Welcome. Anything you say here needs to be a factual and honest account. These are proceedings of the federal parliament so some serious consequences are involved. I do not think there is a jail at the bottom of the federal parliament building, but it is a serious matter to mislead a parliamentary committee. If you wish to make an opening introductory statement, we would appreciate that.

**Ms Phillips:** I would like to begin by also acknowledging the traditional owners of the land, the Gadigal people of the Eora nation, and pay my respects to their elders past and present. Given the subject of this inquiry, I would also like to acknowledge the traditional language of the Gadigal people, one of the many languages to have largely disappeared since colonisation.

Thank you for the opportunity for ANTaR to give evidence today. As you well know, this inquiry comes at a critical time, with many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages endangered and the time for action rapidly running out. Research suggests that, on current trends, there are likely to be only a handful of Aboriginal languages left by 2050. Past policies banning or discouraging the use of Aboriginal languages have contributed to this precarious situation.

As the media release announcing this inquiry acknowledged, there is a widespread belief that Australia is a monolingual nation and that only standard Australian English offers education and economic benefits to learners. This overlooks the fact that Australia is in fact home to some of the oldest surviving languages in the world, which are disappearing faster than any other indigenous languages globally. Despite, and I think related to, this, Aboriginal languages have no official status in Australia. ANTaR is a national advocacy organisation of Aboriginal and non-Indigenous Australians campaigning for rights, recognition and justice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and for a meaningful reconciliation process based on principles of recognition, restitution and transformation. Although we are not experts in language learning or educationalists for that matter, ANTaR believes that support for language preservation and revitalisation is fundamentally important as a mark of respect and recognition of the value and importance of Aboriginal cultures and as a means for the promotion of resilience, improved health outcomes and economic opportunities for Aboriginal people. It is also required by international law, with indigenous language rights contained in articles 13 and 14 of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Traditional languages provide speakers with a connection to their culture, their past, their identity and their community. The revitalisation of Indigenous languages is closely connected with ANTaR's efforts both to promote respect, rights and reconciliation but also to advocate for practical action to close the gap. Language learning is also closely connected with ANTaR's priority campaign to achieve recognition of Aboriginal people in the Constitution and to reduce the overimprisonment of Aboriginal people in prison.

Many recent submissions to the expert panel on constitutional recognition raise the importance of language and expressed support for recognition of Aboriginal languages in some way, either in a preamble or in the body of the document. The referendum offers us an opportunity as a nation to collectively express our respect and the value that we place on Aboriginal languages. It would also provide an important legal foundation for action to promote, preserve and revitalise Aboriginal languages. We have seen this in other countries.

As the committee is aware, there are also clear links between the decline in Aboriginal languages and very high rates of imprisonment. Loss of cultural identity and low self-esteem are key risk factors in determining future contact with the criminal justice system. Conversely, as the committee identified in its *Doing Time* report, strong cultural identity, including language proficiency, promotes resilience and reduces the risk of contact. ANTaR believes that the Australian government's *Indigenous languages—a national approach* is an important embodiment of its commitment in principle to promote language revitalisation and to provide for improved literacy and numeracy amongst Aboriginal people. However, it will have very limited impact unless it is underpinned by substantial resources and national policy coordination.

Across the Commonwealth, states and territories there are a range of policies and numerous programs relating to Indigenous language revitalisation and, although there are encouraging success stories at a grassroots level, in general terms the policy framework is fragmented and uncoordinated. There is no common set of national core principles and approaches to funding are inconsistent. ANTaR strongly advocates for the creation of a National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Languages Centre modelled on the Maori Language Commission to oversee and coordinate national languages policy, funding, program standards and research projects, importantly supported by a network of regional centres. Such a body could oversee the development and adoption of a

uniform set of principles across Commonwealth and states, such as those outlined in our submission, as an important first step in achieving policy and program consistency nationally. ANTaR shares both the federal and Northern Territory governments' concerns about poor school attendance and low levels of English language and literacy and numeracy in Aboriginal communities. However, we are very concerned by the Northern Territory government's mandatory English teaching policy introduced in 2009, which leaves only about an hour and a half each school day for students to learn Indigenous languages. All available evidence suggests that teaching in mother tongue languages first in a bilingual education model in Aboriginal communities with team teaching increases English language over time in fact and supports English language learning. Evidence from Australia and overseas—and I note the US study from Thomas and Collier—shows that by high school students receiving a bilingual education are in fact outperforming their peers.

To ensure that Aboriginal languages are embedded in the education system, we recommend that Aboriginal language teaching be included in the national curriculum currently in development and that teaching of English as a second language become a compulsory training component for teachers in remote Aboriginal communities in recognition of the fact that English is a second, third or even fourth language for many Aboriginal children, particularly in those communities.

The current process of development of national teacher standards by the Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs provides a timely opportunity to ensure that Aboriginal languages and teaching are embedded in these standards.

Aboriginal language learning is particularly important in the early years and ANTaR certainly supports calls for early childhood intensive language programs or 'nests', as they are referred to, but language education should also be seen as a lifelong, whole-of-community process, with programs available to adults and efforts to engage the broader community in the teaching and learning process.

Finally, the teaching of Aboriginal languages should be available not only to Aboriginal children but also to non-Indigenous students as part of their languages education. We believe this could significantly improve understanding and respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, the pride and self-esteem of Aboriginal children and in this way contribute in an important way to the reconciliation process. That concludes our opening statement and we welcome questions.

**CHAIR:** You make a recommendation in relation to Australia becoming a signatory to the Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage. What would be the implications and consequences should Australia do that?

**Ms Phillips:** That recommendation is borne from the recognition that language comprises an important part of our cultural heritage as a nation and picks up a recommendation made by the Social Justice Commissioner in his 2009 languages chapter.

**CHAIR:** Chapter 3—is that the one you are referring to?

**Ms Phillips:** Yes, chapter 3. Rajiv, did you want to comment on any practical implications?

**Mr Viswanathan:** A convention, as you know, has a different status in international law to a declaration. The Australian government endorsed the Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous People a couple of years ago but a convention brings with it more obligations to introduce domestic laws reflecting the requirements of the convention. We think that would further support efforts to give Indigenous languages official status in Australian law.

**CHAIR:** I did not ask that question to the previous people because that recommendation came from their chapter. Can you talk about how that would support what you say? Can you give me any particulars on how it would happen?

**Mr Viswanathan:** I guess we could provide more detail separately.

**CHAIR:** Because there are consequences. When any Australian government signs an international treaty, whether it is environment, education or military, there are economic and legal consequences to doing that. Can you give me more particulars about the consequences to Australia if we do that?

**Mr Viswanathan:** It is probably better if we take that on notice and answer separately.

**CHAIR:** Thank you. That would be good. It is a major thing to sign up to any international convention.

**Ms Phillips:** I would add that in enacting that convention national legislation to recognise Indigenous languages and Kriol, potentially, as official languages in Australia would be an important legislative enactment in implementing that convention domestically. From that might flow a legal and policy infrastructure nationally that

might offer some coordination and raise the profile of Indigenous languages in a legal sense as well as in a policy and funding sense. But we can certainly provide further information about that.

**CHAIR:** The symbolism is meritorious—it is terrific. I am not saying it is not a good thing, but there are obvious consequences that flow from signing that. It would be terrific if you could get some information about that.

**Ms Phillips:** Will do.

**CHAIR:** I asked a question before in relation to the Maori Language Commission of the Human Rights Commission. Were you here?

**Ms Phillips:** Yes.

**CHAIR:** Do you have any evidence yourself as to why we should go down a path that the New Zealanders at this point in time are not great proponents of? It is in its embryonic stages.

**Ms Phillips:** I have not any proof evidence that the commission has not already provided or would not intend to provide. Certainly the key evidence that we have relied on is the uptake of language, and that is a significant trend. We are seeing the very opposite trend in Australia—in fact, a highly accelerated language decline. But I think the important thing that we would add in terms of the Australian context, given the number of Indigenous languages in Australia, would be the need for that body to work quite closely and in a coordinated way with a network of regional centres so that whatever the national policy settings are could be implemented in a localised context, appropriately taking into account whatever the language requirements and particular social, economic and other factors are that might have a bearing in those local contexts. Otherwise, I think such a body in Australia would have a very difficult time, given the enormous size of the country and the linguistic and cultural diversity around the country.

As part of a coordinated network, I think certainly given how uncoordinated our current policy settings are, such a body could play a key role in steering that coordination and importantly, too, ensuring that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are driving that policy process by ensuring that they staff such a body. It is a really good way to make sure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are front and centre in making decisions about language preservation and revitalisation around the country.

**CHAIR:** That is good. Can you talk in terms of your position on the implications of a national language policy in Closing the Gap? We have lots of partnerships, building blocks and funding commitments but very little is said in relation to language. Can you comment on that?

**Ms Phillips:** I think that is one of the missing pieces in what we call 'the closing the gap puzzle'. The other one that we strongly emphasise is the lack of justice targets, which I know that you recommended in the *Doing time* report. The key impact that language preservation and revitalisation and improved learning would have on Closing the Gap outcomes is probably related to this question of cultural strength and identity and then the resilience and health impacts that flow from that. The domestic evidence which is often pointed to in that context is the study around health outcomes in Utopia and other homelands. They have significantly higher health outcomes and life expectancy compared to other communities, despite suffering relatively similar levels of social and economic disadvantage. This has been largely attributed to the cultural strength of those communities. Language obviously plays a key role in that context. So we would see key health outcomes there related against self-esteem to identity and resilience as well as economic and educational outcomes.

We know the educational benefits of bilingualism. We know that there is a Closing the Gap target or a number of them that relate to educational improvements, particularly around literacy and numeracy. The evidence there is, I think, unquestionable. It is really not in debate from what I can see, apart from perhaps in the Territory. But I am not sure what evidence has been adduced there either to actually question the value of bilingualism. It seems like a lot of assumptions have been made. So I see language as having a key bearing on the health, education and employment outcomes and targets in the Close the Gap strategy.

**CHAIR:** We have already received evidence from Utopia and have an invitation to go there. We had hoped to be there before the end of the year; but, unfortunately, as I said before, President Obama visited—not that that was not a good thing.

**Dr STONE:** You spend a lot of time in your submission—and it is a very good submission, thank you very much—on language revitalisation, and understandably so when you talk about extinct languages and languages that need to be retrieved. I asked the previous representatives about the issue of the contact languages or the creoles. They are particularly spoken all through the Torres Strait Islands, of course, but also right throughout Northern Australia, through the Pilbara and so on. Does your revitalisation concern also extend to recognising the status of the contact languages and making sure that those who speak them are not given the same consideration

for ESL language support in schools or that they are treated as just being poor speakers of English? Can you speak about that?

**Ms Phillips:** It is important that any recognition of Indigenous languages includes recognition of the creole languages. Certainly, to your earlier question in terms of education policy, if we are talking about bilingualism and we are talking about teaching children in their mother tongue, if that is a creole language then that should be the language in which they are initially taught in an early years bilingual education model. It might be that in later years you introduce some more traditional languages that are non-creole languages as their language proficiency develops. I also think that the language revitalisation exercise process is one that is perhaps important that the whole of the community is engaged in. That is not so much an early education priority as I see it, although that is a good place to start. It needs to extend beyond that. But it is a different question to the mother tongue question, I think. Certainly in some cases where languages are virtually extinct or are extinct, revitalisation efforts will be very difficult. That is why it is extremely important that there are resources now and quickly, given the urgency of the situation, to engage in the recording, preserving and archiving of those languages which are critically endangered to ensure we preserve what is left of them, and then we can look at how we might try to bring those languages back to life in some way using that information.

**Mr Viswanathan:** Just to add to that, we would echo the comments made by the commission earlier that the communities need to be the ones deciding how and which languages they wish to revitalise. It cannot be something mandated externally, each community needs to be deciding.

**Dr STONE:** Understood. Can I move on quickly. You have a lot to say about bilingual programs and you make some reference to the Northern Territory program. To what extent do you think the problems in the Northern Territory are aligned with the native language teachers often being poorly paid, not trained, just teachers aides in the schools, usually women, and therefore the whole status of using languages in the Northern Territory schools was kind of a cheap childminding exercise often with federal CDEP funding for those teachers aides rather than Northern Territory salaries paid through their education department. Have you got a comment on this whole business? You rightly say that it should be a community led initiative to decide which languages are revitalised or protected or preserved, and those decisions I would think would then spill into how people are trained effectively to teach in their schools as native language speakers. Have you got any recommendations about how we train Indigenous speakers appropriately so that they can take their languages and make sure that their children are effective speakers at the same time as they become functional in English and therefore can compete in our English-speaking economy?

**Ms Phillips:** I think that is an important point. The literature talks about team teaching and you have raised a key issue there, which is the flaw in a model of team teaching where you have the non-Indigenous teacher who is paid a much higher rate than the Indigenous teacher, who is in fact a teaching assistant and has not been given perhaps the training or opportunities to enable them to develop their skills further. I understand there has been a high level of demand for places at the Batchelor Institute's training and education programs for Aboriginal teachers. There is a whole lot of unmet need there, it sounds like, for additional training, whether that is qualified teachers or more skilled and experienced teachers aides. So I think it is certainly a priority to upskill the Indigenous education workforce to ensure that they can play an equal role in the classroom and that team teaching is really what it sounds like. I have forgotten what the other part of the question was.

**Dr STONE:** I guess I was asking how we can make sure that if Indigenous communities are to carry the flag, to identify themselves which languages are appropriate, that they then have the skills to carry that through, and then the curriculum materials and the time in the school programs and so on to carry out what they clearly would want to do.

**Ms Phillips:** There may be opportunities to address some of those points. The inquiry is timely in a number of ways, not just because of the critically endangered nature of language but because the national curriculum is in development and the teaching standards as well. I think both of those processes could well pick up some of these issues, particularly the Indigenous teacher training issue.

**Mr Viswanathan:** The role of regional language centres is very important to that as well. We have talked a lot about a national Indigenous language centre if it were established, but we think it is important that that work in conjunction with appropriately resourced regional centres which could then form a bridge between the national program and particular communities.

**CHAIR:** You make a comment in your submission in terms of the maintenance of Indigenous language and records program about the inadequacy of the funding at \$9.6 million. I think we could agree that that is a small amount of money in relation to language. But you make a comment not just on the inadequacy of the funding but also on the inconsistency of the approach with respect to the funding of the revitalisation programs. You say that

in the previous two rounds the applications had outstripped the actual amount that was being offered. Can you comment further, because you leave it dangling in your report. You say:

This results in inconsistent approaches towards the funding of language revitalisation programs.

Do you have any particulars about that?

**Ms Phillips:** I think the broader point is one that the Human Rights Commission has made too, which is that, because it is a grant based funding program, no Indigenous language centres are receiving recurrent, secure funding that they can rely on. There are a group organisations who may or may not apply in any one year, and they may or may not apply because of a whole lot of other contingencies to do with capacity and staffing. It is not a policy or grants program that is designed to ensure that money finds its way to where it is most needed and to the programs that are necessarily most effective. It is going to be the accident of who happened to apply that year for the particular funding grants, and you have just got to hope that the money finds its way to where it is most needed. What we are suggesting is that something that is much more intelligent as a grant program design is needed to ensure that we get the maximum output for those very minimum dollars.

**Dr STONE:** So you want recurrent funding for approved and appropriate centres and then a top-up might be grants for special programs but not that the whole existence of these programs depends on your luck of the draw in winning a grant.

**Ms Phillips:** Absolutely. The amount is miniscule, as you say—less than \$10 million for a national Indigenous program. The level of demand is a fairly crude measure of the actual demand, obviously. The need is much greater than that, as we can tell from the critically endangered nature of Indigenous languages. It is just one measure.

**CHAIR:** To give an analogy: while the Commonwealth government funds capital and recurrent grants to schools, on top of that we have given—for example my side of politics—terrific programs, which my colleagues may disagree with, in relation to trade training centres applications whereby people can make funding for that. You are saying that there is too much emphasis on the equivalent of trade training centres where people can make applications themselves and, if they are successful, they will get one as opposed to the recurrent and capital grants. What your saying is that we should be rolling out these programs, as Dr Stone said, not just pilot programs or you deciding to put in an application. This should be a matter of: 'You're funded for three to five years. This is the criteria on which you are funded. This is why you are being funded. And this is stated very clearly.' Is that what you are saying?

**Ms Phillips:** That is right. What we are calling for in our submission is a common set of national principles, and those principles, we suggest, could be developed or informed by a national commission. But, regardless of the existence of that body, we suggest that there be a core set of principles that inform funding decisions that are made nationally, that significantly more resources are available and that funding is then directed to the priorities that are established in those principles and in the national policy framework rather than what is inevitably an ad hoc funding process under the current model.

**CHAIR:** You are not the first person to give evidence in relation to that, Ms Phillips. I can assure you that we have had that evidence before. Any other questions?

**Dr STONE:** We are just about out of time, but let me ask one quick final question. You talked about the national curriculum development, which is occurring now. Are you perceiving that that would include non-Indigenous students also taking up Indigenous languages? Is this your idea of a curriculum where we offer, as we do now, alternative languages as year 12 subjects and so on? Is this the idea?

**Ms Phillips:** That is right. It would cover both so that it would cover language learning for Indigenous students but also for non-Indigenous students as one of the language options offered probably not until high school for most students but in some cases primary school. I must say that I am encouraged by the draft national curriculum statement on bilingualism. There is quite a strong endorsement of those principles. I have not seen the final. I understand it is coming out this month. The question then will be how those principles are implemented in the draft curriculum. We will be watching very closely to make sure that the issues we have raised today are reflected there.

**CHAIR:** Thank you very much for your very good evidence. We look forward to getting additional evidence to help us in our report. Thank you very much.

**Ms Phillips:** Thanks again.

**CHRISTIAN, Mr James, Head, Aboriginal Affairs New South Wales**

**WILLIAMS, Mr Shayne, Residential Principal Policy Officer, Aboriginal Affairs New South Wales**

[10:20]

**CHAIR:** Welcome.

**Mr Christian:** Thank you for the invitation. I pay my respects to the traditional owners of the land that we are gathered on today, the Gadigal people of the Eora nation. I will start by telling you a little bit about myself. I am a proud Wiradjuri man. My mother's people are the Wadi Wadi people. My mother grew up on Balranald reserve in the south-west of the state, and my father's people come from Warangesda station. Thank you for the opportunity this morning to address the inquiry.

**Mr Williams:** I would also like to thank you for the opportunity to come and speak to you today. I come from the Aboriginal reserve of La Perouse, which is on Botany Bay. I am a Dharawal person on my mum's and dad's sides, but I am also Dhangadi and Kamilaroi and I have got Victorian connections as well, with the Bangerang people.

**CHAIR:** Thank you for that background. I appreciate that. Would you like to make a brief introductory statement before we proceed to some questions?

**Mr Christian:** I would. Can I just say that our introductions are not an uncommon event when Aboriginal people come together. You can see, I think, the importance of language, the connection to country and the connection to each other. So often those sorts of introductions position people very well in the interactions that they are about to have. I just wanted to point out that particular aspect for you.

Language is one of the most fundamental ways in which Aboriginal people express our culture and strength and community wellbeing, by reaffirming our sense of belonging and community connections. Too often, though, Aboriginal people are written about or talked about as though we are a common group of people with a shared language, history and culture. Yet in New South Wales alone there is a very large and diverse number of Aboriginal clans and language groups.

Aboriginal communities in New South Wales will also have different past experiences, particularly with government policies and programs and relationships with colonisers, which in turn may and do affect our preparedness to respond to new initiatives or even invitations to talk about new ways, for example, in the reclamation, revitalisation and promotion of our important languages and ways of cultural expression. The degree of willingness to respond will depend on the community's past experiences. For example, if expectations have been raised previously and they have not been met, there will be a reluctance to engage. Genuine recognition of cultural and linguistic diversity means developing an approach to languages and cultural expression that is place based, because this reflects the ways in which different communities interact and, again, the important differences that do exist.

Indigenous languages tie us to our country and express our way of being and seeing the world. For Aboriginal people, language holds our stories, history and knowledge built up over thousands of years. Aboriginal languages are unique in their vocabulary, grammatical structure and cultural meanings. But Australia has witnessed the largest and most rapid loss of language anywhere in the world. New South Wales has the longest history of colonisation and suppression of cultural expression. As a result, only some 13 of the 70 languages spoken in New South Wales in 1788 are spoken today. According to the 2006 Census, only 804 Aboriginal people in New South Wales identified as speaking an Aboriginal language.

The New South Wales government is now focused on language maintenance, extending the number and fluency of speakers and on revitalisation of sleeping languages. According to school principals who teach Aboriginal languages, there is a strong connection between language learning and Aboriginal students sense of self-worth, identity and pride—their ability to engage with education and perform at their best. This I think is important in recognising that in educating young Aboriginal people and children it is much more than bricks and mortar and world-class curriculum; is actually the things that will drive parents and the children themselves to get out of bed to go to school and to participate.

In New South Wales using and learning Aboriginal languages has been associated with increased school attendance rates amongst Aboriginal students and improved academic performance, particularly in literacy levels. For Aboriginal students learning an Aboriginal language can strongly motivate students, promoting a sense of pride and direction.

The Minister for Aboriginal Affairs in New South Wales, the Hon. Victor Dominello MP, has commissioned an evidence based review of the impact of language learning on educational outcomes for Aboriginal students. Dr

Williams is conducting that review as a resident researcher within Aboriginal Affairs NSW. I am sure he is keen to talk to you about his research so far. This review currently being conducted will consider whether expanding Aboriginal language and cultural learning in New South Wales schools will improve academic outcomes and will make recommendations on how to maximise these potential benefits. The review will inform the government as to its designs and implementation of Aboriginal language policies and programs that build on cultural and our other strengths that Aboriginal students have. This review will be completed by the end of 2011. May I suggest that it will be, hopefully, instructive for the inquiry, and we are happy to ensure that we share the review with you when it is finalised.

It is Aboriginal communities that are the custodians of our languages. Language learning in school requires the engagement and ownership of Aboriginal community. All language maintenance and reclamation work must be driven by Aboriginal communities ourselves. This is a lengthy, complex process that demands a concerted effort and substantial support from government. Aboriginal communities cannot undertake this crucial task alone or without sufficient resources. Aboriginal languages are invaluable cultural heritage for all Australians and deserve to be a high priority of all governments. The New South Wales government recognises that successful language revival efforts require coordination and collaboration across governments.

