

# State-by-State Language Support

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## Western Australia

Indigenous languages have recently been focused on in the WA Office of Multicultural Interests Languages Services Policy which seeks to ensure that translation services are provided by all government service providers.

Many Indigenous languages are taught in Western Australian schools and TAFE courses are being developed. The Morditj Noongar Community College, a primary school for Indigenous children which includes language and culture as a part of the standard curriculum, opened in Perth in 2001. Attendance rates are up amongst students who had been transferred from mainstream schools.

There are eight language centres across WA which work on a range of activities from developing material to be used in educational curricula to encouraging the maintenance and use of traditional songs, dances and ceremonies.

## South Australia

In South Australian schools in 2006 over 5000 students were involved in over 60 programs teaching one or more of nine Indigenous languages. In SA, support for Indigenous languages is embedded within whole-of-government strategies and statements, but there is currently no statewide, coordinated language policy. The University of Adelaide comprehensively addresses Kurna and Ngarrindjeri in the context of its broader linguistics focus, and the University of South Australia offers a two-week Pitjantjatjara Summer School.

Indigenous languages were formally introduced into the wider South Australian state school curriculum in the mid 1980s, although bilingual Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara programs had been inherited from mission schools on what are now the Pitjantjatjara-Yankunytjatjara Lands; these flourished until the early 1980s.

The South Australian Interpreting and Translating Centre provides interpreting services for Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara. In 2006 it took on the responsibility of addressing the shortage of skilled and culturally appropriate interpreters available to the health and justice systems.

## Queensland

Three strong languages are found in Queensland. These are the Wik languages associated with Arukun and the surrounding country, Tharore from Pormpuraaw and Kala Kawaw Ya (KKY) from the outer Western Islands of the Torres Strait.

In Queensland there have been many moves to develop Indigenous languages policies, but none have been accepted or implemented. Bi-lingual education programs in the Western Cape started in the 1970's but were shut down when Federal Government policy changed and funding was withdrawn in the 1980's.

Recently, the Queensland Studies Authority accepted a recommendation from the QLD Indigenous Education Consultative Body to look into developing an Indigenous Languages Other Than English (LOTE) Framework which supports and guides schools and the communities to negotiate, develop and implement an Indigenous language, appropriate to the local community, as an accredited LOTE subject.

Queensland is also one of the few states that does not fund or coordinate any interpreting or translating services in any Indigenous languages, Aboriginal Englishes or creoles. Despite the lack of framework and support from the Queensland government, various language programs in schools have developed with the support of their local communities, the involvement of regional Indigenous Language Centres and the Federation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Languages (FATSIL).

### New South Wales

"Before 1788, there were more than 70 Aboriginal languages that were spoken across New South Wales. Today, most Aboriginal languages in New South Wales do not have enough speakers to function properly and only ten languages are being significantly revitalised." (Aboriginal Languages Research and Resource Centre - ALRRC)

"All languages in NSW fall in the high risk of loss category without community intervention and help from language experts. Today, of the 70 plus NSW languages, there are only ten Aboriginal languages that are "healthy" enough to be taught in our schools. Only four have enough speakers to record the language and there is significant revitalisation and education activity in six other languages." ALRRC

The 2001 Census found that 0.7 percent of Indigenous people in NSW "speak an Aboriginal language at home" but did not specify which one.

NSW is currently the only state in Australia that has developed a comprehensive state-wide Indigenous languages policy. The policy was formally launched in July 2004. The strategy to implement the policy will be finalised and released publicly in late 2007.

The NSW Aboriginal Languages Research and Resource Centre opened in 2003. It provides one-off grants of up to \$25,000 to Aboriginal community organisations for language revitalisation work. Fourteen grants were given to organisations across NSW in 2006-2007.

There are around 21 community language revitalisation projects being funded by the ALRRC in NSW.

In 2004 the Aboriginal Curriculum Unit in the NSW Board of Studies developed an Aboriginal Languages K-10 Syllabus to coordinate and formalise support for Aboriginal Language programs in schools. Since then the ACU has been holding workshops with selected schools to incorporate the curriculum into the school program.