The issues, in summary, that we have raised in our submission to you—and I know that you will have read it, so I will not go into the details—are similar to the things that I think that the Australian Human Rights Commission and ANTaR have outlined: the need for the establishment of national Aboriginal languages bodies; regional language cultural centres; community based language teachers who receive appropriate training, recognition and wages; a network of community language teachers; again, adequate financial resources—we will be pleased to revisit the issue of the evidence base with you and the questions that you have already asked; we do have an opinion about that; and the need for government to continue to work with Aboriginal communities to encourage at early stages like preschools, primary schools, high schools et cetera to offer Aboriginal languages. But it is not simply good enough to offer the opportunity for Aboriginal languages to Aboriginal students; it must be offered to the community, because we cannot assume that families, parents, will be able to speak the languages that we are teaching. We have already commenced work in New South Wales to establish a peak community state based language centre to coordinate language revival efforts and resources in New South Wales. We call it the Centre for Aboriginal Languages Coordination and Development. The centre was established earlier this year with funding of \$1.27 million over three years, which includes annual funding of \$400,000 to cover some staffing and administration as well as the community based language projects. Indeed, \$200,000 of those funds will be directed to local community language projects. The centre was established under the auspices of the New South Wales Aboriginal Education Consultative Group—and I see on the agenda that they will be appearing before the inquiry—because they are the peak Aboriginal education advocacy body and they have played a significant role in promoting and supporting language revitalisation work in New South Wales, particularly through the education system. An Aboriginal community controlled council will direct language work priorities for the centre. The centre will provide informed advice to the New South Wales government on the development of a revised Aboriginal languages policy and strategic plan.

I want to comment just briefly on another issue because it has already been covered in previous evidence, and that is the \$9.4 million allocated to the National Indigenous Languages Policy and the Maintenance of Indigenous Languages and Records Program in 2009-10. As I am sure you are aware, the program funded 63 projects at a value of \$7.9 million. That dropped by one project on the previous year, which had 64 projects valued at a total of \$8.8 million. We know that there are significant numbers of applications being made to this program, yet not all of them are able to be funded. We know that there are groups and communities who would like to participate but for various reasons are not ready at the time that the grants program cycle is running. We would support the previous evidence given by the HRC and by ANTaR that the program is not consistent in its application of available resources. There is an inability of community to be able to plan for the longer term, particularly as the work of revitalisation takes a long time—it takes time to develop the trust of language speakers—and that if they entrust that to whatever body is running these projects it will be respected and honoured. So the fact that these programs are not recurrently funded does mean that communities cannot plan for the longer term. There is no certainty for the work that they are undertaking. That is a very significant issue, I think, for the program.

In conclusion, Aboriginal languages are an invaluable asset to both the Aboriginal community and the broader Australian community. Without substantial effort by Aboriginal communities, state and Commonwealth governments, many Aboriginal languages, cultural concepts and the repository of histories and knowledge will be lost. The need for governments both state and Commonwealth to work together with Aboriginal communities to salvage and strengthen Aboriginal languages is urgent. Through the combined and coordinated state and Commonwealth efforts, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students and communities and the broader non-Aboriginal

community may continue to benefit from the unique cultural heritage of our Aboriginal languages and cultural expression. Thank you very much.

**CHAIR:** Thank you very much, Mr Christian. Dr Williams, perhaps because he has dropped you in it in terms of your work—and without pre-empting your findings, because I presume that, having the idea of completing it by the end of 2011, you are a fair way through your review—can you make some comments about it? We look forward to reading your review in due course.

**Mr Williams:** I am more than pleased to provide you with a copy of the final report. I am just past the mid-study paper, so you will receive a copy of that as well. It is in the process of being internally published. When you get the copy of it, it will be nice and clean and have that nice printed smell to it. We like to do things professionally.

There are certain parameters to my study. It is a literature survey, so there is no field based work involved at this stage. I have been asked to look at the correlations between the teaching and learning of Indigenous languages and culture and the influence that has on Indigenous students' academic performances and outcomes. Thus far, the hardcore empirical evidence in terms of the literature is quite scant. I am sure you are already aware of that. There is anecdotal evidence around which suggests that the teaching and learning of languages and culture is impacting in a positive way on the acquisition of English and maths and students' participation in schools, but most of that evidence is anecdotal and a lot of it seems to exist only in the schools themselves. That is the stuff I need to go after; but, like I said, I am restricted by the parameters of the brief. It is quite a broad brief, too, because I am also expected to look at the impact that the teaching and learning of language and culture has on Indigenous health and wellbeing. So it is quite a broad brief that I am working to.

Some of the speakers earlier pointed out the dire situation of Indigenous languages, not just here but worldwide. That is what the literature is revealing to me so far. Because this is an Indigenous driven study, I want to push it a little further than what has been done previously. What I want to do with this study is look at Indigenous spiritualism as a determinant in helping children embrace the teaching and learning of culture and how that then leads them into a different realm where they are able to participate more fully and more proudly in a system that is completely alien to them and their own culture, which is the mainstream education system.

The thing with mainstream education systems is that the curriculum is very crowded and children are required to learn in a crowd, which brings up questions such as: how do we get Indigenous people to set up a cultural context within these systems that they feel they fully own and that they can embrace? For me language is not owned by certain individuals; it is a community owned collective responsibility. I can see—and I am just reiterating what James said earlier—that it takes a whole community approach to be able not just to develop language programs but to work on particular pedagogies to ensure that that language and that culture is carried out in a way in a school context that is effective for Aboriginal people.

I am going back to 1960 here, when two academics—one was a linguist and the other was a major anthropologist—agreed that Aboriginal languages should be used as a tool to assimilate our peoples into the Western education systems. My fear is—and it is a fear that we should share—how do we get our people not to be sceptical about what we are trying to do here in terms of teaching language and using language this time round to help our children acquire English proficiency? If our children do not acquire English proficiency, how do they get access to the mainstream economic system and, therefore, the wealth of this country? This is my own analysis of the literature thus far. I am applying an Indigenous spiritual lens to the literature to try and provide our readers with a different window into the Indigenous perspective and how it works in this context.

**CHAIR:** Dr Williams, this sounds like a fascinating review and we look forward to receiving it. It certainly raises issues that are outside of what we have been getting in evidence.

**Mr Williams:** What I am really after is the cold, hard empirical evidence, which I suspect will probably come about in the form of more field research and which I would like to put forward to you as a recommendation.

**CHAIR:** We appreciate that. We need the evidence that demands a verdict, if I can put it like that. That is from my old days as a litigation lawyer. I am sure that Dr Stone, as a former anthropologist, will ask questions—I am just a humble lawyer—in relation to the second aspect of our inquiry into competency in the English language. I am interested in picking up something that Mr Christian said about training recognition and wages—that is his expression—for Aboriginal language teachers in New South Wales. How can we go about doing this? As you know—and Dr Williams talked about the pedagogy—children do not grow up in a vacuum. They need good mentors, trainers and teachers to teach them these concepts. It does not matter which culture they come from, they need that. How do we go about ensuring that? And what is happening in New South Wales?

**Mr Christian:** There are a range of ways that we can look at making sure that Indigenous language speakers and teachers of those languages are appropriately recognised. Clearly, recognition in the academic fields is important. In New South Wales, we have a range of technical and further education institutions, or TAFEs, that are teaching Aboriginal languages. For example, my own Wiradjuri language is being taught in TAFEs in places like Albury. That is one way that we can, in a sense, professionalise teachers of Aboriginal languages. The other way is possibly through various industrial instruments. Because each area approaches this issue differently, you will have people on different pay scales, different pay rates and with different requirements for their qualifications. As far as I am aware, there is no uniformity around those aspects.

My sense is that how we get that recognition and how that recognition is then appropriately rewarded is an issue for every jurisdiction. But there needs to be some commitment to address the issues somewhere, and there is not one currently, as far as I can tell.

**CHAIR:** An inclusion of Indigenous languages in the national curriculum as we have with history, maths and science? Would you recommend that we include the teaching of language? That would surely enhance the prestige of language learning in Indigenous communities, if you had it as part of the national curriculum as you might teach Mandarin, Japanese, Indonesian, French, German or Italian.

**Mr Christian:** That is a timely opportunity with the national curriculum being developed by ACARA. I think there is merit in that, definitely. There has to be a demand. I think with demand that also acts as a lever to increase the professionalism and, again, rates of pay et cetera for individuals. So I think that is an important lever.

**Dr STONE:** I understand that the New South Wales Constitution now recognises Aboriginal people as a first people. I am looking at page 12—it is page 56 in our papers—of your submission. I am not sure whether it is paraphrasing the words in the constitution. If it is, it does not seem to mention language. When did that constitutional recognition happen, and are you aware of whether there is a general awareness among the New South Wales population of that recognition in the New South Wales Constitution? Does it in fact refer to language? Our previous evidence suggested that we should make reference to indigenous language and, of course, have a preamble or more in our Australian Constitution in relation to indigenous peoples, so I am just interested in whether New South Wales has that recognition. Can you tell us a little more about that?

**Mr Christian:** I cannot give you the exact dates that the New South Wales parliament, with bipartisan support, passed the bill amending the New South Wales Constitution to include recognition of Aboriginal people as the first people of this state with particular interests and contributions to make. Language is not specifically mentioned, but the legislation passed through the parliament in 2010. I will take it on notice to get the exact date for you.

**Dr STONE:** So it occurred in about 2010.

**Mr Christian:** Yes. It was marked with a very significant day in the parliament where two of our respected community leaders and elders spoke in the parliament to the bill and there was a big gathering out the front. I do not know how many Aboriginal people specifically would know about the constitutional amendment, but we certainly see it as an important development and an important recognition that Aboriginal Affairs as an agency played a critical role in getting that through parliament.

**Mr Christian:** The lack of reference specifically to language may have been an oversight at the time, and maybe that is a further evolution of the statement to come. Shayne, I am very pleased to hear that you have a Bangarang connection. That is my home country on the Murray River in Victoria. Your research sounds absolutely critical. I am a little bit concerned for you about its scope—it is very comprehensive the way you have described it, and I understand that you are doing it basically as a literature review. How are you going to finger the quality of the various programs in schools? You will be able to look, obviously, at whether or not the curriculum is ESL based or does include traditional language teaching or recognition, and you will be able to say whether there is a community programme happening. But how you going to evaluate whether, where something has worked, it was because it was an excellent program and whether something has not worked because it was underfunded and so on?

**Mr Williams:** I have also been asked to look at the international, national and state literature, so the research I have done so far is very broad. I will probably be looking at best practice in Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the US to see what our indigenous brothers and sisters have been doing in those countries. It was interesting too, Minister, that you—

**CHAIR:** Call me Shayne; I am not a minister.

**Mr Williams:** Yes. My name has a 'y' in it is well.

**CHAIR:** I know. It is great to meet someone. There are not many of us around, mate.

**Mr Williams:** It was interesting, Shayne, that you mentioned the commission in New Zealand. In this country we have always been under the impression that people in New Zealand have always been better off than us because of the Treaty of Waitangi and things that have happened since then, but it does not look like people have moved beyond the rhetoric which is enshrined in these policies and acts of parliament and all that. I am more interested in looking at action policies. I am aware that you have a national approach in place, and I thought that probably a good recommendation to make would be that we also look at an action plan for that approach to see how that can roll out more effectively.

The thing with this literature is that I have to rely on my own analysis of it in order to try to read the subtext of what people are saying, and to do that I am applying an indigenous lens to the literature to try to develop an indigenous theory based on what I engage with. I think the work is important too for the AECG, who will be speaking to you later on today and who are now responsible for the language program which was previously under the auspices of Aboriginal Affairs. I am at this point because my motivation is to serve my people first. I know that I have been commissioned to do this by the state government, but my primary motivation is to serve my people. I am doing this work not only for the office but also to help develop a strong theory for this community based organisation which has now been charged with the responsibility of rolling out this state program. They are going to need a lot of support, and I will be drawing on the literature and trying to evaluate what works and what does not work so that the outcomes of this study support what we are trying to do here in the New South Wales context.

I think it is absolutely imperative that longitudinal studies be carried out at the national and state levels if we are going to get to the heart of what really works and does not work in the context of the teaching and learning of languages and its causal correlations with and effects on our children's performance in school systems.

**CHAIR:** Thank you, Mr Williams. I think you have just given us a good recommendation, actually.

**Mrs GRIGGS:** James, I picked up something that you said about parents who are trying to teach their children the language without being able to speak the language themselves. This question is for both of you: how big an issue do think it is that the language has missed a generation or two? How big a gap is that going to leave? Given that we are trying to increase the level of language pickup, do you think it is an issue?

**Mr Christian:** It's definitely an issue, and it is definitely a challenge. In looking at the challenge of that, I go back to one of the other things I said: one size does not fit all. It is a phrase which people throw around, but I think that, particularly in this area, it is about looking at how particular communities and individuals within the community can engage in different aspects of living activities. I think that the other risk here is that language is seen as the silver bullet when in fact language connects a whole lot of things together—storytelling, dance, art, interaction, connection to country—and any one of those elements are really important to be concurrently revitalised.

**Mrs GRIGGS:** Do you think that in the remote parts of Australia the language has missed a generation, or is it more in the urban centres of Australia? I just wondered whether you knew or not.

**Mr Williams:** Are you talking about other states and territories?

**Mrs GRIGGS:** I know that you have just focused on New South Wales, so if you want to—

**Mr Christian:** Ninety-five per cent of the Aboriginal population in New South Wales live in urban and regional centres, and five per cent live in remote places—it is very different—but we share the same sort of age cohort issue in that we have a very young Aboriginal population in New South Wales. I think the average age is 20 or 21, so it is way out of kilter with the rest of the population, which is very much an ageing population. There are many challenges and opportunities for Aboriginal people in that very fact, and that is why language and cultural expression and revitalisation et cetera are so important for those young people, who will come forward and be the next leaders—the next people running our organisations and communities—to have a very strong sense of pride and identity.

So I cannot answer whether there has been a skip in the language, but I can tell you that there is nothing more heart-warming than going to Walgett and being fluently welcomed to country by an eight-year-old. When that happens, nothing matches it.

**Mr Williams:** I was talking to a Bundjalung man about four weeks ago. He said he had just come back from a funeral on the North Coast where not a word of English was spoken; it was all in Bundjalung. You talk about skipping a generation, and there is a historical context for it. As you know, we were the first people to be invaded and colonised in this country, so hegemony—a dominant culture telling us that our languages are no good, that we are primitive, that our cultures are no good, that our colour is no good and that our features are no good—has been an instrumental process that we have had to go through, and that has taught us to hate ourselves over the

generations well before I was even born. I have had old second cousins tell me that whenever the old people tried to speak to them they would run away in shame, and I think there is a bit of that around still today.

We need to look at strategies to help people get around that dilemma, because we do not want our children to be ashamed anymore of who they are. We want them to be proud Aboriginal people. We want them to be proud Australian citizens equal to anybody else in this country. We want our people to go on and be more like you—we want our people to be politicians and lawyers. We do not want them to be labourers anymore. We want our children to occupy positions in this country so that they are part of how this country is run.

I have one more thing to say. It is about the national curriculum, and I will be brief. I think the national curriculum has to be flexible enough to support Aboriginal people who speak English as a foreign language and people who speak Kriol and, of course, it has to be flexible enough to support Aboriginal people who speak fluently Aboriginal English, which is a legitimate language formation in this state in particular.

**CHAIR:** As chair I am going to invite you back, when you have done your report, to give further evidence on this in the new year. It would be terrific if you could come back and give evidence.

**Mr Williams:** Yes.

**CHAIR:** We might have to get you on a plane or have you drive down to Canberra, but that is—

**Mr Williams:** No problems—I like coming to Canberra every now and then.

**CHAIR:** We are definitely going to get you back in the new year, once you have done your review, to talk further about that.

**Dr STONE:** Yes, we need to hear about what you have found.

**CHAIR:** We want to hear further from you.

**Dr STONE:** I apologise—you are talking about Bundjalung, not Bangarang, aren't you? Did you say you are from—

**Mr Williams:** My grandfather is from Rushworth, in Victoria.

**Dr STONE:** I see; so he is Bangarang. I thought you were saying—

**Mr Williams:** It is right on the border of Ngurai-illam and Bangarang territory.

**Dr STONE:** That is right, so that is okay. I have one last question, and it follows on what you have just said about Aboriginal English. I am very impressed that the New South Wales government is addressing the matter of Aboriginal students who speak Aboriginal English as their home dialect. They are recognising Aboriginal English as a another dialect and as an alternative to all sorts of other languages people speak. You tell us that you offer effective ESL pedagogies for Aboriginal students programs and that you offer courses in 88 strategically targeted New South Wales schools. These are two-day courses to support English-as-a-second-language teaching, particularly in delivering English literacy to Aboriginal students who speak Aboriginal English in their homes. I am wondering how many teachers in those 88 schools have taken up those two-day courses. I was reading from page 19 of your submission.

**Mr Christian:** I will have to take that on notice. I will give the heads up to a colleague, Michele Hall from the Aboriginal Education and Training Directorate, who will appear before you later today.

**CHAIR:** I think someone is pointing behind you. She is sitting there.

**Mr Christian:** So, Michele, I do not need to give you a heads up—you are already here!

**Dr STONE:** I think that is a very interesting initiative, and we would very much like to hear how much the ESL uptake by teachers to skill themselves in ESL teaching is evolving.

**Mr Christian:** I have one last recommendation. It goes back to the issue of the evidence base—what is working and what is not and how we know over the longer term whether the investment is worthwhile. This issue is sadly prevalent across some areas of Aboriginal policy and affairs. I think that, for this particular area, the investment in the longitudinal studies and other studies—building that evidence base—ought not to be forgotten.

We talked about \$9.4 million being available under the national programme. I looked at every one of those projects, and I cannot see that there is actually an investment being made in building the evidence base that is so badly needed. But I also do not want much-needed local projects which are being funded to suffer as a result of the need for government to build its evidence base on whether its investment is being appropriately targeted and utilised.

**CHAIR:** Trust me: I think you have given us one of our recommendations. Mr Williams, we look forward to hearing from you in the new year, after your review. Hansard will have a transcript available for you to make any

corrections, deletions or alterations to your evidence today. I thank you both very much, along with the other people who this morning have been very good indeed, for your terrific evidence today.

**Proceedings suspended from 11:00 to 11:09**

**HALL, Ms Michele, Director, Aboriginal Education and Training, Department of Education and Communities**

**CALLAGHAN, Mr Paul, Director, New England Institute, Department of Education and Communities**

**CHAIR:** I welcome the representatives from the New South Wales Department of Education and Communities to give evidence. Do you have anything to add on the capacity in which you appear?

**Ms Hall:** I work within the office of schools in the department.

**Mr Callaghan:** The New England Institute is part of TAFE New South Wales. It is one of 10 institutes, of about 23,000 students, in regional New South Wales.

**CHAIR:** Thank you very much. We appreciate your coming here today. The evidence you have given us was a comprehensive, and we thank you for that. When we were at the Queensland parliament a few months ago we got terrific evidence from your counterpart in Queensland. Thank you for taking the time to be here today. Would you like to make a brief introductory statement?

**Ms Hall:** Aboriginal languages in New South Wales is a key priority area. It is evident in the New South Wales State Plan 2021 and it has been embedded in all state Aboriginal education and training strategies and policies.

**Mr Callaghan:** In terms of today Michelle and I have had a quick discussion. We see this as an opportunity to contribute in a positive manner to what the inquiry is trying to achieve. We see this as a wonderful opportunity to create a better future for our people. It would be remiss of me not to follow protocol and say, 'Goochi ikku koori kidn gadagal burri koori worimi burri yookl yookl.' That is my language, the language of the Gattung people of Worimi country, which is Port Stephens. I was paying my respects to the Gadigal people of this country. When I say, 'Yookl yookl,' that means it is from the heart.

**Ms Hall:** As a Kamilaroi woman I also acknowledge the Gadigal people of the Eora nation.

**CHAIR:** You said it is a high priority. Can you say how the department is supporting Aboriginal languages and communities, particularly through the New South Wales education system, in terms of language revitalisation?

**Ms Hall:** The New South Wales Department of Education focuses on offering programs for schools. So it becomes part of the whole school curriculum approach. We work in partnership with the Aboriginal Education Consultative Group, which is the key advisory body on all matters to do with education in New South Wales. As you heard from colleagues previously, they are leading the Centres for Aboriginal Languages Development and Culture. That is in the process of establishment. As a department, we see our role being in partnership with the local community, making local and shared decisions with schools about the delivery of language and the development of the programs. We respect that local communities have their right to reclaim, rejuvenate and revitalise their languages. We pay homage to their attempts and their work in doing that. We work collaboratively with them in ensuring that the maintenance and the contextual study of those languages is delivered in schools.

**CHAIR:** There are a number of qualifications that come through TAFE—qualifications in Aboriginal languages certificate I, II and III levels. And I understand they are nationally recognised as well. Can you tell us whether graduates from those programs are accessing teaching opportunities for Indigenous languages in the New South Wales education system?

**Mr Callaghan:** I will comment on that. If I can just segue from Michelle also in terms of the TAFE role with languages, I have a vision down the track where our kids in the schools are accessing languages. For me, that is the platform of identity and self-esteem that, no doubt, others have talked about. Where TAFE comes into it is that there are a lot of people who have left the school system, so we are trying to provide that platform and base. I am hoping that, down the track, we will not have as big a number of students that will have that need. That is where these certificates are so important. We are still in the start-up phase; we have not seen the rollout. I have developed a four step model of empowerment for Aboriginal learners based on my experiences as an Aboriginal development manager and an Aboriginal person. Even though it has multiple entry and exit points, from my anecdotal overview of education it takes up to six years to create a work-ready individual. We are only in year two or three with these programs but I can say from personal experience that these platforms are absolutely essential for providing that springboard of identity and individuality and personal empowerment to bridge the gap and transition into those employment pathways.

**CHAIR:** Can you tell us a bit more about the collaborative approach in relation to the master's in Indigenous language education? I think that is at the University of Sydney, is that right?

**Ms Hall:** Yes, it is.

**CHAIR:** I am interested in that because, as a layperson rather than someone within the system, I would have thought that when someone comes out with a master's degree it gives them the prestige, potential pay scales and recognition that would enable them to advance their career options as well. We had evidence before about the question of where you go—there is no real pathway. So very few people choose that. If you want to be a Mandarin speaker or a teacher of Indonesian or German, there are courses and pathways.

**Ms Hall:** The Aboriginal Education and Training Directorate supports up to 10 sponsorships for Aboriginal teachers. That is part of the requirement—to enter into the course at the university. Those sponsorships provide HECS coverage and, if they are in a classroom, teacher release. It also gives some flexibility around resourcing—for example, if someone did not have a laptop or other resources that they may need to complete the course.

We have had about six people enter and complete that course to date. They have been classroom teachers in schools and as such will continue in their respective schools, working in that particular language area. We have had a couple of entries whereby the person has had teaching qualifications and is not necessarily teaching in a classroom but chooses to be in another position in the department. Where that occurs and where the community has asked that person to engage in the sharing of the language, then the salary arrangements are a decision between the school who receives the funds and the individual.

As for training people to get into those particular areas, at the moment we are working at exploring the avenues of positions involving languages other than English and how they may translate and transfer into Aboriginal language positions. Some state schools in New South Wales have a dedicated LOTE position. One example is Vincentia High School, which has made that a dedicated teacher position. All of year 7 in that school studied the Dhurga language, supported by the local community. So it is a shared responsibility and a shared experience. At the moment they are looking to extend that into stage 5, which is very exciting.

**Mr Callaghan:** Perhaps I can just follow on from that. I really welcome your enthusiasm about the master's degree, because the higher-level programs will create the employment opportunities for the future teachers, and that is certainly a major challenge for us. The next layer down is an even more exciting proposition but a bigger challenge. In the New England region, to start with, we have a population of 14,000 Aboriginal people and 30 per cent unemployment. There is also 50 per cent of the population not participating in the workforce. So there are a lot of people who are not engaging. We know that, once we have the teachers in place, languages and culture will be the candle that will bring the moths to the flame to engage in the learning process. Then the learning can start building the platform of the transitions into employment.

Having an economics background, I have done some costings—which you would be well aware of in any case—that show that turning someone around from 20 years of unemployment to 20 years on the average wage is a net turnaround of about half a million dollars for society, in addition to all the other add-ons, such as social add-ons. So it is a wonderful opportunity for us. I know that language will not mean employment for everybody, but it is the stepping stone of that identity and self-esteem that you would have heard about in relation to empowerment. If I may share a story from the old people who have taught me: they talk about the tree of knowledge, and the leaves of the tree are the things that we would call technical training and literacy and numeracy. They are the leaves; they help you do your day-to-day things. But you cannot have the leaves without the trunk, and the trunk of the tree is your language, your ceremony and your art that Dr Williams talked about. But you cannot have the trunk without the roots, and the roots are your core values that are your self-esteem and your identity, and respect and those kinds of things. By having the languages tapping into the roots, we can then support the leaves so that they are sustainable. That is what the old people taught me about our learning system, and that is what is missing a little bit.

**Dr STONE:** I think, Michele, you were going to grab that information for us about: 'out of the 88 strategically targeted New South Wales schools being offered the two-day course supporting application of English as a second language in delivering English literacy to Aboriginal students'—have you got a number for how many teachers have actually taken that?

**Ms Hall:** I will have to take the question on notice as to the exact number. I am aware that the 88 schools took up the opportunity. What happened was: when we were targeting particular teachers, the enthusiasm was so great that we had more than the two or three teachers in the school who were going to attend, attending. That is a very exciting outcome because it demonstrates the recognition of Aboriginal English. It also demonstrates the critical importance of this: our students are being taught, assessed and reported on in standard Australian English; they are speaking Aboriginal English, so the understandings of the constructs and code-switching those students encounter every day in the engagement of education in general is critical. That is one of the most positive results of doing the ESL strategy in New South Wales.

**Dr STONE:** We had excellent evidence from a woman who has done a lot of curriculum development in that, on teaching students about how to code-switch—how to understand when it is appropriate for Aboriginal English versus standard English versus formal and informal language and so on. I remember that evidence we took in Queensland. But that curriculum was developed in Victoria, we understand.

An important part of students learning in schools, based on coming to school with a different language from standard English, is that their home language be written down, or that they learn the codification or decoding of language through written form. How many traditional languages in New South Wales are now well along the track of being developed in written form?

**Ms Hall:** I would have to take that on notice. I know that, in 2011, 12 languages were taught across New South Wales. I have a list of those languages here: Dhangadi, Dharug, Dharawal, Bundjalung, Kamilaroi, Dhurga, Wiradjuri, Paakantji, Muthi Muthi, Ngiyampaa, Wangkumara.

**Dr STONE:** So are curriculum materials being developed for each of those languages—vocabularies, grammars, and so on—so that the students are not impoverished in their learning, with only having the verbal experience which does not help them to learn standard English, having learnt the codes for how it works in written form?

**Ms Hall:** I would suggest that the delivery of languages in each community context has its own style. It would have its own context. A lot of language speakers had to rely, as Dr Shayne Williams was speaking about, on having language recorded by anthropologists and linguists because of the circumstance of invasion and the policies at the time. Other languages are being kept fluent through oral. Depending on the context of the speaker, they would be sharing through oral. They would be, I would suggest, developing text materials in their specific program so that the student gets a broader context of how the language develops, but it also positions itself with their everyday learning. So it would vary across language group to language group.

**Mr Callaghan:** Within the TAFE system in New England, we have a Kamilaroi language project that is online and interactive. It has been highly successful because, as our language was never meant to be written, it is a good learning resource and I can understand the connect with it and why our teachers are so passionate about it. We are hoping to set up a platform for extending that framework throughout the country by using technology. They use interactive software that entails cartoons whereby the kids can write in bubbles. It enables them to have fun whilst they remember their language.

Our staff are currently researching new technology in avatars, which is beyond my understanding but they get quite excited about it. It will be interactive and kind of imaginary. These software programs will create people who actually speak and with the words written there as well. So the future is almost here. We are exploring how we can do that and create that engagement. By doing that, it means that we are not faced with just having the classroom; we can actually get the critical mass engaged in other ways. It will not be face-to-face but it means that we can use blended learning to try and maximise our returns on the cost of such programs.

**Ms Hall:** We would be quite happy to provide for the inquiry an example of how Kamilaroi has been documented, with associated resource materials that link back to a teaching resource, if that would be useful to you.

**CHAIR:** That would be terrific. It would be great if you could do that.

**Mrs GRIGGS:** You talked about 10 teachers before. Is that the number of teachers who are actually approved to deliver Aboriginal languages?

**Ms Hall:** No. The MOILE was related to the Master of Indigenous Language Education. We offer 10 sponsorships to Aboriginal teachers to take that up.

**Mrs GRIGGS:** And you have had six?

**Ms Hall:** Yes, we have.

**Mrs GRIGGS:** How many teachers have you got delivering Aboriginal language courses?

**Ms Hall:** In 2010, we had 44 teachers of Aboriginal language.

**Mrs GRIGGS:** That is across the 12 languages?

**Ms Hall:** Yes. Last year we had 12 languages as well. So it was across those language groups. They are community people.

**Mrs GRIGGS:** What is your target? How many teachers do you want to get?

**Ms Hall:** How long is a piece of string?

**Mrs GRIGGS:** I know. What is your target in the next two to five years? Also, how will you know that that target is an appropriate target to have?

**Ms Hall:** Targets have to have strategies behind them and strategies require money, and money is a matter of government. Our responsibility is, and my role is, to do the very best job that we can with the resources that we have. We intend to partner with the AECG once the centres for Aboriginal languages and development in culture are established. We intend to have a resource available so that schools can link directly into those centres and access that resource as a means of gaining local knowledge and local connections. We suggest that that will bolster the numbers due to the very construct of what those centres are perceived as doing. At this point in time, we are working with that construct. We will work with our schools and community in accessing that and then on bolstering the numbers. We also think it is important to bolster and offer support to families, parents, uncles, aunts, grannies, who want to be part of that process as well so that the maintenance of language can occur in the home. So when the little one or the older one is learning it at school and they are going back into their home or community, their families are able to engage in conversations as well.

**Mrs GRIGGS:** So you do not have a number that you are working towards? Is it unrealistic of me to ask what your goal is?

**Ms Hall:** I will take that on notice.

**Mrs GRIGGS:** That is fine. I think you partially answered this. How are you trying to encourage these people to become involved and become teachers of the language. You talked about the centres; is that the main way of getting the community involved?

**Ms Hall:** I will ask Paul to answer that, because TAFE offer certificates in Aboriginal language for our community. That serves as a means of working with schools and TAFE in the delivery of languages.

**Mrs GRIGGS:** You have the program and you have 44 people. That is fantastic. But what are you doing to encourage other people to come along and be involved in this program?

**Mr Callaghan:** I think the AECG will have a major role in recruitment.

**Ms Hall:** I concur with that. The AECG will see this new and exciting proposition of the centres as community working within their own language groups in construct of building the capacity and capability of the language in the particular area that is required. There are many speakers of language who do not necessarily speak language, because of what Dr Williams was speaking about before of the historical context of speaking language being punished. So, hopefully, many people in our communities, especially our older people, who have language—but for some reason there is a shadow of sharing—will in their own environmental context and safety of their community start developing more direct ways of sharing with each other. They do not need a formal certification.

**Mrs GRIGGS:** Of course not.

**Ms Hall:** They have the language, they have the culture and they have the knowledge and that is respected. I believe that this is an exciting period for the energy to start revitalising about languages and for sharing language in a more fluent way with each other.

**Mr Callaghan:** I think it is a chicken and egg kind of model. For so many years we have not been allowed to speak language or practise culture. I am a traditional dancer and in the last five years it has really taken off and we dance all over the state, which is great. We have built the Kamilaroi online delivery capability and the certificates. It is a bit like a big cruise ship I noticed down at Circular Quay this morning; they do not start off fast but, once they build up speed, they go really well. This is just starting to build up; success will breed success. Once the community starts to see that this is actually happening then it will be a lot easier to actually recruit people to support. Given that the AECG have a multiload level of connect with the community, they will be part of the recruitment arm. But part of the opportunity is that TAFE works very closely with the schools. We have 10 institutes and over 100 campuses across the state.

Part of my dream is for us to actually build a custom-made technological facility at Gunnedah where we deliver Kamilaroi online, which can actually reach out and support the state, if not the country, with frameworks of how we can roll this out so we do not think about the historic way of meeting with everyone face-to-face. We can start connecting and supporting communities to engage in their research and build that capability.

In terms of VET itself, I met with 14 of our local Aboriginal land councils in the last few months. We were looking at priorities and we were talking about employment pathways, which is ultimately TAFE's role to provide employment. We were talking about disengaged learners and how we need to bring them back into the system. Each one of those land councils said they had at least 100 people in their community who had disengaged from

learning and will not come in until we provide language and culture as the flame. If you times that by 120 land councils you will see there are 12,000 people who currently are not being maximised whom we can bring in with language as the platform. We will not be able to do that in terms of critical mass by trying to bring everyone into a classroom and hence technology and visual aids will be not the solution but part of that program of providing a solution, with the AECG.

**CHAIR:** I have one last question in relation to the issue. There have been the usual words about significant increase in Indigenous enrolment at TAFE in New South Wales in the last five years, up to about 6.3 per cent, I think the evidence was in your submission. Can you explain that? Secondly, can you attribute the increase in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders being involved in TAFE to language learning in any way at all? Is there a correlation there?

**Mr Callaghan:** In terms of research, there is no research I can tap into. In terms of my observations anecdotally, certainly in the last few years students have been coming increasingly to TAFE because I think we have worked really hard on improving our service delivery. Even though TAFE historically has always done a good job, there has been greatly increased focus on providing transitions into employment. We have also been really focusing on cert III and higher, as you see in the submission. Students know if they come that we listen, we have got tailored learning and we have got Aboriginal units in each institute. We do individual learning plans and we have got student support officers. We have had them there in the past but I think we have really increased our capability in terms of the focus and the connect with industry. That is why there has been a success. There may well be other factors but I think that is the driving force.

I do not think language has had an impact for that group. Those people that have come in have a degree of self-awareness and self-esteem that have given them the impetus to a degree, but they have certainly been getting the cultural support in the learning environment which is so critical. Part of that is the cultural support once they go into the workplace environment. So I think that is happening. The big opportunity here is that there is this vast cohort; over 50 per cent of people are participating in the workforce and there is 30 per cent unemployment. It is the shame factor that Dr Williams talked about. They are embarrassed to come in and say, 'Look, I can't read or write.' So I think the language is the hook to provide the platform so that they will follow this slipstream. There are unique opportunities that we have not harnessed yet because of where we can go.

To summarise it, the increase in cultural focus and certainly the Aboriginal education and training policy in terms of cultural contexts, and our staff having understanding of cultural awareness, have improved the learning environment. I still deliver cultural awareness; I delivered it at Coonabarabran last week. And staff are understanding the imposts on our students. You can get the pedagogy perfect. That is the leaves. But if you have got a really difficult home life, and you would be aware of domestic violence and drugs and alcohol, then you still have big issues. However, our staff are now getting a better understanding of that, so we have got a far more supportive learning environment. That would be my understanding.

**CHAIR:** So a more supportive environment, plus Indigenous people seeing TAFE as a pathway of choice, has increased the participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in New South Wales to 6.3 per cent, over 35,000 people, which is a large number of people in TAFE.

**Mr Callaghan:** There is a degree of trust in the TAFE system. Part of that is historic, but it is also because we have Aboriginal units and we have Aboriginal student support officers and we have counselling services and library services and disability support consultants.

**CHAIR:** In your experience, is that being replicated in other states and territories, that level of participation?

**Mr Callaghan:** I cannot comment, I would have to take that on notice.

**CHAIR:** It would be good if you could get that information. I am sure TAFE New South Wales has evidence about how they are comparing with other states.

**Mr Callaghan:** We will follow that up.

**CHAIR:** That would be great.

**Mr Callaghan:** Certainly within my institute we have increased our certificate III enrolments by 60 per cent. We have 70 students in diplomas this year and we have 67 apprentices. That is because there are employment opportunities in the marketplace as well.

**CHAIR:** Thanks very much. Thank you for coming here and giving your evidence. As a Queenslander I have to admit that your evidence is every bit as good as your equivalent in Queensland. It is hard for me to admit that but I am south of the border so I am all right to say that.

**Ms Hall:** Thank you very much.

**CHAIR:** Hansard will have a transcript of your evidence. Please make any changes to it if there are any inaccuracies there.

**Mr Callaghan:** You have won origin five years so you can give us a bit of space.

**CHAIR:** Six. We always remember these things. Bragging rights. Not that Northern Territorians or Victorians understand!

**JACKSON, Dr Robert, President, Australian Council of TESOL Associations**

[16:40]

**CHAIR:** I welcome the next witness here today. Thank you for your submission. Do you wish to make a brief introductory statement before we proceed to questions?

**Dr Jackson:** I do have a prepared opening statement that I would like to read to you.

The Australian Council of TESOL Associations, or ACTA, is the peak body for the teaching of English to speakers of other languages, or TESOL, in Australia. Our submission to the standing committee inquiry into language learning in Indigenous communities and this presentation were compiled by members from our constituent state and territory associations who possess expertise in the field of English language and literacy education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, and they have the endorsement of those associations.

ACTA firmly supports the objectives outlined in the Australian government's *Indigenous languages—a national approach* document and the goals of the national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education policy. ACTA acknowledges the importance for all Australians of protecting our rich cultural heritage, and particularly the cultures and languages of our first peoples.

In order to achieve these objectives and goals, ACTA makes the following recommendations. One: teachers, schools and educational jurisdictions at all levels must formally recognise and acknowledge the actual home language backgrounds of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. The majority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in Australian schools speak a variety of Aboriginal English, an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander creole, one or more traditional heritage languages or any combination of these as their home language.

Currently, in many situations where students speak a variety of Aboriginal English and/or an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander creole as their home language, this language or language variety is unnamed or unidentified and thus goes unrecognised by schools and education authorities. It is assumed, incorrectly, that the student's home language is English. Students are often subjected to unsuitable instruction or methodologies and inappropriate referrals for educational remediation as a result.

Two: timely and effective consultation with representatives from all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and groups within the particular community or context must be sought in order to inform the development and implementation of educational strategies and language education programs in schools. The recognition and active involvement of members of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities at all levels of educational decision making are crucial to the enhancement of education policies and programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people in Australia. Teachers and principals should go beyond the classroom and the school in seeking to engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, as invited and appropriate, to find out about language maintenance and revitalisation initiatives, and to incorporate these into their educational curricula.

Three: education authorities and institutions at national, state and local levels must adopt a strategic and thoroughgoing approach to the teaching of standard Australian English to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students who speak a traditional or heritage language, a creole or a variety of Aboriginal English as their home language. These students are learners of English as an additional language or dialect—or EALD. Bilingual, multilingual, bidialectal and TESOL education programs and initiatives should be developed, reinstated and/or consolidated and appropriately resourced to ensure effective implementation and maintenance of these programs where there is community support for their operation. These programs acknowledge students' home languages and allow students to continue their learning in a language they understand while they are learning academic English for schooling. Schools should meet the learning needs of speakers of Australian languages, creoles and dialects, to have their bilingual, multilingual and bidialectal development supported through researched and established pedagogies for additional language learning. Four: the training and employment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander principals, teachers and educational aids in schools and the appointment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander personnel at all levels within educational jurisdictions are essential. As well as bringing linguistic and cultural knowledge to the educational context, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators in schools provide positive role models for students and support links to the community or communities.

Five: accurate understanding and reporting of the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language backgrounds is crucial to any plan to improve educational outcomes for these students. There is no one-size-fits-all approach—no easy solution. Distinctive, differentiated and expert second-language pedagogies and assessment programs are required to meet the needs of those Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students who are learning standard Australian English as an additional language or dialect. Similarly, distinctive, differentiated and expert language education programs are required to support the revival and maintenance of traditional and heritage

Indigenous languages. In many situations, and particularly in those situations where the Indigenous language is critically endangered and/or students' home languages are varieties of Aboriginal English and/or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Creoles, a three-way approach is required.

Six: language revival projects and programs for the revitalisation, renewal and reclamation of traditional or heritage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages must have high expectations and aim for linguistic proficiency and communicative fluency. One of the long-term objectives of such programs should be the capacity to provide mother-tongue education to students alongside English-language instruction. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have the same right as any other people to receive instruction in their own language, and this right is enshrined in a number of United Nations declarations, to which Australia is a signatory. Many active Indigenous languages exist in Australia, and the academic development of bilingual and multilingual students depends on the formal use of students' home languages, along with English, in learning programs.

We thank the standing committee for this opportunity and would be pleased to collaborate further in the planning, development and implementation of programs and strategies which will assist educators to continue to bridge the gap for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in Australia.

**CHAIR:** Thank you very much. We appreciate your very detailed submission. I was extremely impressed by it. It really is a very good submission. I take it that, Dr Jackson, you either wrote it or were instrumental with the team that actually did it. It is terrific.

**Dr Jackson:** Absolutely. My background and area of expertise is not in this area, so I am very heavily reliant on the expertise that we have in our state and territory association.

**CHAIR:** Could you please pass on our thanks to those people involved. I thought it was a terrific submission.

**Dr Jackson:** Thank you. I will do.

**CHAIR:** I am very interested in a comment you made. It was about identifying which particular Indigenous language is being taught in a particular area. You mentioned Creole, and Dr Stone has mentioned it. It seems to be an amalgam of different things, but your comment was about identifying which particular language was spoken in a particular area. Do you have any pearls of wisdom for us in order to look at that? It is a very difficult issue. There are different groupings. In my electorate, there are the Children of the Dreaming. I have the Jagera, Yuggera, Ugarapul people in my area. I have seen maps of Australia with the different groups. It is a very complex mosaic of groups. Identifying which particular group speaks which particular language in which particular location is difficult, so I am interested in hearing what you have to say about that. You raised the issue in your report, in your submission, and you have rested here again today.

**Dr Jackson:** Absolutely. One of the points that we need to keep coming back to is that there is an absolute diversity of language backgrounds. Going back to the traditional languages, obviously there are particular geographical locations where the language groups were originally spoken, but the history of settlement of Australia has meant that a lot of those traditional language geographical areas are broken up. So you will have situations in remote and very remote places where perhaps the language groups are consistent with some of those maps that you are speaking of. In other situations, because of the removal of Aboriginal people to missions or to stations—

**CHAIR:** Are you talking about migration—forced migration or voluntary migration?

**Dr Jackson:** Forced migration, certainly. You will have a situation where those people have been dislocated from their traditional lands and their traditional languages and cultures. What will happen in those situations is that Creoles or other varieties of contact language will arise. The distinction that we make is between the contact languages, in which we include varieties of Aboriginal English—and there are light varieties in very strong varieties of Aboriginal English. Each of those ends of the particular spectrums require different approaches. There will be what we call mixed languages. That is a couple of languages like Warlpiri and Gurindji in the middle of the Northern Territory, where the creolisation has undergone a subsequent creolisation where a traditional language has come in and again the language is shifting more towards that particular traditional language. So there is another step in that process of creolisation.

What we also find in many places—in the Far North and Cape York in Queensland—is that students will come to school and they will have 20 different main languages other than English as their home language or their first language. They might present at school with that sort of language. In other places—Yarrabah just south of Cairns—a creole will have developed, so people in that particular community will speak an unnamed creole; it is just the talk or the lingo that the people speak. If you need to name it is Yarrie Lingo. That is a creole and it is quite distinct from standard Australian English.

So in terms of recognising, identifying and going in and finding out what language is being spoken in a particular community or context, you cannot really go in with a preconception of what might be there; you really actually need local solutions. You need expert people in there to identify, because often the communities themselves will not have that linguistic expertise to be able to elaborate or to identify the language stem or stems in that particular community.

**CHAIR:** Then how do we then recognise and value what you have described as the 'home language' of ATSIA students? That is the expression used in your report.

**Mr Jackson:** Absolutely.

**CHAIR:** How do we do that? We have had evidence previously that it is worse up in the Torres Strait, where there is just a kaleidoscope of language. We have had evidence from numerous people giving submissions. How do we do that? It might be different in a settled community like mine, which has a large Indigenous community on the south-west of the Brisbane River, where there are three distinct groups and everyone knows there are three distinct groups. How do we sort the problem out of identification, value and then go in and sort it out, if I can put it like that? Perhaps that is a male thing—sort out solutions. How do we identify? How do we do that in places like Cape York?

**Mr Jackson:** There are two parts to that question. Pedagogically when a student presents at school you recognise and value the language or the talk that that student brings. You don't have to name it to actually recognise that that student is speaking a different variety or dialect of English in the classroom. For you to try to continually butt your head against the wall and try and teach that student using the same pedagogical principles that you would for a native English speaker is not going to work. In that very microcosmic sense you need to recognise and value the language that the individual student brings to the school.

Now you have identified situations where there perhaps are monolingual students—a group of monolingual students coming into the school. Another example would be Areyonga School west of Alice Springs, where the language background that students bring to the school is Pitjantjatjara and it is a common language that the students share. So the pedagogical strategy that the teacher can implement in those schools is a bilingual program of education where you can actually use the students' first language because all the students are speaking in the same first language.

In this situation you alluded to in the Torres Strait and in the Far North and Cape, the students are coming in with different language backgrounds, as you have identified. For teaching to our Australian Curriculum, standard Australian English is the target language. In those situations you would adopt TESOL pedagogies, ESL pedagogies—so the pedagogies we use in intensive English settings, for example, in Sydney. Where they are available you would have teachers aides, ethnic aides, bilingual speakers of particular language or the main language groups. You would be using whatever resources that you could.

**CHAIR:** Could you tell us about those support materials. I will stop asking questions and hand over to Dr Stone. But tell us about the assistance, not just the assistance that the local people might be able to provide but the support materials that are available in that very complex—my expression was—'kaleidoscope' of languages?

Tell us about the materials that are available. Have we got enough? Are they sufficient? What is your expert comment on what we are providing? Queensland particularly, and New South Wales and the other states would have the same.

**Dr Jackson:** I am aware of some very good resources that have been produced, but they are being produced for local solutions, local communities. My examples are drawn from a very organised departmental program in New South Wales, the intensive English centres, and they are quite well resourced with picture dictionaries; bilingual dictionaries; ethnic teaching aids, as I mentioned; bilingual support materials—stories that are written in both languages. Again, with a lot of Aboriginal students you are looking at a language that does not have a print form, a written form. That is another overlay. You need to then transcribe the language, have a written version of the language, and then get the student used to the idea that language occurs both in an oral form and in a print-based form. That is another step.

The TESOL pedagogies that you would implement are strategic. They are sequential, so there are certain stages that you would need to go through. The oral language precedes the written language. You would use the students' oral language and teach them the target language by bilingual methods—by showing body parts or realia around the classroom or taking them out and talking about: 'What's the word you use for this? In Standard Australian English this is a tree. What's your word?' That is the sort of pedagogy at the very early stage. Obviously, the pedagogy changes as the students acquire more of the target language, whether it be English or the traditional language.

The other issue that I think is a really difficult one—and it is not one that I have an answer for; I put it back to this inquiry—is: in those communities, where there is such a diversity of language groups and communities and cultures that have come together, what is the Indigenous language? Who decides what Indigenous language you are going to teach? What is going to be the target language in those areas? One of the people who fed into our submission said that logically it should be the language of the place. The language of the place is not always going to be the language that the people in the community speak, but as a starting point perhaps that is a logical answer. That certainly is a question.

**Dr STONE:** Yes. I think, Dr Jackson, you are right in saying that whose language is going to have the status as the school's language or the preeminent language in that small place where, except for a very small group of traditional owners, they are all resettled people—places like Arionga or Haasts Bluff—becomes very political, and then you further exacerbate community tensions if you pick winners of languages and say, 'Yours is important—more important than ours' and so on. It is a very vexed area, as you are implying.

I think your submission is excellent in that you fully acknowledge the business of Aboriginal English—of different dialects, of the contact languages as well the heritage or traditional languages and the need for us to have an understanding that whatever language a child brings to school they are going to learn best having that home language as the foundation for their other learning. That is such a critical point, which is new to most Australians, I think. We have imagined the best thing we can do for a child is to start them off the day they arrive at school in English. Tragically, it seems to us, we have had a lot of evidence about the Northern Territory move away from bilingual education to this other principle or program they have where we have to wonder just what their objectives are in beginning again with English-only for those numbers of hours.

Have you got a view of how we are going to change each state and territory's approach to teacher education? It seems to me that it is not just Indigenous language differences in Australia; it is all our refugees, our migrant children and so on. Do you think there is any value in having embedded in every teacher education experience, from the first year to three or four years, as most teacher trainees do now, some language training, whether it is TESOL or ESL, so that wherever they end up teaching in a school—whether they encounter a new refugee group or an Indigenous group—they at least have the basic tools to move forward without further damaging those children's capacities to learn?

**Dr Jackson:** Absolutely. I think that is an essential ingredient. I know that a lot of teacher training programs have electives or compulsory units within their teacher training credentials focusing on ESL and multicultural education. We have worked closely with ACARA and ATSIL. We have developed with ACARA and EALD support document for the Australian curriculum F to 10, which is geared towards mainstream teachers. You have a lot of mainstream teachers in schools at the moment teaching Indigenous students, refugee students and migrant students who are, perhaps, invisible in the classroom. Those teachers certainly need support.

You have a lot of situations where the staff, the teaching resources, the specialist teachers are not available. So mainstream teachers have to jump in at the deep end and address the learning needs of these students. That is one area where we have worked quite closely with the Australian government to produce materials which will support mainstream, non-specialist teachers.

The ideal is obviously to have a specialist teacher or a teacher who has had part of their teacher training devoted to ESL methodology and TESOL pedagogy. Initially for Indigenous students there is another factor required. Before the teacher is appointed to a rural or remote school, or a school where there are large numbers of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander students, there is another step. It might be a refresher on language particular to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities—you were talking about the differences between the contact languages and the traditional languages and how that might play out in the classroom—and it might also cover some of the cultural factors. The Western Australian bidialectal model—and the teacher training that goes around that model—does that very well.

**Dr STONE:** What is that called?

**Dr Jackson:** It is bidialectal.

**Dr STONE:** I do not think we have heard about that particular program yet. You are saying that an ESL type of exposure during teacher training would be very good but you need extra inservicing for those who are actually going to remote communities where they are absolutely going to experience students with a different cultural perspective as well as a different language.

**Dr Jackson:** I think that would be the optimum.

**Dr STONE:** Can you comment, then, on NAPLAN? I do not know whether you were here when we spoke about a submission which referred to the problems NAPLAN introduces in not taking on board students who have

English as a second, third or fourth language—they may be Indigenous students but the expectation is that one size will fit all—and then what follows from poor NAPLAN results for that school.

The datasets from NAPLAN—the LBOTE datasets—do not reflect English language proficiency. They reflect the parents' or the grandparents' first language. Often the LBOTE bubble will be coloured in and the students may be monolingual, standard Australian English speakers—native speakers. So the datasets that are captured through that LBOTE bubble are not reflective of students' stages of English language development. The feedback I have had from Queensland is that schools are very confused about whether to identify as LBOTE, as non-English-speaking or as English-speaking. So the data that people from NAPLAN and My School are getting is faulty. Some schools are saying, 'Everyone, colour-in that bubble; you're all LBOTE.' Other schools say, 'No, we're going to steer well clear of this.' So there is a lot of confusion out there about whether to identify or what to identify.

We would say that you would need to identify specifically what languages are spoken in the school. If a student, as their home language, speaks a variety of Aboriginal English, a creole or a traditional language then certainly they are in a different category to speakers of standard Australian English as a first language.

Within ACTA we would categorise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into two groups: those who have standard Australian English as their first language and those who are learners of English as an additional language or dialect. You will find that there is probably about a fifty-fifty mixture of those two groups across Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australia. Again, do not quote me on that statistic, but there will be significant numbers in both of those groups. We just do not have the statistics; we just cannot capture that information as we are set up at present. It would be lovely to have that information.

**Dr STONE:** So you can imagine the teachers' dilemma at an outback school where there is no capacity for them on the forms to identify that our children are Aboriginal English speakers and therefore should be considered differently in their NAPLAN results than standard English speakers. I can understand the dilemma for them, but therefore we are getting data which is not being helpful to anybody, because it is not reflecting the realities of these kids' languages.

**Dr Jackson:** Absolutely, yes.

**Mrs GRIGGS:** Earlier you were talking about communities where multiple languages are spoken and working out with is their chosen language to learn in. Do you have some examples of communities where there are multiple languages spoken and they have been effective at picking one or two or three languages and putting them in schools?

**Dr Jackson:** I think that Tagai State College in the Torres Strait have taken that approach. I am not sure that everyone is absolutely happy with the languages they have chosen, but they have certainly had a good go at it and, as Mr Neumann mentioned, the Torres Strait is one of those areas where there is a huge variety and diversity of languages spoken.

**Mrs GRIGGS:** So what has made that successful?

**Dr Jackson:** I think that, again, it is the community support for it, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people themselves in the school. You have very good links between the community and the school; you have good communication and good funding and resourcing. That particular school has been picked up as a lighthouse school.

**Mrs GRIGGS:** Are there any examples in the Northern Territory or in WA?

**Dr Jackson:** Northern Territory is a little bit different because you are looking largely at that divide between the bilingual programs in schools and schools which have perhaps had to adopt or have always adopted standard Australian English as their main medium of instruction. So, no, I cannot give you any examples of that.

Again, it is the diversity across Australia. I think that in Western Australia one of the schools that I did a little bit of research on for our submission was the Moorditj Noongar Community College just out of Perth. They have very effectively adopted a three-way approach. The majority of the students of the school will bring a variety of Aboriginal English to the school, and the Noongar language is the target Indigenous language, but there is also standard Australian English. So it is that three-way model that has worked very effectively at that school.

**Mrs GRIGGS:** So you think that those two schools are effective?

**Dr Jackson:** Absolutely, yes.

**CHAIR:** Thank you, Dr Jackson.

**Dr Jackson:** Thanks for the opportunity.

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

[12:08]

**CHAIR:** Thanks, Mr Hobson, for coming back and giving evidence. I think it was in October this year that you gave us some evidence before. We particularly want to hear from you about teacher training and the Master of Indigenous Languages Education.

**Mr Hobson:** I am very happy to be back appearing before the committee a second time.

**CHAIR:** You made a submission, and we have it here. I invite you to make a brief introductory statement. We are particularly interested to hear about the training and accreditation for teachers working in Indigenous communities and particularly about the Master of Indigenous Languages Education. Perhaps you could tell us how it is unique in the field and how it came about. What hurdles do you face in relation to this particular area and what hurdles do teachers face in gaining their masters and then progressing in terms of their career structures? They are the sorts of areas we are interested in.

**Mr Hobson:** Okay, but you may have to remind me of that list of topics.

**CHAIR:** I will.

**Mr Hobson:** May I begin by commending the committee on the progress of its inquiry to date. There is currently a great deal of optimism evident in the Australian languages community that I believe is directly attributable to your work. The inquiry is providing a new focus around which Indigenous language activists are rallying nationally. On the internet and elsewhere there is much discussion on the progress of the committee's activity that indicates a significant renewal of hope for the future of Australian languages. People are impressed by the number and quality of the submissions you have received and published and the enlightened and informed approach of the committee that is revealed in the transcripts of your hearings. To give you a specific example, the submissions from the Resource Network for Linguistic Diversity, Mirima Dawang Woorlab-gerring Language and Culture Centre in Kununurra and the Koori Centre all made reference to the need for widespread implementation of the master-apprentice program in Australia. Based on our mutual declaration of support for this idea to the inquiry, a partnership has now been formed by us, together with Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education, to bring the principal proponent of the program—Professor Leanne Hinton from the University of California, Berkeley—to Alice Springs in early 2012 to offer a train-the-trainer workshop for 20 Australian candidates.

Good things are happening; progress is being made. So if no-one has said it yet, thank you, and please keep up your very important work.

I understand that you called me here today in order to specifically address the topic of Indigenous languages teacher training. Given the time limitation, I thought it might expedite matters if I briefly outlined what I believe are the major needs and issues in the field. There is a significant and ongoing shortfall in the supply of trained teachers of Australian languages. Most speakers do not have language teacher training, and most Indigenous teachers do not have the necessary skills or any intention to acquire them. There are, of course, exceptions, and some very gifted individuals, but they are not the norm. In several areas this means that language programs are in abeyance for want of teachers or that community members are struggling to deliver effective programs without a clear awareness of what does and does not work. It is also draining the supply of skilled individuals away from tasks such as documentation and community language revitalisation into school classrooms. We need more Indigenous languages teachers.

However, there is currently no entry-level teacher training degree for Australian languages nationally. There are a number of TAFE certificates, with more becoming available, and a very good two-year course offered by the Department of Education Western Australia—and I am sorry our Western Australian colleague is not here today—that leads to a renewable, limited authority to teach in that state. The Koori Centre offers a suite of graduate qualifications for those with varying levels of teacher training but only the highest of those—the Master of Indigenous Languages Education—is recognised by the New South Wales Department of Education and Communities for appointment to designated language teacher positions in its schools. So there is a clear need for an entry-level qualification that has national recognition. I should state here that the Koori Centre is currently assessing the feasibility of such a course being offered by the University of Sydney that, if acted upon, would not likely see an initial intake of candidates before 2015.

Conversely, many people with an ambition to teach their own language wish to only do that; they do not necessarily want a four-year teaching degree that allows them to teach in other subject areas. In this context, a limited authority to teach—such as exists in Western Australia—would be an excellent innovation nationally, especially if incorporated into a developmental model of teacher training. Professor Lorna Williams and her

colleagues are successfully applying such a model in British Columbia. Teacher accreditation bodies and unions would perhaps benefit from some guidance in this regard in the form of a national policy statement. There is great variation in the vitality and documentation of languages across the country, and all have only a relatively recent literary tradition. This means that any expectation of parity with European or Asian languages in terms of teacher and student performance is doomed to be frustrated.

The New South Wales Board of Studies has shown laudable pragmatism by implementing a languages syllabus that allows for substantial variation between languages and schools over time. Similar pragmatism in relation to teachers' linguistic performance standards is required if we are to facilitate the development of the teaching and revival of these languages rather than crush them from the outset. Pursuant to this is a need for flexibility in the accreditation of teacher fluency. There needs to be not only flexibility in expectations for different languages and locations but flexibility in the recognition of authority. No university, government agency or professional association in the country has the capacity to know or assess appropriate standards of proficiency in the large number of Australian languages that have potential to be taught. Both Western Australia and British Columbia again provide leadership in this regard. The aforementioned Department of Education Western Australia course delegates authority to an elder or recognised speaker of the language concerned to certify the adequacy of prospective teachers' fluency. The British Columbia College of Teachers has delegated responsibility to established First Nation language authorities since 1993. Both accept the relevant language communities as the only authoritative judges of teachers' linguistic competence. Again, teacher accreditation bodies and unions would benefit from some guidance in this regard in the form of a national policy statement. It would also provide Indigenous communities with an incentive to form language centres.

There are many other issues in the field worthy of discussion, and I am sure you will have many questions of your own. You have already raised some. But the matters I have just discussed are the ones that strike me as the 'elephants in the room' that are most in need of attention.

**CHAIR:** We have already received evidence in relation to British Columbia. I am interested in the Master of Indigenous Languages Education particularly. Is it unique?

**Mr Hobson:** Yes.

**CHAIR:** Is the level of accreditation recognised internationally?

**Mr Hobson:** No.

**CHAIR:** It is not, for example, like a Master of Arts from the University of Queensland, which is recognised internationally? It is not—are you saying that?

**Mr Hobson:** No. I will correct myself: yes, it is recognised internationally. For the purposes of teacher of accreditation?

**CHAIR:** That is what I mean.

**Mr Hobson:** That is a different issue altogether.

**CHAIR:** Explore that for me.

**Mr Hobson:** For the purposes of teacher accreditation it is currently formally recognised only by the New South Wales Department of Education and Communities for appointment as a designated languages teacher. So if in your local school you had an Indonesian teacher and they decided to leave and, in the New South Wales context, there was an Aboriginal person who had completed the masters, they would be able to take up that position as the designated languages teacher in that school and deliver that language.

**CHAIR:** Only in New South Wales?

**Mr Hobson:** Only in New South Wales.

**CHAIR:** We have large numbers of Indigenous people in Western Australia, in my home state of Queensland and in the Northern Territory. Why haven't they taken that up?

**Mr Hobson:** In Western Australia the limited authority to teach that I referred to, which is based on two years of training, operates across Western Australia. It only permits people to teach their language in their local school. It is certainly a great initiative. It is not tested in other jurisdictions. I would expect that if somebody from New South Wales went across to Western Australia and said, 'I have this qualification that is recognised by NSW DEC, will Western Australia DET recognise it?' They would probably say yes, once tested. In practice, however, the issue would be the language that they would be working in would be a New South Wales one, so it is not practical.

**CHAIR:** But as you know the boundaries between the states are colonial constructs, if I could put it like that. We need to break down the dingo fence, for example. So, if you were in Tweed Heads and teaching Indigenous language, to get that qualification recognised in Coolangatta on the Gold Coast seems to be a logical progression. What do we have to do there?

**Mr Hobson:** I would hope that a graduate of ours with recognition from New South Wales would be able to go to the accreditation body in Queensland and say, 'I am recognised in New South Wales, will you extend that recognition to me?' At a practical level that kind of situation seems to work, but not formally.

**CHAIR:** There is no formal policy from education in Queensland.

**Mr Hobson:** And we are not even accredited by the New South Wales Institute of Teachers in this state; it is only by New South Wales DEC. For example, if it were in the Catholic education system in New South Wales we would have to test that. We do have graduates from the Catholic system—

**CHAIR:** Only in the state schools do you have that formal recognition?

**Mr Hobson:** Yes.

**CHAIR:** So if you want to work in the Catholic system, which makes up a huge percentage of kids in the country, and presumably in New South Wales as well, you do not get the automatic recognition of your qualifications?

**Mr Hobson:** No, your qualifications are recognised, but not for the designation. One can teach languages without being the designated languages teacher in a school. If you are a trained teacher and you have the capacity in that language, you can teach that language in a school, across the country.

**CHAIR:** But not like, say, maths or English, where automatically, if you went from the state system into the Catholic system or the independent system—

**Mr Hobson:** You are not identified as the occupant of a designated languages teacher position, but it does not reduce your capacity, your ability, to actually perform the job. But you cannot have one of those designated languages teacher positions. It might sound important, but maybe also it is a little bit of hairsplitting. One can do the job without the designation.

**Dr STONE:** The trouble is that Mr Neumann is a lawyer. He does not understand the archaic job protection practices of teacher unions and teacher education departments across states.

**CHAIR:** Mr Neumann has a very good relationship with the Queensland Teachers Union and the AEU, as a Labor MP!

**Mr Hobson:** I am glad to hear it.

**Dr STONE:** Let me tell you: it is problematic across Australia.

**CHAIR:** I will have you know that I was endorsed as their No. 1 candidate by the Queensland Teachers Union last federal election.

**Mr Hobson:** So the answer is that, in practice, I have absolute confidence that our graduates would be accepted to teach the language that they have been trained to teach with us in any jurisdiction in Australia. I do not think they would ever be refused the capacity to do that. However, they may not be able to occupy this preserved languages specialist position within a school—perhaps.

**CHAIR:** To pick up Dr Stone's point, wave the magic wand for us, Mr Hobson. Solve the problem for us. Give us the evidence that we need to solve this problem. What do we need to do?

**Mr Hobson:** I think the long-term future of our program is not strong. I think we are exhausting the supply of trained Aboriginal teachers who are going to take on this graduate qualification. It is a one-year coursework masters, so it is an abnormal situation. In arts you would not be able to do a one-year masters. It is the professional development regime that exists across education systems in Australia.

I would say the future lies in a four-year degree, but I would also strongly advocate for the idea of a limited authority to teach, perhaps based on two years of training, as is the case in Western Australia and British Columbia. We do accept into our program people who have two years training. We have had graduates of the two-year program from Western Australia who were granted provisional entry into the masters. They can do the first semester and graduate with a certificate, or if they perform to a credit level across all the four units of study they can enter the masters. We can have the anomalous situation of somebody who has only two years training towards a teacher qualification graduating from us with a masters, but apart from that recognition of a limited authority to teach in Western Australia they are not given teacher status anywhere. Some very strange things are possible.

But, yes, ultimately I think the answer is going to be a four-year degree. That is a difficult thing to offer. With the accreditation of the masters, we were not capable to teach in all the possible languages that people could bring to our classrooms, so we opted for linguistics for Aboriginal languages, and our teachers bone up on their particular area based on what languages are brought to the classroom in each cohort. To get recognition from DEC was a very difficult task because they wanted parity with Asian and European languages, and that is simply not going to be possible.

There is a need for some leadership nationally, I think—a declaration, as I said, of national policy that we need a structure of things like limited authorities to teach. We need flexibility in recognition of teacher fluency and in recognition that different languages are at different stages in the maximum level of fluency that any person could possibly have. For institutes of teachers or departments of education, if you have a language that only has a literate tradition of 10 years and it is under revitalisation or currently at risk, to expect that people would be able to do six units of study at university level when the school systems are not even teaching it to year 12 is just absurd. But, at the moment, that is the landscape that we operate in.

**Dr STONE:** Thank you, Mr Hobson. Obviously one of the employment possibilities for Indigenous traditional language speakers or indeed Kriol or contact language speakers is as interpreter-translators, and there is a huge shortage of them in courts, in Centrelink and in other service provider agencies. They too, of course, often need formal training so that they can work as skilled professional interpreters or translators. In your institution at the Koori Centre, have you looked at training interpreter-translators and how you might add that string to your bow of the teacher education mix so that we have people who are multiskilled and have other employment prospects beyond remote schools or other facilities?

**Mr Hobson:** I have worked as a trainer of translators and interpreters in a former life at the Institute for Aboriginal Development in Alice Springs. It is a very specific task. It has quite specific demands. So one must teach the language of the court and must teach the language of Centrelink, which is much harder to understand than the language of the court, and the language of medicine. All of these things need to be taught to people. It is at quite a high level and specific. Our expertise is in teacher training. I would not think it would be wise of us to muddy our waters by taking that task on, but I recognise there is a great need. I think in the Northern Territory there is a fair bit of activity. I am not sure what the current agency is that is providing training up there. That is another area of glaring need in Australia. Good abilities in their own language and good abilities in English are certainly necessary preconditions for a good translator and interpreter, but they are a highly specific skills set.

**CHAIR:** Do you have students coming from Queensland or WA going and doing your master's?

**Mr Hobson:** Absolutely. We have had a couple of students in from Durack. Have we had a student from your seat? I am not sure that we have. To get a sufficient cohort, and this is to give you a picture of our real world, we need about seven students to cover costs each year. Applications close in a couple of weeks. We do not have seven applicants yet. We are supposed to start teaching in January. Hopefully, there will be one from up around Cooktown, someone who has put in an application, if we do run it this year. We have had Queenslanders or people from the border country, so Bundjalung and Yaegl speakers from around that area. We take people from anywhere in the country.

**CHAIR:** You said that there is no primary degree or qualification, if I can put it like that. What qualifications do the people who come to do your Master of Indigenous Languages usually possess?

**Mr Hobson:** They might have a Bachelor of Education (Primary) or a Bachelor of Education (Secondary) in Aboriginal studies or in another field, but there is a great diversity. We take in TAFE teachers as well. As I said, we will go down to people who have two years towards a teacher training qualification, so we will recognise that course from Western Australian Education. We try to be as flexible as we can possibly can. We are looking at this intake, at whether we have some people who have some prior training and have completed the TAFE Certificate IV in Workplace Training. We have had candidates go through with that qualification before. They can do quite well. They might only graduate with the graduate diploma, which is six units of study rather than the eight which constitute the master's, but they are still perfectly well equipped to do the task; it is just that the university will not permit us to allow entry directly into the master's to people who do not have a four-year degree.

**CHAIR:** Some universities, like the University of Southern Queensland, have a huge external student program, whereas with the University of Queensland the vast majority of those students actually attend university physically. Can you do your course externally at the centre?

**Mr Hobson:** No. But it is available only by block release, so under the Commonwealth's away-from-base activity program whereby students come to the university six times a year for one week only and they do the remainder of their study at home in their community. In a couple of weeks I will be going out, with my colleague

who is sitting behind me, and we will be travelling out to schools in a range of locations to observe our candidates teaching in their classrooms to certify their competence before the whiteboard, as it were. Many of our candidates are actually working, so currently doing the job in schools, but what they are after is maybe some recognition, maybe the piece of paper. Probably more than anything else they are after the skills. In too many places it is head, shoulders, knees and toes and the body parts chart—and nobody knows what to do after that. So there is a great need for skills in how to teach language. In, say, New South Wales or other places with the longest histories of colonisation and loss of languages, people are also re-learning their language at the same time. So our cohort tends to be people who are going to be involved in revitalisation, rather than candidates who are going to be involved in bilingual education, because those people are already competent speakers of their own language and of English. They perhaps do the excellent degree through Bachelor College. They do not need second language methodology teaching necessarily. Our candidates are going to teach an Aboriginal or an Indigenous language as a second language to people who are now predominantly some variety of English speakers as a first language.

**Mrs GRIGGS:** Are you keeping a record of or monitoring where your graduates end up?

**Mr Hobson:** I could probably run you through the list of names and tell you where they are working today.

**Mrs GRIGGS:** What I am particularly interested in is this. We talk about attracting remote and rural teachers. That is one of the most difficult things for the Northern Territory and for WA. I am wondering whether or not your program has any graduates that are looking at working in or are working in remote parts of Australia.

**Mr Hobson:** We have an excellent graduate in Durack, in Western Australia, who was a teacher in the school at Shark Bay and who singlehandedly revitalised the Malgana language there in the school and started the program of kids learning the language for the first time in decades. She graduated with her master's. She is now, I think, a senior curriculum officer for Aboriginal languages for Catholic Education in Broome. Also, the New South Wales department of education has grabbed one of our graduates as a senior curriculum officer. They are not remote locations. Generally people go back to where they came from. But we have a current student from Bidyadanga—which is La Grange, a few hundred kilometres south of Broome—who, hopefully, is completing it at the moment. We have not had a Northern Territory candidate to date. Possibly that is because of the accessibility of Bachelor College.

**Mrs GRIGGS:** Of course. In years to come it will be interesting to continually monitor where your graduates are going and their career progressions.

**Mr Hobson:** We have probably had somebody from most of the language programs in New South Wales. Because it is in Sydney we do tend to get New South Wales people, but we have had them from Victoria and certainly from Western Australia and Queensland.

**CHAIR:** You gave us evidence before about how important it is to have first language literacy and numeracy in the preschool stage, as then English can be picked up later on as a second language, because that would enhance children's educational attainment. Take the master's in Indigenous languages. Is that course geared to first language teaching at all at a preschool level?

**Mr Hobson:** No.

**CHAIR:** Not at all?

**Mr Hobson:** Not at all. We are only training teachers of Aboriginal languages as second languages—so no. That would be the province of somewhere best served by Bachelor College. But, even though Bachelor have the Centre for Australian Languages and Linguistics—where I used to work—and have a very good teacher training program, they have not married the two. I think there is an assumption that people who do the degree in education are already first language speakers and they will do their own interpreting at the coalface, in the classroom. But the Bachelor College degree does not incorporate that. They have second language English methodology but not first language Aboriginal language methodology. So that is the assumption: you speak it and you have got a teaching degree so you will teach the kids in your language. It is a kind of assumed thing as far as I can see.

**Dr STONE:** Does Bachelor College have in its teacher degrees a compulsory ESL component?

**Mr Hobson:** I would imagine they do. I cannot speak as an authority on it. It has been 17 years since I worked for Bachelor. Someone like Jeannie Bell or some of the other staff from Bachelor would be best equipped to tell you—sorry, Jeannie is not even in the teaching language area.

**Mrs GRIGGS:** I think they do. They are linked in with Charles Darwin University now. I am pretty sure I have read somewhere that they do.

**Mr Hobson:** As you were talking about this earlier, I would advocate that if people are going to go into remote Indigenous schools it should be an absolutely essential requirement for placement that they do have ESL

training. Without it they are largely a burden on the community. It is inflicting an ineffective teacher on the students. These kids are so far behind the eight ball now that they really need our best ESL teachers to be working with them, not predominantly first-year-out people who are going to last three months and then panic and run home to mum. There are great people out there doing wonderful things, but it is not the—

**Mrs GRIGGS:** It is tough.

**Mr Hobson:** That is the nature of Territory schools.

**Mrs GRIGGS:** Yes, that is exactly right.

**Mr Hobson:** I have spent a lot of time in them.

**Dr STONE:** Given the change since 2009 in Northern Territory policy vis-a-vis bilingual education, would the Northern Territory government understand the need for ESL training? In a sense, if you look at their new policy, they are not looking at teaching English as a second language; they are talking about all English and then something else after the four hours.

**Mr Hobson:** Yes, I think, as my colleague who spoke before me was kind of hinting, there is this idea that one size fits all and if we just continue to yell at them in standard English it will eventually work. We have decades of evidence—we do not need NAPLAN to tell us—that it is a hopeless failure. The best results for literacy for Indigenous children in remote schools in the Northern Territory come from about 1993, from Lajamanu School, when it was at the peak of its bilingual program, and it blitzed the Territory for English literacy and numeracy, over all the English-only programs. The kids in Lajamanu bilingual school had better English literacy than any Northern Territory remote school English-only program.

**Dr STONE:** That is what I was wondering before, and I did not ask the question. Given that it has been nearly three years now since the Northern Territory changed its bilingual policy from those few schools that did teach it, was there some good measurement of the outcomes of those schools before they were required to change their policy? You referred to places like Lajamanu. Is there evidence of how those bilingual schools were tracking in terms of children's school retention, employment perhaps, English language and traditional language facility, or is it anecdotal?

**Mr Hobson:** I know from the literature and from listening to Brian Devlin speaking that there is a very strong belief that the data that was presented by the Northern Territory department of education was skewed—that would be the most polite description for it—and that it selectively quoted and sometimes misquoted information, statistics, essentially to support what would seem to be the interest of the bureaucrats to close down bilingual education. That is probably a fairly strong statement, but I like those.

There is good evidence, I understand, from individual schools in the Northern Territory that programs were doing quite well. They were certainly not doing worse than English-only programs. There is no evidence that they were ever doing worse than the English-only programs. But the way the information has been presented has suggested otherwise. And it is high cost. It requires a larger number of teachers, investment in materials in two languages—and it is not English, and the bureaucrats only speak English. I think that has more to do with what has happened, rather than the reality of any results from children.

I hark back to when you were asking about schools in the Northern Territory where there were multiple languages. I think every bilingual school in the Northern Territory probably had to pick one language, so they were all indications of the successful capacity of Aboriginal communities to decide which the appropriate language is. Then you have very interesting ones like Yipirinya, which is outside the NT education system as an independent community school, where I used to work. It runs four concurrent bilingual programs in Central Arrernte, Western Arrernte, Warlpiri and Luritja. So it solved it by teaching four languages quite happily. It works well.

**CHAIR:** John, that was interesting, useful, entertaining and very good, once again. Thank you for coming back and taking the time to make yourself available again. Thank you very much. It has been very interesting. The number of times I was pointing to Susan here was an indication of the fact that the evidence was so good. I really appreciate your taking the time to come back and thank you for giving us any additional information.

**Mr Hobson:** I am quite happy to do another encore, if you like.

**CHAIR:** As you know, Hansard will provide a transcript of your evidence. If you want to make some changes to it, let us know.

**Proceedings suspended from 12:40 to 13:31**

**LOWE, Mr Kevin, Inspector, Aboriginal Education, New South Wales Board of Studies**

[13:32]

**CHAIR:** Thank you for coming. We appreciate that very much. Is there anything you wish to add about the capacity in which you appear today?

**Mr Lowe:** I am an inspector of Aboriginal education with the New South Wales Board of Studies and an Aboriginal man.

**CHAIR:** We apologise, but Mr Ed Husic, who is the member for Chifley, is on his way. He is caught up in traffic in New South Wales. We might make a comment in relation to that! I am a Queenslander and my friend Natasha here is from the Northern Territory. He will be here shortly, but we will continue on. Would you like to make a brief introductory statement before we proceed to questions?

**Mr Lowe:** I would. Thank you very much for that. I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of this place: the Gadigal people. I would also like to acknowledge my own ancestors—the Gubbi Gubbi people of South-East Queensland—other Aboriginal people in the room and all others who assist Aboriginal people in this particular piece of work, which I feel is highly significant.

The paper the board has provided clearly articulates the major issues we see as important. The Board of Studies has had a very significant role in New South Wales in supporting the aspirations of Aboriginal people in their reclamation of language and the teaching of those languages in schools over the last 20 years. We have taken a very significant, high-profile role given that we are a very small agency, and our work in most people's eyes would be in the development of curriculum. However, there is some space in our legislation in which we have I and others have generously been allowed to work: the space of supporting schools, teachers and communities in the reclamation of language through implementation of our syllabus. Our syllabus has become a really significant vehicle by which language work has been undertaken in New South Wales.

I would probably suggest to you that, until such time as we actually had a curriculum document that allowed for school based work from kindergarten to year 10 and legitimised that within the school curriculum, most school based work was very much at that ephemeral level. It was language work that in most cases was not much more than putting names on windows and doors and, if lucky, singing a song or two. It provided a vehicle by which we could have a consistent, coherent education program from kindergarten right through to year 10 with very clearly articulated learning outcomes. What we have found in our language work is that we are probably some of the few people who go out to schools and communities on a regular basis. It is part of our mainstream work. We would go out to schools and communities in New South Wales and work in supporting the development of those programs.

If you wanted to ask me the biggest single finding of our work, we have clearly found that, where language work is properly supported by schools and schools systems, it has the potential to be a very significant part of a school curriculum. We found that in every case where schools came to the task with an open heart. I know that is hard to describe; what does an open heart mean? I guess we all know what it means, but it is hard to define. Where schools come into a process where they clearly have articulated to the community that their wish is to work with the communities on developing a language program, we have found that the communities have absolutely embraced that opportunity.

I am much more sanguine about all of the fears that people have—and there are many fears that I often hear articulated around the countryside—about the difficulty of implementing language programs. I am a bit like General Zhukov as he approached Warsaw in 1944: I do not feel that we need to win every particular battle, but we need to be able to walk around those areas where there are difficulties and show by good example that good language work has good outcomes. In every case where that has happened we have found that those who were doubting Thomases always came to the party because there is nothing more empowering than seeing a school where communities can sit down and watch their kids articulate in language something that they were not able to do six or 12 months beforehand. It is an extraordinary process.

If you want to ask me questions, that is where I would like to leave this part of my presentation.

**CHAIR:** I have never heard the Zhukov analogy, but I have heard Wayne Bennett spoken of. I read his book about the fact that you cannot win every rugby league game but you learn from your defeats and trial and error. I read a book by Jack Gibson some years ago which said a similar thing. But I will box the Zhukov analogy. I am a great student of history.

What are the elements that make up an effective program in this area? You have been in this a long time. What really makes it go well?

**Mr Lowe:** From a school perspective or from an education perspective?

**CHAIR:** Both.

**Mr Lowe:** I think that an effective program is one where schools and communities work in genuine partnership. We have seen examples where schools with an intention to do the right thing clearly have not worked with the community in working through what all the issues are—and there are always issues. I am the first to admit that there are issues that communities have, and mostly it comes to whether or not the community believes that the school is in there for the long haul. There is nothing more destabilising in any community project than when the tap is turned on and off, when funding comes and goes, when you are given an unrealistic outcome in terms of what you are supposed to be able to achieve. People need to remember that it has taken 220 years to lose language and it is going to take us more than 12 months to put it back. Language reclamation is a long, hard slog. Communities want to hear schools get up and say: 'This project goes beyond my time here, and when I go I am going to hand over a program which will still continue to go. We're going to put things in place which will assist in the long-term reclamation of language.'

**CHAIR:** We are joined by Mr Husic, a Sydney member of parliament. You used the Zhukov analogy before—and I used Wayne Bennett—so can you use examples where programs have been successful, where programs have not been successful and the reasons for that?

**Mr Lowe:** I could talk about several programs. We are currently working on a project in far western New South Wales that takes in the townships of Wilcannia, Menindee, Broken Hill and sometimes Wentworth and Dareton. We started off by calling it the Lower Darling Language Project; now it has morphed into the Paakantji Language Circle. Four years ago we were told that, as you would be aware, some of those towns are some of the most significantly underresourced communities in New South Wales and almost across Australia and have had historically low educational outcomes. What those schools and communities were clearly looking for was somebody to come in and work with them through the significant issues of how to work in an environment where there is more than one language. I know that part of your brief is to try to work your way through that particular question. The issues are of resources, community language teaching and how to skill up communities to work in that space. The obvious problems include community expectations to be able to walk in and develop a language program from a curriculum when they themselves left school at the age of 14. There are a whole bunch of issues on which we needed to work with them.

We would go there every term for two days, so it was eight to 10 days a year that we would go to the schools and work with them. At the end of the first year I can honestly say that we would have had probably no more than a page's worth of material that we could progress forward as saying it was a good representation of our outcomes. But what was behind that page was 10 days of ongoing discussion. There were significant social issues that those communities needed to address before they could move forward. Too often we walk into these communities and think they are going to get it—they are just going to jump onboard—because intuitively they will understand that this is important stuff and they should put all their issues aside, jump straight into a project and expect high outcomes out of it.

We have refined our process over the last decade. We do a lot of facilitation, clearly and squarely put all of the issues on the table and look to work out how to address them. To go back to the Zhukov analogy, it is where people will get up and say, for instance: 'We can't develop this program. This program is only for Aboriginal students.' That is a legitimate thing. I have heard it myself and seen it in places. As I said, I am much more sanguine about it, because I think that, in the end, this is their language and their program, and they need to own what the outcome is from those decisions. There is nothing more empowering than making decisions, working through those decisions, seeing where those decisions take you and then, if you want the program to go, turning around and saying, 'Okay, now's the time to change the program.'

I will give you an example. The Gumbaynggirr program, which was running at Nambucca Heads and is one of our more successful programs, at that stage was only four Aboriginal students. They implemented it in their school. Within two years the school said, 'The program is really going to grind to a halt because we don't have enough students in the classroom to justify paying for the teacher to be in the classroom with the community person.' The community said, 'What can we do?' The school said, 'The only alternative is for you to open the classroom up so that non-Aboriginal students are in the classroom.' The community went away and thought about that, and within a day or two they came back and said, 'Yeah, we'll give it a go.'

Out of that decision came a much stronger program. They had faced what they saw as a real concern—and it was a legitimate concern within the community that non-Aboriginal students who would learn the language would somehow or other take over and own the language and the community would be further disenfranchised from it. That is a legitimate concern. It is not one that we should sneeze at or not give credence to. But, when they saw in

the end that they could make decisions themselves and it was either that they would stick to their position or move the project forward, they moved the project forward. That project has gone from strength to strength. They have taken students right through to the completion of year 12 and regularly have students going through the completion of year 10 in their language program. Those concerns they are now happy to articulate: 'We had that concern. We addressed it, and now it's gone.'

To go back to the Paakantji project, there are many of those concerns that they needed to address. We were able to address those concerns with them, and they came to the salient decisions about who was going to teach the language and what resources they were going to need. Then, in the second, third and fourth years, we have incrementally increased the amount of output from that project. Now it is a fully-functioning community project, a fully-functioning multicampus, multischool language project across a significant part of remote New South Wales. That is a great example. Behind that is a lot of hard work to help communities address those issues.

**Mrs GRIGGS:** At a federal government level, what do you believe are the priorities for supporting language learning in the schools of Indigenous communities?

**Mr Lowe:** That is a great question. I can honestly say that New South Wales was one of the major early supporters of a national curriculum for Aboriginal languages. We still see that as a really significant way forward. We would look at the curriculum documents across the country. While they would look different, they essentially have the same learning outcomes. That is not surprising. While there are different approaches, we would see that the Commonwealth is in a really strong position to give the languages a shape paper. The languages curriculum that would come out of ACARA would be a significant outcome for Indigenous people. Why? Because it would provide us with a great opportunity to share resources across jurisdictions. Currently we are locked into jurisdictional issues, so materials that we produce in New South Wales are not because we write specifically to our own curriculum.

While there are ideas that teachers might be able to beg, borrow and steal from another jurisdiction—which is good, because we want to share—it is much more difficult. We want to be able to share teacher training, the resource part of it—all of the infrastructure that sits behind teaching. A maths teacher who has done education at Monash University or Charles Darwin University should be a good maths teacher in Sydney—and of course they are. But a languages teacher teaching an Aboriginal language is really stuck in a jurisdiction which is very hard to move across even from one language to the next. So we are looking at being able to value add.

We also would strongly suggest that the federal government funding needs to be more strategically aligned to other programs. The MILR funding, as an example, has been a really great leverage point. We have been able to leverage resources out of both the state government and other jurisdictions and organisations, so clearly we want to bring as many resources as possible. This is my personal opinion here, but we do not want bucketloads of money this year and no money next year. We would rather have a steady flow of resources that help us develop really effective education, a good curriculum, really good teaching and learning resources and good teacher training models. Again, most of our teachers are community based teachers, and most of those people have not even finished high school. Therefore, in most of those instances it is difficult to ask someone in that environment to front up and deal with the everyday life of a classroom teacher. We need to support them.

What is it that university programs or post-secondary education opportunities could articulate? One of the things we would clearly want to see is a graduated training response. If a community person in a remote community wants to be able to become an effective teacher but does not want to move to Sydney, Melbourne or Brisbane to do that, what is it that can be delivered on the ground to those people and articulated in pathways right through to the completion of a degree if that is where they wanted to go? Currently, we work in a vacuum in those environments, and I think the Commonwealth is in a very strong position to be able to assist in developing some of those clear pathways.

**CHAIR:** So you are suggesting we get rid of the dingo fence on supply, resources, accreditation and curriculum?

**Mr Lowe:** I am strongly suggesting that. I think that is a clear way we would like to move forward.

**Mrs GRIGGS:** You are the second witness to suggest that.

**Mr HUSIC:** Can you clarify when you said you thought that federal funding needed to be clearly aligned to other programs in terms of advancing the study of Aboriginal languages?

**Mr Lowe:** Yes. One of the concerns that has been often expressed is that, currently, the MILR funding, which is the community based languages funding, has been increasingly purloined into other areas and has drifted into supporting programs which are probably not clearly articulated to supporting community language work. Having said that, I want to say that it is not necessarily that the MILR funding should be made to fit a stricture of state

funding, but we should be looking at the overall bucket of resources: state, Commonwealth and even other agencies such as land councils, which I think are really an untapped cultural and financial resource. We should be looking at what resources we can deliver to a community and then add the whole thing in toto instead of having to go get two and six from the Commonwealth, one bob over here and three shillings over there, put it all together and somehow or other try to make a program. Each of those programs has different restrictions around the resource and what is expected from them. There is often overlap in some areas and an underutilisation in other areas. In the end, with good advice we should be able to say to the community, 'If you're a community who is just stepping into a language program and you really don't know how to move forward—you have strong aspirations, you think that you've got something that you can do but nobody is there to tell you what to do.' There needs to be an articulated, strategic way to assist programs, and that resource should be utilised to help us make strategic decisions and bring other resources to it. That is what I am suggesting.

**Mr HUSIC:** There is a program that is running in my neck of the woods out in Western Sydney through one of the schools—Habersham Public School—called Koori Plain Chat. Once a week in the mornings they get the kids together to basically learn languages and be able to speak amongst each other in a more conversational setting. Where would you say the best focus should be? Obviously everyone is going to say 'all the way through', but should more effort be placed in the primary school level before it is introduced as a potential option in high school to pursue language learning? Where do you think effort is best prioritised at this point in time?

**Mr Lowe:** My view would be that, with regard to effective language learning, research strongly suggests that languages are most easily learnt at an earlier stage. Experience from overseas would clearly suggest that that is the way forward. That sounds like it is an easy answer, but to actually make that work you need a whole infrastructure, and that infrastructure is having people who at other levels are able to work in language. You would get students in a pre-school program emerging into primary school who have learnt some language but then are not able to follow that into a primary school program. The language, we would suggest, probably dies within a very short period of time. There would be some remembering of some parts of it. The question is: what is the purpose of it?

I think a more salient question needs to be asked: what is it that communities want? How do we then help develop programs that are significant to them? I have heard it over and over again when we have asked communities and elders what it is they want. They are pretty prosaic about it; they just say, 'I'd love to be able to walk down the street of my town', wherever that town is, 'and hear kids speak lingo.' That is how they say it. 'I want to hear kids just yelling language across the street. I want to be able to hear a parent chiding their own child or grandchild in language. I want to be able to see and hear language being spoken intergenerationally.' That only happens when we have intergenerational learning, and for that to occur we need to work in all domains. If you ask me to prioritise, I strongly suggest that primary school and pre-school are really good places to start, but if that is where it stops it is useless.

**Mr HUSIC:** I agree.

**CHAIR:** In your submission, on page 8 you say, 'School language learning must be in a context of high expectations'. Then you say that, because of internalised oppression, there is quite a culture of low expectations amongst Aboriginal people in terms of Aboriginal student outcomes. Can you explore that? In that part of your report you stated it and then did not really expand upon it. I am interested in hearing what you have to say about how we create high expectations.

**Mr Lowe:** Thank you for that question. Something which is constantly on my mind is how schools significantly undervalue Indigenous people's knowledge. That is articulated in many ways. We would all be aware of the research around expectations and the effect of low expectations of schools on student performance. I think that research is so strong that I would not want to go over it with you. What we see, though, is that that manifests itself in many ways. I remember very early on, when we were doing some work with the Walgett community. A really significant elder, the last really good speaker of Kamilaroi in Walgett, got up and said: 'It took me a long time to realise that last period on Friday wasn't a really good time to teach. I didn't realise until another teacher who had come to the school and started to agitate for a better, more appropriate location for our teaching, realised that in fact he had been given the grave watch and was basically filling in the time slot that nobody else wanted.' There is a systemic low expectation which is built into the process when people are time tabled. It is the expectation of the learning. If the Commonwealth—or the state, for that matter—funds a literacy program and in the end has a very low fundamental expectation of what the kids can do, if your expectation is that at the end of it the kids are really going to be able to read and write then you can implement a core literacy program and, in the end, achieve the outcome which your expectations beg, which is that the kids might have some word recognition.

Until such time as those people who administer programs have high expectations of themselves, the teachers and the systems, we need to all be on the same page and have the expectation that we all want a language program. We do not want language awareness. Language awareness is where we have been for the last 30 years, and people who have told you they have had language programs in New South Wales up to about 10 years ago had language awareness programs. That was as good as they could deliver because nobody was supporting them. It was about putting names on doors and windows, doing head, knees and toes. That is as far as it ever got. If you were funding, as you do, a Commonwealth language program for French or any other language and at the end of it your kids could sing 'Frere Jacques' as an outcome for French, would you be happy? I do not think so. You would expect that those kids could actually speak French. We need to have the same expectation. If you want a language program then fund us to deliver a language program. We will deliver it, but we need the systems, schools and teachers to work with us as well.

**CHAIR:** I describe that billabongs and boomerangs stuff as 'tourism education'. It has to be far more than that. You used the word 'essential' on numerous occasions throughout your report. I am interested in hearing what you say about the qualifications of people who actually teach Indigenous language in school. Tell me about what you would like to do. I am going to give you the power to be dictator of Australia for one moment. The people in the back are saying, 'No, no, no!' but I am going to give you the power to determine this policy. What would you do in terms of teacher training? To get great student outcomes you have to have great teachers. Everyone knows that: great schools, great teachers, great structure. You cannot have flagpoles and silly nonsense. You have to have good schools, good libraries, good halls, good curriculum and good teacher. Tell us about how you build great schools and great educators.

**Mr Lowe:** Generally?

**CHAIR:** Yes.

**Mr Lowe:** Okay.

**CHAIR:** You have five minutes of power.

**Mrs GRIGGS:** Four now!

**Mr Lowe:** The issues for us is around how to build a critical mass of good Aboriginal studies teachers. It is a graduated approach. We need to be sensible of the fact that we are not going to find all of a sudden a whole bunch of Aboriginal people given the fact that New South Wales—I will go out on a limb here, though I may not be the only person who has done this—does not actually have any first-language speakers of language. None. I would suggest to you we do not have second-language speakers either—that is where language is still spoken intergenerationally even though you might not know the whole language. We are all in various stages of language reclamation. Language reclamation means we just know a few words or a phrase. If we are really lucky and have studied enough, we might be able to put several sentences together to make an articulate language. To have good language teaching you need to be fluent in language, therefore we need a number of things. We need to have a whole program that goes to the heart of building language competence and there are a variety of programs that I would certainly favour. The master-apprentice program looks at how we use our one or two best speakers and deliver the best outcomes to those people who, hopefully, are much younger than they are to build as quickly as possible a degree of language competence. We need to have a really strong link to higher education because we are in a language deficit in terms of good research. I do not mean good research done by non-Indigenous academics where it sits in libraries but research that really helps us in language teaching. What does good language teaching really look like? That is something we are not really aware of. We have a good idea of it but what does it really look like in a genuine Indigenous environment? It is a hard thing to tie down, except when you have gone into a classroom where it does happen and you say, 'Geez, I'd like to have that.' But to have that you have to know the context of how it occurred.

We are trying to build language competence. We are trying to build it from the ground floor up so that we do not artificially take people out of their environments until they feel they are able to move out of that environment. We need really good support from schools. We have found that some of the best programs we have had are where there has been a non-Indigenous languages teacher sitting beside a languages student who is learning language but also teaching language, where the languages teacher works with them on the pedagogical and curriculum issues and the community person provides the culture and language knowledge. Between them they work as a team. It is expensive but it works.

What does a good teacher have? A good teacher has good pedagogic practice, they have good knowledge to interpret how to make a good curriculum and how to build sequential learning over significant periods of time. Community and language teachers will tell you what they are teaching and if you really interrogate this they have

about three or four lessons and they teach the same three or four lessons or dozen lessons over and over again, because that is as much as they know. Do I blame them? No, I do not, because nobody has sat down and said, 'This is what good teaching looks like. This is how we move you forward. This is what you can do in kindergarten and this is what you can do in year 12 and there is a lot of learning that goes on in between.' So we need to provide that skill base.

In the end, of course we want our own Aboriginal language teachers. It is no different to what they do in New Zealand, where they started off teaching language at preschool—in language nests—just as they were in the kitchen making scones or making sandwiches or getting a drink or going to the toilet. They learnt it there. They were also building a language competence through the whole community so that they could get young 20-year-olds or 25-year-olds in their first appointment to Wilcannia Central School as a language speaker but also with 30 years teaching in front of them, where they can become good pedagogues—because it takes a while to become a good pedagogue.

So instantly? No. You're not going to get it; it's up there somewhere. But there is a long-term strategic plan that you can put in place that builds on all the things we know a good teacher needs to have. It is not rocket science to know what a good teacher is because you have all experienced good teachers in your time, I hope. We want to know how we build that when we are starting from this particularly low base. We need to have support, we need to have articulated pathways, we need to have appropriate programs, we need to have TAFE, we need to have RTOs that are delivering programs, we need to have our university sector really coming on board with that and we obviously need schools to appoint people into positions and then mentor them into being good language teachers.

**Mr HUSIC:** Would it be unfair of me to ask if you could comment on or if I could ask you questions about the 2003 review into Aboriginal education in New South Wales?

**Mr Lowe:** Absolutely.

**Mr HUSIC:** I understand there were about 71 recommendations and about half a dozen relating to Aboriginal languages. Out of those recommendations, drawing on your expertise, knowledge and understanding of the review but also in the broader context of education in the state, what do you reckon the things were that worked well arising out of that review? I understand the bulk of the recommendations were enacted. What have been the standouts, from your perspective, of what has worked well that could be applied nationally for the teaching of Aboriginal languages?

**Mr Lowe:** I will be honest with you, in the area of languages some of the outcomes are as yet unfulfilled. Having said that, I think that there has been an attempt to enact what they can, but some of the infrastructure needed to be replaced. The one that I have really invested in and have put a lot of effort into bringing to fruition is the role of the technical and vocational sector in providing community based language instruction. It is a really significant piece of work on which TAFE New South Wales, to give them their credit, have finally come to the table and developed certificates 1, 2 and 3. We know that through MILR funding, Commonwealth funding, South Australia has been funded to develop a certificate 4 course.

Again, we see that as a really important addition to the training needs. In the end, a lot of our community people—and we need to be really clear about this—have great fear of moving into the university sector and do not have the immediate literacy skills to be able to go straight into an undergraduate program. We see that the TAFE model for community based language work has the potential to deliver really good language outcomes.

What we have said to TAFE and to the New South Wales state government all along is that this is a really good opportunity to create an employment base. There is an opportunity here for the employment of Aboriginal people in schools, but if I left my job and went back to being a school principal, I would want to know that if I am going to employ somebody that can actually deliver the goods. In the end, quite often that comes down to what piece of paper they have and where they can demonstrate that they have these capacities. We would hope that encouraging Aboriginal people to take up the opportunity of doing certificates 1, 2 and 3 courses would articulate into employment. That is starting to occur in some TAFE institutes—and the one that comes to mind is the Riverina which has been able to articulate close to 200 students at various levels, certificates 1 through to 3, and those people are now able to get employment in the school sector. That is a great outcome for the community, for the people who have done the course and for TAFEs to see they are growing a whole point of employment which previously was not there. Some of my colleagues from the Koori Centre gave evidence before. We would see that course as one we are strongly in favour of because we need to have a program at the higher-education level to start to provide those sorts of skills. That is a really important course.

We are yet to see the department buy into it. We have not seen the Catholic education service buying into it. We would like to see our kids make choices. Sometimes they go to state schools, 90 per cent of them, but 10 per cent of them still go to the non-government school sector. That is all well and good, but currently we are not seeing the non-government school sector buying into Aboriginal languages education as much as the government school sector. Having said that, some of the best examples in New South Wales come out of the non-government sector, but they are real standouts—one-offs—as opposed to where the majority of kids are. I am not trying to play one against the other because we try to work in a space where we work in all schools, both government and non-government schools, to make for a better community. Whether the kids are able to access a community language program should not be dependent on whether they go to a Catholic school or a state school.

**Mr HUSIC:** To clarify, because I did not hear it correctly, did you say your opinion is that the non-government sector is not buying in as much as it could?

**Mr Lowe:** That is right, it has not as yet bought into what it really means to support a languages program in terms of putting the hard yards in. I did say that a few standouts in New South Wales are in the non-government school sector. There are particular reasons for that and we have drawn very heavily on that to inform what we think is really good practice.

**CHAIR:** Thank you, Mr Lowe. Hansard will provide you with a copy of the transcript. Please make any alterations if there are any errors in the transcript.

**Mr Lowe:** Thank you so much for that.

**KUTAY, Dr Cat, Public Officer, Centre for Indigenous Technology Information and Engineering Solutions**

**MUNDINE, Ms Kaye, Chairperson, Centre for Indigenous Technology Information and Engineering Solutions**

**CHAIR:** Thank you for being here. I have been looking forward to your evidence all day. I read your list of recommendations. It is a very good report. I thought it was very creative. I am looking forward to hearing what you have to say. Thank you for your very detailed submission. We greatly appreciate it. Would you like to make a brief introductory statement?

**Dr Kutay:** Thank you for having us and giving us the opportunity to add more to our evidence. I acknowledge the traditional custodians and owners of this land, the Gadigal people, and recognise the elders past and present of the Gadigal, the other people of Sydney and those who have made Sydney their second home, such as the Bundjalung, the Wiradjuri and the other speakers we have worked with in our work.

Our submission focused a lot on IT because that is our interest. Kaye for a long time has seen IT as having a role in Aboriginal affairs and needing to accommodate Aboriginal people in its development. It is a new technology and it should involve everyone in society. We are particularly interested in teaching Indigenous languages and putting Indigenous students and their parents in the role of educator. Hence that provides for their self-esteem and wellbeing.

Language provides an identity with your family, your country and your community. These languages are divided into formal and informal languages. There is a classification of who can say what. This classification covers different activities that you perform such as your sacred activities, your day-to-day activities and who you are speaking with. So there are various forms of language. There are not only different languages but within a language there are different languages spoken. These dialects have been formed by people in different areas who are organising how to express their different ideas and different objectives within those areas.

We now need to get back the original sounds tapes of these communities through the national recording project, which has ceased funding. It takes a lot of practice to get people to relearn their language. Listening to the archival resources helps them get the sounds that are not present in English; they can rehear the sounds and resay them. We are interested in supporting projects, such as the national recording project, to get AIATSIS tapes back to the communities.

Mention has been made of the MILR project. There are problems getting funding through MILR. Often it is hard for government workers to understand the processes involved to get those tapes released to the community. We also see obviously that there is a high IT component in that work.

We acknowledge that people maintain their links with their identity and their feeling of strength and confidence in themselves through their language. They will be more confident to interact with other cultures, such as the white culture in Australia, as they have something that is a lot more deep and meaningful to them and is connected to their life; therefore, languages are highly important in learning. Languages are where Indigenous experts can achieve control of their employment and their programs with all the associated benefits of wellbeing.

Most people have some remnants of their language. For example, Richard Green is now teaching Dharug in Western Sydney. It was considered a dead language, but he is now teaching it in community. He always starts a lesson off with: 'What's the name of your street? What's the name of this suburb? They are all Dharug words. You have been speaking them for years, so let us speak it as a language, not just words.' The kids greet each other in the corridor. As Kevin said, you start feeling it when people start to talk it in the corridors of the school. That is really something.

If the committee or the government feel that the community cannot run these projects then it is important that the community learn to run them by running the language projects themselves and not have pilots that continually stop. One of the previous presenters mentioned that pilot programs are a death knell to language programs. There needs to be people who are trained to assist the people in this process, mentor roles, and at the same time the community needs to have control so that they learn the process, learn through their mistakes and learn in a way that Indigenous people will learn. We need to build on what there already is, not start from scratch. Only community controlled language centres that do this work already. There are many strong community groups that could start off the projects and keep them running. Aboriginal languages have a role in colloquial conversation, but there is also a role for them in teaching and formal presentations. And there is a role for presenting to parliamentary committee, but I am not very well versed in how to use the languages in that way.

The language is how you express yourself to others in regards to the environment in which you live. People should be learning the language and living the language in their day-to-day experience. This is not a novelty. It is

about how the environment is viewed and their relationships with other people and so on. We are starting to learn the value of Indigenous knowledge in terms of burning and maintenance of the environment. But we have not yet understood the value of their knowledge in terms of relating to other human beings, respect for others, how to work together as a team and many other aspects of knowledge that are communicated within this language.

I use the example of jargon used on the radio. I am a radio technician. When you are working on the radio, you do not say, 'Could you please turn up the frequency knob in the range of 500 to 1,000 hertz?' You have not got the time. You say, 'Turn up the mids.' Everyone has their jargon. It is about expressing your understanding very quickly and completely. When the Noonkanbah people want to tell their story to parliament, they tell it in their language. They cannot tell it in English; it is not their language.

I had an experience with Professor Greymorning, an Arapaho American indigenous, who came to Australia to explain how he revived Arapaho. He had his daughter with him. He has a very good teaching method—the Muurrbay language centre uses it; they consult with him often. His daughter told her a story that he had taught her that week in Arapaho. She told the story and then she translated. As she was translating, you could see that she was struggling to get the words. Afterwards, I went up to her and told her how English is a language of diplomacy. You can use it to very nicely say, 'I'm going to come and take your land and take your kids. I don't like your culture. I don't think that you're a good parent, because you're bringing your kids up in that culture. I'm going to kill your husband and take your food supply.' You can use English to say those things very nicely and unemotionally—unlike me now—and calmly and you will not be able to object, because I have said it so politely. I asked her, 'How do you feel when you speak Arapaho?' She thought for a second and said, 'I feel like I'm speaking the truth.' That is what it is: a language in which you do not pussy-foot around or hide behind diplomacy. You say what you think, you say what is going on, you say what you understand.

By using IT and Indigenous experts to create Indigenous perspectives on Western culture and teaching methods, we have an opportunity for Indigenous people to teach Western culture in a way that their own people can understand. It has been thrown onto them a lot of the time. Now there is a chance for them to reinterpret and explain it using an Indigenous way of teaching. That will assist people to become integrated—not assimilated—into the mainstream in a way that is more empowering. It is important that those Indigenous communities in which English is a second language be allowed to teach Western culture in their own language.

There is also the issue that a lot of Indigenous knowledge is conveyed orally. It has never been written down and probably never will be. This is therefore not known to non-Aboriginal people outside that oral tradition and outside the community. When we talk about teaching Indigenous culture in schools, there is so much knowledge that is not known because it has never been conveyed to non-Aboriginal people in a way that they could or would listen to. There is a long way to go. An example was the stolen generations. Aboriginal people knew that this was happening for years; for generations. It was talked about and well known. But it only when it got into the public domain and people started collecting the data that a public campaign began. IT can help in that area, too—I am a bit of an IT pusher—because by getting stories shared and public other people can say, 'I know that story; I relate to that story,' and start sharing these ideas. I believe that English will only be learnt by Aboriginal people as a second or third language if they see a need for English. When there is no employment and no open and honest negotiation or trade between the two cultures, they will not learn it and will not see a need to learn it. An example is a community in the Western Desert that I was working in. It was a training project in radios. I was linking it to teaching in the school and I asked the project officer about the teacher. I got a good description. Then I went to the local community leader and asked about the teacher and got another description. I thought, 'Okay, we have a teacher with a badly split personality.' The two descriptions did not match at all. I wondered about those different perspectives. Then I realised that there was a white teacher in the school and an Aboriginal teacher. For the Aboriginal community, there was one teacher: the AEA. For the white community, there was one teacher: the white teacher. The two did not see each other. They just did not mix. I do not think that it is much different across the country. There is a real split as to who is seen as doing the work, who is seen as relevant to the community and who will be consulted and listened to.

Another issue that has come up to do with this is that a lot of communication between communities could be through the National Broadband Network. But when the National Broadband Network came in it was said that these communities will not be linked. They will not be on broadband able to upload and download; they will be on satellite, which is one-way communication not two-way—well, basically, as there is very little upload on satellite, because it is much slower. So they will be reduced to receiving knowledge rather than contributing and sharing knowledge.

Similarly, the digital channels were going to exclude things like Indigenous TV. When these new technologies came in, there were lots of campaigns by people in remote areas about being deprived of their TV channels and

their link. Governments are continually on the back foot whenever these policies are introduced. People from the government say, 'Oops, we forgot that you have this Indigenous TV out in the remote communities that needs to be part of the process.'

There was another issue involving the translating service. The Finnish Sami Language Act 1991 requires that judges deliberate in any one of the seven Sami dialects used by participants in a case. To turn around how we deal with translating services or language teaching is to totally change our perspective. While the Sami are a small part of the Finnish population, it is now a requirement for judges to deliberate in the language of the participants, which is a far cry from what we have in Australia.

With information technology, there is the opportunity for these disparate speakers and schools to share resources in a way that they have not done so before. At the same time, this must be under community control, because they understand who have the skills, what needs to be done and who has priority. I will finish with a saying from Kevin Gilbert: it has to be the Aboriginal communities, because the white man will never do it.

**CHAIR:** Thanks very much. You are involved in developing oral history web sites. What other activities are you doing online to assist in the revitalisation and promotion of Indigenous languages?

**Dr Kutay:** We have not yet got the funding for Bundjalung because of this issue of understanding the process for getting archives back. For languages, Richard Green has Dharug web site, which is mostly words but we are starting to try to develop that into sentences. Les Bursill has put up the AIATSIS tapes that he was given for the Dharawal language. He was handed the tapes. He wanted to know what to do with them, as he wanted the language and knowledge to be spread out. He has put them on the web. They are up there to be annotated and used as examples—the sound. We want to do the same with the Bundjalung. We have the Bundjalung resources, but they are only open to Bundjalung speakers—we have no permission yet. We will hopefully working with the Muurrbay people on setting up a web site like the First Nations web site to enable communities to upload sound. They will record a sound, upload it and make it available to everyone and can be linked with various technologies, such as language parsers.

**CHAIR:** You made this comment in your submission: 'By supplying resources online and on computer to support language and culture, we will encourage Indigenous people to become engaged in this major area of employment and growth.' Can you explain what you mean by that? I thought it quite obtuse. I could not quite understand what you meant by that.

**Ms Mundine:** Most of the Aboriginal communities in this society are isolated. One of the important things is the very thing that we are talking about now: the use of language and education et cetera. What I do in the communities is get an idea of what the issues are. Then I go round and find people like Cat who then help me work out a system, process or whatever to help Aboriginal people leap forward so that they can then participate at the level they should have been at years ago. One of the things that we have to first of all find out is whether or not a community has electricity. A lot of communities do not. Without it, they cannot even get onto these things.

Schooling is very important for the kids. We encourage people to donate computers et cetera to schools, so kids become familiar with the technology. That means that when we get the funding we can use the technology. What used to happen—and this is my life experience—is that somebody with a bright idea would come out and dump it at the gate of the Aboriginal community. And that is where it would stay. We have to make sure that these things are connected at the right time with the right people so that they can make use of them. There is a lot of teasing out of information and then putting things together. That is how I work with Cat. This is the future; let us get into the new technology; let us get into computers. The kids like it. In some schools, they use little cartoons and get kids to write their stories on the computers so that they are familiar with them and ready for the next step.

When they start listening to themselves—with little kids able to hear themselves speaking through the computers—they get excited. They bring in their grandparents and say, 'Listen.' In my own family, they keep saying: 'But you got to stop them speaking with the Australian accent. We got to get our accent back.' And we are trying to get it back again. When we play the tapes of the old people from two generations back, the kids can then connect to that. They hold generational suppers and things like that. It is great personal development.

Unfortunately, Australia has a very racist structure for Aboriginal people. We have to get Aboriginal people to use this technology to say: 'This is who I am, and you're going to have to deal with me. I'm in the modern world now.' That is why there is a big push now through getting the preschool stuff going. We are now getting these kids to say, 'This is who I am.' I would love to live to a really old age to see the result of this. We are rebuilding a society. We have to stop building jails. We are going to have put all our focus on this new technology so that the kids can be part of the world, not just part of Australia, not just part of New South Wales. They have to see themselves in that context.

The new technology is one way to do it, but bringing back things that were important to people is also important. When I grew up, when you went to school if you spoke Bundjalung you were taken outside and caned. That sort of attitude is still there. It is like the music has stopped but the melody still lingers on. We have to stop people in these positions from having that attitude towards Aboriginal people.

**Mrs GRIGGS:** Thank you for coming along. Just for your information, my background is in IT. Before I was a politician I was an IT developer—many, many years ago. I was involved in a project that the Northern Territory government, in conjunction with another organisation, developed a product called Marvin. Are you aware of Marvin?

**Dr Kutay:** Yes.

**Mrs GRIGGS:** How similar is your product, or your services, to the Marvin product? That was going to be this fantastic opportunity to go out and speak in language and get some very key messages out in the remote and rural communities in the Northern Territory.

**Dr Kutay:** I have used Marvin, in Campbelltown. It was difficult, because the students were not that engaged with learning. I would not blame Marvin for it. Also, there were not many graphics of life in the city, so there were not many graphics that they could use. But there was one thing I really liked about Marvin, which you would appreciate. I forgot to say that I also developed language games using Muurrbay's graphics. The idea of that game is that it is based on a database. So it does not matter what language you have; you can still do 'who is?', 'where is?' and 'what are they doing?' within the same graphics and interface. So it is very simple to change from one to the other. And that is what Marvin was. You could just change the language or change what is said, and the students could play around with it.

**Mrs GRIGGS:** Correct me if I am wrong, but I thought Marvin was developed to be able to engage not only students but also adults who did not have English as their first language.

**Dr Kutay:** It is very graphical.

**Mrs GRIGGS:** Yes, and pictorial.

**Dr Kutay:** It is pictorial, yes. You click on it, and then you add the voice. There is still going to have to be education in terms of icons—in getting people into IT you have to show them the process of clicking on the icon.

**Mrs GRIGGS:** Just so that I have a picture in my mind, which I can go and talk to my colleagues about afterwards, is the thing you are proposing a similar concept? Or is it completely different—am I on a different tangent?

**Dr Kutay:** It is exactly the same concept—using graphical interfaces and setting up databases so that people can speak and upload. You do not need to transcribe it; you do not need text. You are relying very much on the audio. That is why we are working from language and oral history.

**Mrs GRIGGS:** How many users of your product are there?

**Dr Kutay:** The game was aimed at Sydney schools. The three school programs streamed into one, mainly because they were teaching Wiradjuri, which is off-country language and is not successful. But a Wiradjuri project finally decided to take the kids up the creek and do a fishing story in Wiradjuri, which is flying. That is Tempe School, and they are using the game there. There is a difficulty involved in developing these programs. If a high amount of money is paid for them, there may be a large amount of funding, and the government takes the program and publicises it. But if you get a small amount of funding to do something with an open-source free software that is flexible and so on, you do not get any support to distribute the program. Apparently it has been very difficult. So we have stayed within an area we could travel to, where that program is working. That is why we have got more into websites, where people can add their words and re-use the site for their own languages.

**Mrs GRIGGS:** A couple of hearings ago we had some witnesses saying that the young Indigenous people in the Northern Territory, in rural and remote as well as urban areas, were taking up technology really quickly. They all had mobile phones. They were all texting and Facebooking. I am not sure whether you have had a similar experience here that the younger generation are taking up technology and wanting to expand on it and use it.

**Dr Kutay:** Richard Green had an SMS system set up in Dharug so he could SMS to a student in Queensland, so they can text each other language examples. We have again a lot of mobile users and in Sydney it is okay, but when you start getting out to Kyogle north of Grafton you practically have no internet access anyway.

**Mrs GRIGGS:** And with phones?

**Ms Mundine:** With phones, again, no.

**Dr Kutay:** We are up in the mountains.

**Ms Mundine:** A lot of the remote communities use phones on Bluetooth. They share music and videos and, if they can get to a town, they send it in, probably to ICTV in Perth who broadcast it to the communities. It is a very good TV service.

**Mrs GRIGGS:** Thank you.

**Mr HUSIC:** In your submission you made some reference to intellectual property. One of the recommendations was funding the development and distribution of software that supports the acknowledgement of IP of Indigenous knowledge and stories. Do you mean the IP over the software or the knowledge?

**Dr Kutay:** The knowledge, the recording.

**Ms Mundine:** That is the first thing that the community say we have to keep. We have to keep the knowledge itself.

**Dr Kutay:** There is the issue of videos of deceased people, not just the video but also audio, not being available unless the family gives permission after a certain time and who can give that permission. It has to be centralised to close it off and there must be a process of opening it up. There has to be a process if someone wants to put it on Facebook so we can guarantee that it will not be passed on.

**Mr HUSIC:** You mentioned later in your submission retaining IP over all resources developed, for example language groups retaining IP over all resources they have developed for their language and having control over access to these resources. Have you opened up discussions with IP Australia, being the government body that takes care of recognising IP? Have you had talks with them?

**Ms Mundine:** I used to be on the Aboriginal arts board. That was one of the fields I worked on, IP et cetera. What came out of discussions with the community is this is our culture. This has been handed down from generation to generation. We not only own it but have responsibilities in regard to it. That is why we want to have it protected and we started that in the Aboriginal arts board.

**Mr HUSIC:** I will play devil's advocate just to test this line of thinking. You want permission that is similar to anyone in the general community giving permission for their image to be used. I understand that, but if the priority is the survival of the language, would that be better served by opening it up so you are not retaining control by small groups but rather there is fluency in the spread of languages? The aim would be to protect languages from being extinguished and that could be better served by providing more open access rather than clamping down on IP or classifying languages. Not the resources, I understand what is required to be invested in the development of resources and that you do not want to give that IP up, but the languages themselves might be better served by providing greater access.

**Ms Mundine:** I throw the question back to you and say, would it be served? These Aboriginal languages have certain meanings, whether they are common meanings or religious meanings. In the culture only certain people are allowed to use them and they know in what context they can use them. That is where we have to start from. That is why we are having discussions within the Aboriginal communities about what they are allowed to share and under what responsibilities that sharing would take place. We need to discuss what that sharing will mean to them and to the person who is receiving the gift, because that is what it is. A lot of discussions still have to be held about this. There are a few who are a little way along the line of these discussions, but there is still a long way to go about who has the ownership. Is it a commonly held ownership or is it single-person ownership?

**Mr HUSIC:** I am interested in that too.

**Ms Mundine:** It is really not ownership, it is guardianship. They have to work through it. We can cover it by talking to a lot of lawyers. They said we can do it under a certain contracts.

**CHAIR:** Ms Mundine, if you are happy to take up Mr Husic's point, if you would like to give us some more evidence and put something in writing to us that would be terrific. We have a long way to go still with the inquiry so we have to finish up now and move on to our next witnesses. Could you take that on notice?

**Ms Mundine:** Yes.

**CHAIR:** If you could get that information to the committee we would greatly appreciate it. It is a very complex and difficult issue. Thank you very much for coming. Hansard will provide a copy of the transcript and if there are any things that need to be altered please—

**Ms Mundine:** Thank you. You mean if we were intelligible or not.

**CHAIR:** Yes. Thank you very much for coming, we appreciate it.

**BERWICK, Ms Cindy, President, New South Wales Aboriginal Education Consultative Group Inc.**

**INGREY, Mr Raymond, Executive Officer, New South Wales Aboriginal Education Consultative Group Inc.**

[14:40]

**CHAIR:** We welcome the members of the NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group Inc. Would you like to make a brief introductory statement if at all possible before we go to questions?

**Ms Berwick:** Yes, we will try to be brief. The NSW AECG is recognised as the peak advisory body to both the New South Wales government and the Australian government in all matters on Aboriginal education and training. That is our core business. Over the last couple of years we have had an extensive community network that runs in New South Wales and we have had a lot of success. Most of the achievements we have had in Aboriginal education could probably be squarely put at the lobbying and advocacy role that the NSW AECG plays for government and the advisory role that we play.

Over the last couple of years there has been, I guess, a resurgence amongst communities in New South Wales of the reclamation and revitalisation of Aboriginal languages. They wanted somebody to advocate and be a voice for what is wanted in New South Wales, so the AECG in its advocacy role has picked that up. We set up a language and culture council of recognised Aboriginal speakers of language in New South Wales—not only speakers of language but also cultural knowledge holders—to advise us about what we do or lobby about and what issues face various communities in New South Wales around that reclamation, revitalisation and maintenance.

From that we ran some regional workshops, which Raymond will talk about. We ran some regional workshops that came with some recommendations and we tendered for the Centre for Aboriginal Languages Coordination and Development and were successful in that tender this year. Our role and intention is to support and coordinate the development of Aboriginal languages in New South Wales but in the next few years we hope that it exists on its own and we will go back to doing our other business.

**Mr Ingrey:** As Cindy said, the AECG focuses on education and training. Aboriginal language plays a role in our work but it is not to the extent that we are involved in it at the moment. As Cindy mentioned, in 2010 we established the New South Wales Aboriginal culture and languages council, which provided advice to us in our language endeavours. We had personal involvement in our local community with languages but as a collective we needed that advice. As Cindy mentioned, they came from not only people who are on the forefront of revitalising language and maintaining it in their local communities but they actually have that knowledge. They were nominated by our networks and the language networks as well.

In 2010 the then Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Minister Lynch, announced a partnership with the New South Wales AECG where they provided us with some resources to run a series of regional forums and one state meeting. Due to the limited funding that we had we could only hold them in four regional areas. Those areas were picked strategically with regard to the capacity of some of those language regions. They were: Gunnedah, Broken Hill, Condobolin and Moruya, on the south coast. We invited anybody who had an interest in Aboriginal languages to come along.

Out of that, they brought up some of the issues that they face in either their local community or their regional community. Those forums delegated a number of community members to attend the state meeting, where they could hear what is happening not just at a state level but at a national level as well. The forum came up with 10 recommendations, which were not in the submission but I am happy to submit them.

**CHAIR:** We would appreciate that. If you could get those to us in writing that would be terrific.

**Mr Ingrey:** That is fine. Those 10 recommendations are what has given us a bit of a background in what is leading Aboriginal languages and what the community wants in Aboriginal languages. There is everything from their own capacity—they identified the need to build Aboriginal people's capacity—to what is expected from the government both at a state and Commonwealth level. At the time, the community was happy for the AECG to lead that advocacy role in making sure that our needs are met.

We were then invited to put in a select tender for the Centre for Aboriginal Language Coordination and Development, with which we were successful. As Cindy mentioned, we would nurture and support in that centre. It would be for the development of regional and local Aboriginal language networks. One of the big things that has not happened in New South Wales is the coordination not only at a local level but at a regional or state level as well. It is coordination not only amongst Aboriginal communities but for state government departments and Commonwealth government departments. Previously, what was funded in one area had the wheel being

reinvented in the next town when they could have shared that resource if the funding bodies communicated with each other or if the communities had the opportunity to get together and discuss what they are doing in their local community.

Hopefully, we are going to set up a network that will build that and enable our mob to coordinate their own affairs in Aboriginal languages. We would coordinate projects to make sure that it is sharing, and we would provide some assistance for communities to do that. We will continue to advocate on our network's behalf. One of the main challenges also is to seek further financial assistance to make sure that the needs of the communities are met.

**CHAIR:** This sounds like a very new body. It seems that everything, apart from the networks, are going to be created; you have had a number of fora around New South Wales and there is a state meeting—how long have you been operating?

**Ms Berwick:** The New South Wales AECG?

**CHAIR:** Yes.

**Ms Berwick:** The New South Wales AECG has been in existence for over 35 years. We have a long-standing history in our involvement in education and training. We have a partnership agreement with the New South Wales Department of Education and Communities that has just been re-signed with the director-general in 2010. The previous partnership agreement was 10 years old. In terms of education and training, we are involved in all aspects of education and training in this state. I guess that puts us in a good position in relation to how languages are taught in schools and TAFE colleges here. We have been working with the education department on a policy, a way forward and addressing some of the issues in communities about remuneration and teacher training. That is probably nothing new, but it is about how we work together to actually do that. We are a new body in terms of language advocacy. We are not a new body in terms of education. We were chosen for the select tender and we won it on the basis of our educational achievements.

**CHAIR:** Can you describe circumstances of success, to use your word, in the role you have played in the development of Aboriginal education, particularly the reclamation and revitalisation of language? You are getting the networks going and you have had the forum. You are obviously engendered a fair degree of enthusiasm in the area. Are there other areas where you can claim success in how you have influenced the development of that policy?

**Ms Berwick:** Of languages in particular or education?

**CHAIR:** Languages in particular.

**Ms Berwick:** Our sojourn in the languages is a new one. As I said, it is not necessarily our core business. The aspect of languages that becomes our core business is the teaching of languages in schools. We have initiated talks with the department to look at remuneration, staffing—the major issues that have been brought up across the regional forums. If you want to talk about our success in Aboriginal education in general then I am happy to direct you to a couple of things.

**CHAIR:** That would be good.

**Ms Berwick:** The small TAFE campuses that have been built in country New South Wales have been with our advocacy. We were responsible for the employment of Aboriginal aides and workers within our schools. We have 320 Aboriginal education officers. Most recently, we have been contracted by the state government to provide teacher professional learning. We provide teacher professional learning around cultural competencies for teachers in the focus schools that have been identified by the Commonwealth government. This is not mickey mouse—it has been accredited through the New South Wales Institute of Teachers as part of the accreditation for registration as a teacher in this state. We have put through 400 to 500 teachers and it is being done in 15 locations at the moment, so it is to have some success. I could go on about a whole pile of things but that is probably the most recent one.

**CHAIR:** We have had evidence from the New South Wales Department of Education and Communities about their Aboriginal languages policies. Were you involved in that?

**Ms Berwick:** Yes, we were, in the rollout of it, and we are in talks with Education and the unions about redirecting staff to support language work in New South Wales. That started last year.

**CHAIR:** What is the benefit overall to Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginal people of giving attention and recognition to Indigenous languages and education?

**Ms Berwick:** Do you really want me to answer that one?

**CHAIR:** I do. This is what they call a full toss and middle stump!

**Ms Berwick:** That is right. I have just had this conversation with ACARA. There are probably two aspects to it. Obviously it is about identity and pride. If Aboriginal kids go to school with some identity and pride in who they are, their success at school is probably enhanced. I would consider that attendance is not a problem in this state. We did a review into Aboriginal education in 2004 in this state which we were an active player in. One of the things that were shown was that, if you take out the chronic nonattenders, the majority of Aboriginal kids go to school the majority of the time. What they are is disengaged from school. So we would see that placing more value on their culture and the unique place they have in this country would instil a sense of identity and pride in who they are, which then would breed success in school. That is for them. The other side of it is that, if you teach that in school and teach about the unique place that we have as the oldest living culture in humanity—for which Aboriginal people are respected and revered across the world, even if we are not revered for it in this country—that can only breed understanding, tolerance and respect for that culture. That, in turn, can only enhance the relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people and help reconcile this country.

**CHAIR:** I think you have beautifully hit that for six and I am very happy that you did that.

**Ms Berwick:** Thank you. I am glad you did not bowl me out.

**Mr HUSIC:** I just wanted to ask about the New South Wales Centre for Aboriginal Languages Coordination and Development. How do you see that working in a practical sense? I think you have just won the tender for the three-year program. How do you see this working and operating in real terms?

**Mr Ingrey:** The plus we had in successfully winning the tender was that the AECG has a large network of 112 local AECGs across New South Wales. There are 19 regional AECGs which coordinate those locals. With that network, we can pinpoint and get the community viewpoint from the grassroots. We intend to duplicate that. We intend to establish local Aboriginal language networks so that anybody who is involved in Aboriginal language, or has an interest in reclaiming their language, can actually be a part of their local community's Aboriginal language network. They would then be coordinated by regional Aboriginal language networks. Those regional Aboriginal language networks would be governed by a board nominated by those networks. That is once it is actually established—we intend to establish those networks by the middle of next year. As I said, we have been in existence for nearly 35 years and our networks are proven to actually work. It is a unique organisation—there are not many across Australia like us. Our networks were mirrored with the New South Wales Aboriginal Land Council system. Other major organisations in New South Wales have looked at the AECG to make sure that our networks work.

**Mr HUSIC:** When you say there will be a centre, will there be a physical presence? Will it be playing a coordinating role or will people be able to go to the centre itself if they want to undertake the process of teaching or learning languages?

**Ms Berwick:** We see the centre as both physical and non-physical. We have a secretariat which supports the functioning of the New South Wales AECG located in Stanmore. The centre will operate out of Stanmore. One of the things that came over from the Department of Aboriginal Affairs was their material—that would be housed at that centre. Our vision would be that regions—and language regions—would actually have their own centres to house their own material and that those centres would be accessible to the communities in those regions. At the moment, that is one of the issues—accessibility through AIATSIS, getting access to the material and the red tape that people have to go through. That is what we see as a vision for the language centre. But there is a physical presence. Our involvement and relationship with the Department of Education and Training allows us to work in the area of developing how languages are going to be taught in schools, from preschool through the compulsory years of schooling. But TAFE is also a part of that. We see that TAFE has a really strong role to play in delivering languages to the community.

**Mr HUSIC:** Will the centre itself be like—

**Ms Berwick:** It is a house.

**Mr HUSIC:** a nerve centre for the activity that gets done on the ground across the 112 AECGs? Is that how you—

**Ms Berwick:** No, the AECG is different to—

**Mr Ingrey:** Eventually we would like to have a number of local Aboriginal language networks. But, with the limited resources we have at the moment to do that, it is probably impossible to set those networks up and actually resource them.

**Ms Berwick:** Yes. So the 112 may not be 112 in the first instance; it may be 20. But eventually, as people become interested, it will increase, which is how the local AECGs are set up. When they have an interest group of people, they set up a local network to discuss the issues around education and training for their children. I would

say that, when there is a group of people in a town that want to talk about the language in their town or their community, they would set up a group.

One of the things that we found, as Raymond said earlier, was the lack of coordination from one town to another. That was never so evident as in western New South Wales, where on one side they have really nice resources in terms of work sheets and everything, and 100 kilometres down the road they are using scraps of paper, yet they are doing the same language. So we see our further role as being able to share those resources so that the towns are not, even though they speak the same language, doing anything separately. So there is a coordination role as well as the role of supporting language revitalisation.

**Mr HUSIC:** Say, for example, a board was set up locally. Again, it would be the Darug language that is in my neck of the woods. How would that board then coordinate its work? Would it work with TAFEs? Would it work with schools? Would it do it itself? How do you see that coordination taking place from the work that the centre is doing?

**Mr Ingre:** In a similar manner to the AECG. They meet and, because of the strong partnership and the relationship that we have with, for example, the Department of Education and Communities, AECGs work closely with local principals and local schools to ensure that there is an Aboriginal perspective and that Aboriginal communities' needs are met. Then, at a regional level, our regional AECGs work closely with the regional department of education to make sure that it is coordinated at a regional level and the same message is given and the community's viewpoint is handed over. The language networks would obviously be involved—for example, in Western Sydney. Also, it does not just depend on communities; it also depends on cultural boundaries and language groups as well. So, if you have a language group that spans a number of Aboriginal communities, we would see each local Aboriginal community setting up a local language network, which would work closely with their local TAFE campuses and local schools, both independent and public, to ensure that the community's needs and aspirations are met when teaching Aboriginal languages.

**Ms Berwick:** I see that it is of benefit of schools because they are kept out of the politics, I suppose, of communities. With a regional centre set up, schools would just need to ring the regional centre and say, 'We want a language program,' and the community will decide who is going to teach it and send them out. We have got some commitment for some teaching positions to work with communities in developing their curriculum, pedagogy and things, because while language speakers do not necessarily have a teaching degree—obviously—the teachers will work with community language speakers to ensure that the work that they teach fits into the Quality Teaching Framework and is of a methodology where you would do that. We have a commitment from the state government for that, but we are negotiating with the unions, which are also committed.

**CHAIR:** We wish you very well in the networking process. It is a creative, interesting way to go about it.

**Ms Berwick:** If we survive it, yes, it will be good.

**Mr Ingre:** Probably the last comment is that the good thing about the Centre for Aboriginal Language Coordination and Development is that it gives opportunities for Aboriginal communities and Aboriginal people to get involved and self-determine where we want our language and culture to be, because it is up to us to ensure that our culture is continued with the support of both the government and the non-government sector and that we upskill our community to be linguists and teachers of language. We also support people that just want to learn their own language and have that identity to further support their children's advancement.

**Ms Berwick:** In New South Wales we see this as a new movement. It is like a movement that we started—not us, but people who came before us—35-odd years ago where we wanted not just to participate in education but be active participants. From that AECG group we want to self-determine the New South Wales languages are and what they mean to us. We see this as a new movement—and, in 20 years time, Raymond will still be here; it is doubtful I will be here—and hopefully it will be as strong as the visionary people that set up the AECG.

**CHAIR:** Is that networking being replicated in other states?

**Ms Berwick:** Victoria does—VAEAI—and, interestingly enough, we have just come from a meeting with Peter Garrett this morning and they are considering it. The New South Wales AECG is seen as a model by the other states, and they have approached him to replicate our model in other states. Obviously, they need some support to do that and he is considering it.

**CHAIR:** I hope you come to my home state of Queensland soon. Thank you very much. I have not heard of that in Queensland.

**Ms Berwick:** The QIECC, but you are a ministerial appointment in Queensland.

**CHAIR:** It is not quite as innovative and creative or as grassroots as what you guys have undertaken—that is for sure.

**Ms Berwick:** We can do that because we do not sit in government. We can just stroke beards.

**CHAIR:** Exactly. There is an arm's length aspect to it.

**Ms Berwick:** That is the way we like it.

**CHAIR:** It is true: in Queensland there is nothing like that happening.

**Ms Berwick:** No, and Queensland were represented at the meeting today with Peter Garrett and they are one of the states that want to move to the model that we have.

**CHAIR:** If you get the three biggest states on board, that is a good thing. Thanks very much.

**COX, Ms Eva, Research Fellow, Jumbunna Indigenous House of Learning, University of Technology, Sydney**

**GIBSON, Mr Paddy, Senior Researcher, Jumbunna Indigenous House of Learning, University of Technology, Sydney**

[15:06]

**CHAIR:** Welcome. Would you care to make a brief introductory statement before we move to questions.

**Ms Cox:** We have come today to pick up on a few points that we want to expand on and because we were invited to come. Jumbunna is not an expert area on Indigenous languages but we have a very strong sense of the politics of the whole area. One of my concerns as a non-Indigenous researcher in this area is to look at what effect some of this stuff has on the non-Indigenous community.

As a member of the non-Indigenous community, we manage to create at least 99.9 per cent of the problems that are being faced within the Indigenous communities by our lack of understanding and acceptance. The language question is an interesting one because, as somebody relatively recent in the area, you are simply not aware of things. You know about the Northern Territory—and Paddy will talk about that because he has been doing field work up there—but I doubt very much that almost anybody outside this room would know very much about how much language stuff is happening in New South Wales. It is not something that is talked about. The New South Wales government, having read the board of studies and the DET submissions, have done some quite impressive work in the area but it is not widely seen.

One of the areas that particularly interests me, which I thought I would open up on because I think it has not been dealt with specifically within the context of today, is some work with the SDN Aboriginal unit into what happens to children in the preschool area. We have got it in the school area, but the preschool stuff is not nearly as obvious; yet we have a lower level of attendance, particularly in New South Wales—and Australia generally—of Aboriginal children in preschools. We started doing some qualitative research with parents in inner Sydney around Glebe and Redfern and found quite a lot of the mothers were really feeling quite concerned about the fact that they felt that they were regarded as having a deficit. The minute they walked anywhere near a non-Aboriginal early childhood service, the attitude was: here comes one of them with a big, empty vessel which we have to fill—which is not a good way of establishing a good and warm relationship with potential users of the service. In many cases they talked about the look they got when they turned up.

What came through when we were reading this and looking at some of the data was the absolute lack of understanding a lot of people in the preschool area—and I suspect also in some of the school areas—had about the depth of culture, language, knowledge and alternative literacies that are available within the Aboriginal communities. So it is not an issue about an empty vessel that has to be filled but being able to recognise and respect sets of knowledge and understandings that the children already have from their cultural backgrounds, including probably much better literacies in reading symbols and the non-written type stuff, and to recognise that there are a whole lot of new literacies, which Cat and Kaye referred to and which you were also interested in, such as digital literacies. Aboriginal children are getting into them fairly solidly through mobile phones and things, particularly in the urban areas and when they can get contact.

In the middle of that there is a narrow band of, if you like, formal English literacy. This turned up a little in the education area but did not seem to turn up in early childhood education. Most Australians have an absolute lack of understanding about what might be called Aboriginal English as a creole. It has a legitimate set of alternative ways of putting sentences together—different grammars, different words and different ways of approaching things. When children turn up with that they get corrected. They get pushed into using standard English, which makes them feel bad, makes their parents feel bad and adds to the idea that these children are undereducated and have a deficit that needs to be filled.

I want to put on the record that it is important that there is a strong move to educate non-Aboriginal Australians about both the richness of all of the Aboriginal languages and the things that we are losing rapidly if we do not do something about them. There are moves in a sense to find the languages again and put them back together again in areas where they are no longer spoken. The creoles that have arisen of Aboriginal English are in themselves quite legitimate codes that get used in certain circumstances. Kaye was saying there are different languages with different codes. That needs to be respected rather than criticised and assumed to be bad English, because that only creates a further sense for Aboriginal parents that their culture is unknown and disrespected. I wanted to put that on the record.

I have learnt over the last few years of working in this area how strongly people feel about the respect that is needed for the cultures and depth of knowledge and things either here or in the Northern Territory. I have done

quite a bit of work on your government's less attractive policies around income management. I am a researcher and have done a lot of looking at data, and you do not have any data to prove that it works. One thing that is really uncomfortable around that stuff is the fact that people feel the whole intervention and lots of things around that disrespect relationships between people, understandings of culture, understandings of language and understandings of the depth of those things. There is the assumption that all you have to do is turn them into nice, white individuals—nice little capitalist deadshits are going to behave in appropriate rip-off styles so they can actually become mortgage carriers and various other things. There is a total lack of understanding of what a collectivist set of cultures are and how that undermines the capacity to hear what people are saying, to listen appropriately to things and to work in genuine respect and collaboration with people rather than imposing things on them with the assumption that the problem is a deficit amongst most of the people we are talking to.

I would like to throw to Paddy, who has been doing fieldwork in the Northern Territory and looking particularly at some of the issues around language teaching and the multilingual teaching that should be happening in the Northern Territory and is not happening at the moment. Minister Macklin is going around threatening to take people's income away if the children do not go to school. That makes the assumption that the problem is with the families and the children and makes no allowances for the fact that the problem is very largely in many cases with the schools. Some schools have high levels of attendance and some do not, so can we please at least assume that cultural stuff is part of the problem not just assume it is bad parenting. I will hand over to Paddy to talk about his Northern Territory experiences.

**Mr Gibson:** Quite a bit in our submission details some of the research that has been conducted in the Northern Territory. I lived there in 2009 and 2010 to look specifically at the Northern Territory intervention and the community experience of that. I conducted more than 100 interviews in the field with people that have lived through the intervention and under it. I do not have a specific background in language policy and my research was not canvassing specifically for experiences of education or what has happened around language.

But it does need to be said that I consistently heard the message that the feeling of disempowerment is a very profound and deep feeling which exists across all of the communities that I visited in the Northern Territory and was a result of a number of policies, not only the intervention but also the dissolution of the Aboriginal community councils that has taken place and the closure of community development employment programs, which employed thousands of people, including many people in schools, in the Northern Territory. There was a profound sense of loss and disempowerment. One of the things that was expressed quite consistently was the loss of bilingual learning. There were formal Aboriginal curricula based on and written in Aboriginal language. Literacy was taught in Aboriginal language. I am sure as part of your inquiry you hear a lot about the formal teaching of bilingualism. Around Central Australia, particularly in the communities of Yuendumu and Lajamanu, which I visited a number of times and which, formerly, did have bilingual programs, there was a real sense of loss.

It is interesting to note that even communities that did not have formal bilingual programs felt that loss as well when other communities lost their programs. They expressed that in the context of a loss of autonomy and a loss of respect for their culture or whatever as it has happened. I can talk about some of the specifics of what people's concerns were or whatever.

Obviously Indigenous attendance in Northern Territory schools is a political hot potato. You will be considering legislation next Tuesday, I believe, that is going to be brought before the parliament around these new reforms that Eva mentioned: giving the capacity to suspend welfare payments as a result of chronic school attendance issues and the extension of income management in a range of areas.

We have been analysing transcripts from the consultation meetings of Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory—or the second intervention as it is more colloquially known. We have records of 13 of those consultation meetings, word-for-word transcripts. In every one of those consultation meetings there were people who expressed opposition to the restrictions on bilingual education that had been introduced. That was unsolicited. There were never questions asked by the facilitators of those meetings about the experience of bilingual education. It needs to be said that in the remote communities there were never specific questions asked at all about any policy to do with education. All that was ever asked of people was: 'How is the school going? What do you think of the school?' The idea that there was explicit Aboriginal consent or support given to cutting off welfare payments as a result of school attendance is not borne out by any of the actual records that we have of these consultation meetings. It was never asked in a remote community that we have records of. It was asked in Alice Springs and Darwin. All of the comments were opposed to that policy, except one lady in Alice Springs who said, 'Parents need a kick up the arse.' Apart from that one comment, everyone was opposed to the idea that school attendance should be linked to welfare payments. As I said, it was not asked at all.

**CHAIR:** This inquiry is not about that at all.

**Mr Gibson:** It is. My point is that at every one of those meetings—

**CHAIR:** I have let you have a fair go so far on this issue.

**Mr Gibson:** To finish my point, bilingual education, which is absolutely crucial in Indigenous communities themselves and their understanding of what is important to them in the school was not mentioned in the Stronger Futures consultation report. It was not asked of communities when they were actually participating in the consultation meetings. That opposition was not recorded in the government's report on the consultations.

**CHAIR:** We are not here to discuss that issue, Mr Gibson. We are here to discuss the terms of reference. I have let you and Ms Cox have a fair go on this issue. You are here to give evidence on language in Indigenous communities. You are not here to grandstand on this issue. You are not going to change government policy by turning up to a parliamentary committee on this issue. If you have got anything to say on language in Indigenous communities in the remaining time, I am happy to listen but I am not going to have you overturn federal government policy.

**Mr Gibson:** Sorry. I am just communicating my research on people's experiences of language in their school and the policy development around language in their schools over the last three months, three years.

**CHAIR:** I am happy for you to discuss the removal of bilingual education in the Northern Territory. You talked about the sense of loss of respect and autonomy. I am happy to give you the opportunity to answer that, but I am not going to have you grandstand on other issues. You spoke about the removal of bilingual education in the Northern Territory. I am interested in the impact it has had on Indigenous communities and Indigenous students. Can you elaborate further on what you said in terms of the sense of loss, a loss of respect and loss of autonomy?

**Mr Gibson:** Absolutely. If you want me to, I could give you some of the more profound expressions of the people who were involved in that process.

**CHAIR:** Please do so.

**Mr Gibson:** At Lajamanu, where attendance rates have halved since the implementation of this policy restricting bilingual education, I did a number of interviews with teachers—one of those was Steve Patrick, another was Julie-Anne Ross—who were really wanting to speak about this. Julie-Anne talked quite a lot about the relationship between the bilingual program and the broader sense of a feeling of control and empowerment of the teachers within the school. She said that since the change the school has become like a prison.

She said, 'White teachers are asking me, "Why is the community calling this a Kardiya school?"—Kardiya is a word for non-Indigenous people—'And I say it is because you are giving more jobs to Kardiya people than Aboriginal people and you are making the Aboriginal people go down. It does not matter if you have a certificate. They tell you to wait. They say they need the Kardiya to work. They moved me out of my job and somebody else took over. They moved most of the Yapa out of their jobs. We talk to them and say, "Hey, what about our role? What is our role in the school?" The principal could not say anything. That is the truth of what is happening.'

A man who has passed away had close involvement in developing the bilingual curriculum. He said, 'This is no mucking around. The school is stealing our kids.' It is like that man was saying before: it is assimilation policies but in a nice quiet way. It is making our children all coconuts. That is what the school is doing. Yapa—that is Aboriginal people with a white man inside—'We won't think Yapa way anymore. The school is like a detention camp. We have to wake up Yapa—that is Aboriginal people—'We have to win them back our own country.'

There was this real feeling that the school was like a prison. The school was like a detention camp. People talked quite a bit about the assimilation policies that they had experienced previously, how that was the experience that they were going through now.

**Mr HUSIC:** Mr Gibson, as a New South Welshman, I am not familiar with the way that the NT structured the incorporation of bilingual language use within the curriculum. How did that work previously?

**Mr Gibson:** It is not in all Northern Territory schools. There are nine, sometimes 10, sometimes 11, depending on the classification of the different schools operating formal bilingual programs. Basically, the actual curriculum, particularly for students in the younger years, is developed in the Indigenous language. The idea is that you learn your literacy—Roman characters—in your language. The pedagogy behind it is not about saying, 'Learn an Aboriginal language and don't learn English'. The theory is that as you develop literacy in your own language that will open up your prospects and opportunities for learning literacy in English. It will be far more effective. The core is that the actual teaching takes place, even if it is teaching of English, in the language. It is the language that forms the core of the curriculum.

**Mr HUSIC:** So they predominantly would speak Aboriginal language first but teach kids English, for example, just like if it were reversed and you were in an English classroom learning German? That type of thing?

**Mr Gibson:** That is right.

**Ms Cox:** It was using elements of what might be an ESL model. Only one of the people who set it up was somebody I knew and she said that, unfortunately, they did not use enough ESL training for the Anglo teachers, so they did not actually understand some of the things there. But the Northern Territory was responsible for abolishing the bilingual programs, not the federal government. They claimed that because there were low responses in the NAPLAN test that it should be directed to the afternoon programs only. First of all, if you look at the statistics, most of the bilingual schools were no worse—and in some cases were actually better—than the non-bilingual schools. Secondly, in a sense it suddenly changed the curriculum so that the children who came in with sometimes two or three Aboriginal languages and very little English were immediately pushed into working in English in the morning sessions and only allowed to do other things in the afternoon. It meant that the two local teachers then lost their jobs. So it was quite a massive shift.

Without going into the fine points, the reason I was raising some of the issues, the more political issues—and I am not going to go back onto them—was that people saw what was happening always as a lack of understanding of what the depth of the culture and the understanding of the culture was. So a lot of the stuff that happened, whether it was about the languages or whether it was about other things, was this assumption that there was something wrong and you had to fix it in ways which bore no relationship to the local cultures, including the language learning and the understanding of the languages.

So it connects up in a way with the issue which the government have said they are trying to rework, of being able to form a partnership. The Productivity Commission, which is hardly a set of ratbag lefties—or whatever you want to label us as—has actually said that the stuff that works is bottom-up, culturally appropriate and long term, and that is the only thing that works. And yet what you get with these sorts of things is the anger about the lack of attention to the bilingual learning and the lack of attention to other things which are culturally appropriate. It is the same sort of thing that we were picking up in the Glebe Public School from the young mothers that we were talking to about the early childhood stuff—a feeling that out there nobody really understands about Aboriginal cultures and Aboriginal languages and the depth of Aboriginal cultural engagement with their own communities.

Language is very much a key part of the recognition of that, whether it is Aboriginal English with words from local things or whatever it happens to be. By ignoring the importance of that, what you get is a switch-off and the kids do not go to school, the kids do not engage and the adults do not engage. I think it was coming through in somebody else's statement earlier—that sense of disengagement that comes from 'You do not understand us and we do not want our children to be alienated.' That comes up quite often amongst the mothers of the young children: 'If you tell our kids the way they talk isn't the right way to talk, you are alienating them from our culture and what is important to us, so therefore we will not bring them back to the early childhood playgroup, because we don't want our children to be alienated.' That is an urban response which is not dissimilar to the Northern Territory response, and that is the reason that we were pushing it.

**Mr Gibson:** On that point, I want to go back to some of the stuff at Lajamanu. The reason I raised the school attendance was that a number of people were telling me there—and I think it is quite disturbing—that, while there are parents in that community that are not taking enough responsibility in terms of their kids, that is true, there are other parents in the community, however, who are actually scared about sending their kids to school. These are parents and families that had had very high attendance rates previously but were purposely holding their kids back from the school because they felt that going to the school was actually having a very severe and detrimental impact on their child's wellbeing. They felt that going to the school was a form of punishment or was trying to push the children in a particular direction in terms of the development of their world view in a way that was felt as a threat by that community and by those parents. There is a very clear policy debate at the moment about attendance levels. If there is this perception in the community that the school is a threat, I think it is quite a serious issue.

**Mr HUSIC:** Why is it seen as a threat?

**Ms Cox:** Because of the cultural stuff. That is what I was trying to say beforehand. One of the things that came through really clearly when we talked to the mothers about what they want for their kids was that they want their children to be confident about who they are and what they are. There was a phrase that Kaye used earlier: 'This is who I am.' If your child goes to something where the culture of the parents, they feel, is disrespected, that pulls the child's sense of who they are in ways that the parents feel uncomfortable with. The main thing they wanted for their children was confidence in who they were and in their own identity so that they could move confidently across into the other areas. But they felt that if you undermined that sense of identity by creating a

sense of conflict between what the parents stood for and what the school stood for then the children were likely to become not confident, alienated and not wanting to go to school. I think that is probably similar to the sort of stuff you are—

**CHAIR:** You mentioned before, Mr Gibson, the link with wellbeing. There was some interesting data you elicited, which we appreciate. It was 2006 data, I think, about the link with young people between 15 and 24 years of age being less likely to be involved in substance abuse—

**Ms Cox:** If they understood their own language, yes.

**CHAIR:** if they were competent in an Indigenous language. Is there other research in relation to that? Also, is there other research subsequent to that ABS data from back in 2006 that indicates the same thing?

**Ms Cox:** I have been hunting but unfortunately there is not a lot of data on those sorts of things. But there is a reasonable amount of data in a whole lot of different areas about if children have a strong sense of their own identity. The point about language and identity is that it is not just language in the sense of being able to talk about things. It is a sense of who you are. A whole Aboriginal language uses different codes in relation to respect for elders. You use different codes—this is some of the stuff that Kay was talking about—for religious things. If you understand your language, you understand who you are and what your relationship is and where you belong and your sense of identity gets embedded in your sense of the language and the culture, so you are much more comfortable with who you are than if you do not have that.

One of the complaints, if you listen to Noel Pearson on some of these things, for example, is about that sort of loss of the sense of moral compass. He goes a bit far on some of that stuff, but I think there is that sense that language teaches people who they are, how they relate to other people, who they respect and where they come from. All of that is embedded in the language. So it makes sense that if you have a strong sense of your language you will also have a strong sense of who you are and that then would assist you to deal more confidently with these sorts of issues of how you move across into different environments.

A lot of this comes from other stuff I have done in non-Indigenous areas looking at issues around identity and other sorts of things. People move much more comfortably if they have a strong original identity, but if you undermine that original sense of identity and try to replace it with the overarching identity of the majority of the country then people actually never feel that they are fully accepted in the new identity and have a sense of disconnection from their own identity. They are much more vulnerable then to becoming part of out-groups rather than in-groups.

**CHAIR:** We got that in the last report, the *Doing time* report, where it was quite clear that people engaged in criminal and miscreant behaviour when they lacked cultural identity. Flowing out of that came this report. I am interested in the idea of language as a human right. Have you explored that idea? I know there are a number of declarations on the rights of Indigenous people. Have either of you explored that in your research?

**Mr Gibson:** The UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People actually says that Indigenous communities have a right to have control over the education process that their children are involved in. It is not just consultation but actual control. That comes from international experience and international struggle. You mentioned the research before. A lot of research has been done on North American indigenous societies. You might be aware of the Harvard Project that looks at wellbeing. It is embedded in international agreements. It is recognised that this is a right that people have for the whole range of reasons that have been mentioned.

It is worth saying that in my time in the Territory a lot of these problems, such as youth suicide, have been quite acute. Within the last four years there has been a doubling of the rate of attempted suicide and self-harm and a 40 per cent increase in the rate of incarceration. It is a quite acute experience. Obviously that cannot be reduced to language but the language in those international agreements and treaties such as the UN declaration includes that important subset of the feeling that the community must have some autonomy and control over its own destiny.

**Ms Cox:** I was part of the post-war migrant child experience where people came out here and everybody gave up their language because that was the thing you were supposed to do and learn English.

**CHAIR:** It was not just post-World War II; it was pre-World War II. My family is a classic example of giving up their Germanic language.

**Ms Cox:** I know. In some cases when the similarities are sufficient, it does not matter, but when you actually have a situation where you have got a combination of that and an inequality overlaying it then there is that loss of the identity. Language is one of the ways that cements your sense of identity and wellbeing. That is why I think it is seen as a right. It is not just a right to speak your own language; it is a right to own your language in a way

which adds to your sense of who you are and what you are and that it is respected. Again it is about the respect of the culture. The language is the most obvious manifestation of a cultural identity.

**CHAIR:** As I said to Ed before, Dietrich Bonhoeffer said, 'Without one's language one is lost, hopelessly alone.'

**Mr HUSIC:** There were some things that you raised in your verbal submission that, for want of a better term, was pretty confronting about the way that parents are seeing the school experience as almost detaching children from their culture or from their world view, I think was the term that you used. I just want to pressure-test some of the statements. Obviously it is entirely human to relate to your own experiences. I am similar. I came from a non-English-speaking European background. But it would be natural, for example, being a child of migrants that when you attend a public school, for example, that there is an expectation about the way you interrelate there as opposed to the way you may relate home, use of language, cultural mores—whatever.

I see that in one way through the eyes of my own experience and am trying to then weigh that up with what you have explained earlier, because it is pretty confronting. What are the types of things that children are being told, for example, that they should not do, apart from the removal of bilingual language as a method of teaching or as a mechanism to teach? What are some of these things that are being done to disconnect children from the world view, from culture, from language?

**Ms Cox:** It is just the lack of understanding in many cases. If you take a look at the history of teachers in the Northern Territory, the average duration for a teacher in the Northern Territory is seven months. The turnover is huge. I went through the latest report from FaHCSIA and things like that. So you have teachers coming in who have little or no understanding of local cultures. In a sense the school becomes a place where there is not a sense of continuity. You were a child who came from a migrant background, as I was. I can remember the sort of embarrassment when you turned up with salami on your sandwiches instead of vegemite and various other things—certainly in the 1950s. It probably disappeared at a later stage. But there was not that sort of strong sense of complete alienation. I think part of the problem with some of the Northern Territory stuff is that if you remove a program it happens to the people there and there is a sense of fear and anxiety about what this means in terms of lots of other things that were happening at the same time, which makes those children feel even more alienated. Yes, children are quite good at learning the code for school, the code for home, the code for when you go and visit your rellies and various other things—you have different sorts of ways of doing that. But if you are actually at the same time feeling that you are part of an out-group, where there is an array of Anglo teachers that have no understanding of your culture, no respect for what goes on, no real respect for the cultural things that you are part of, the whole thing builds into a quite different sort of sense of, 'If I put my child there, this child will become something that I am not.'

Sometimes when you read the language of the official things it is much more about becoming part of the mass society. I can imagine within an area like Lajamanu that would be seen as very threatening because it means you lose your sense of who you are. At is finding ways of being able to get people, obviously, to learn both languages—well, sometimes they have half a dozen languages already—but to learn the formal English that they need, but not in a way that makes it look as though it is blotting out and obscuring the other stuff. That is, I think, the problem that at the moment the sense, because they cancelled those language programs, that they are actually trying to blot it out and say, 'You shouldn't be doing that.'

It is the same as when you talk to older Aboriginal people who say things like, 'When we went to school and tried to speak our own languages in New South Wales in the 1930s, 1940s, 1950s we were thumped, because you weren't allowed to do that—you got punished for speaking languages.' It is when you have got that in your background and then it reappears in the foreground that that stuff becomes much more frightening than it ought to be. Yes, obviously one learns different languages as one moves up through the thing, but it is the power imbalances that create—

**Mr HUSIC:** Are you seeing that largely in the Territory or are you seeing this in other states as well?

**Ms Cox:** To a lesser degree. I was quite interested when we started getting back some of these things. We had Aboriginal interviewers talking to Aboriginal parents in the inner city. There was a small number of qualitative interviews. I used to teach and research methods—that was my area. But it was quite surprising how many of the parents were really anxious about finding an early childhood service where culture and language was respected so that they did not feel that there was a disrespect for them about things like that that meant that their children would become alien to them and would come home and look critically at what was happening at home. There was that tension there—obviously not as acute, but it certainly was there.

**CHAIR:** Thank you very much. I appreciate that. Hansard will provide a transcript of the evidence and please make any changes you feel necessary in terms of corrections you need to make. With that I declare the hearing closed. Thank you very much for coming and contributing. Thank you also to Hansard and to Broadcasting.

Resolved (on motion by **Mr Husic**):

That this committee authorises publication, including publication on the parliamentary database, of the transcript of the evidence given before it at public hearing this day.

**Committee adjourned at 15:41**