During 2006 there were 46 programs offered in 10 languages to 25 primary, 9 secondary and 3 central schools. Of these, 41 are state schools, 4 Catholic schools, 1 independent school. (source: The NSW Office of the Board of Studies)

& Department of Education and Training )

In an effort to improve retention rates and literacy amongst Indigenous students the NSW State Government announced in September this year (2007) that they will make it compulsory to teach Indigenous languages in schools with high Indigenous populations. They cited the improvement in retention and literacy amongst Indigenous students at Bourke High School since they started teaching Wangkumarra. (SMH 14 Sept )

Another key area for development in NSW will be developing language and culture programs for Indigenous inmates. To date this has not been looked at comprehensively.

Community Aboriginal language projects in NSW are also funded by the federal Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts (DCITA) through their Maintenance of Indigenous Languages and Records Program.

#### Other key organisations / References

NSW Aboriginal Languages Research and Resource Centre

NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group

Aboriginal Education and Training Directorate

NSW Department of Education and Training

NSW Department of Aboriginal Affairs

Department of Linguistics, University of Sydney

Dr. Nicholas Reid - Linguistics, University of New England, Armidale

Most of this information was sourced from the NSW Aboriginal Languages Research and Resource Centre web site

#### Northern Territory

The high percentage of Indigenous students in the NT education system, and the relatively high numbers of people who still speak their language(s) as well as English (40% speak a language other than English at home), means there is more focus in the NT on Indigenous education than many other states and territories. The interpreter services in the NT have interpreters for about 104 languages and dialects spoken across the Territory. Bilingual education, in various forms, has been run by the Northern Territory Education Department since 1973, although there are significantly fewer bilingual schools now than at times in the past. In 1999 the government announced the closure of the Bilingual Program, pointing to declining education (literacy and numeracy) standards in the NT's Indigenous population as proof of the failure of the program. However, due to the considerable opposition to the decision from communities with bilingual education programs, the program was not closed but underwent a name change and became known as the Two-Way Program.

At this time there were 21 schools (including one Catholic and one independent) with bilingual programs covering 18 languages and some of their dialects. There are currently half the number of bilingual programs across the NT than there were in 1999. Nominally, there are currently 10 programs across 9 schools in 6 different Indigenous languages. There are also 3 Catholic schools which have a bilingual curriculum. An NT Ministerial statement of August 2005, stated that they would "put Bilingual education back on the agenda", but little change has been evident on the ground.

In addition to the bilingual programs there are a number of schools offering part time language and culture programs. In Central Australia there are currently 23 part time language and culture programs. In the Katherine region there are 8 part time language and culture programs.

Senator Bob Collins' 1999 report, Learning Lessons - An independent review of Indigenous education in the Northern Territory, restated the importance of 'Two-way learning' provided that it is done where the community is properly consulted, involved, the aims of the program are clearly stated and the outcomes can be measured.

The Indigenous Languages and Culture in NT Schools Report 2004-2005 found that:

- There are no identified sources of federal funds for Indigenous language and culture programs for non-Indigenous students.
- (Federal) Australian Government funds available to schools as grants for Indigenous language and culture programs declined from \$385,000 in 2000 to \$300,000 in 2004.
- NT Department of Education Employment and Training does not have ongoing staff positions to support Indigenous language and culture programs (as opposed to Two-Way Schools which do have some system support).

The report called for an increased focus on Indigenous language and culture programs in NT schools, including the redevelopment of a policy relating to the teaching of Indigenous languages and an increase in funding to support these activities.

The NT Indigenous Education Strategic Plan 2005-2009, draws from the Learning Lessons report. In the 'Action Areas and Priorities' section, Indigenous language and culture programs are included under the banner of High Quality Learning and Teaching. Indigenous Language and Culture is included in the NT Curriculum Framework. It outlines outcomes and indicators for Maintenance, Revival and Reclamation Programs.

The Australian Indigenous Languages Policy (1998), endorsed by the NT board of Studies and referred to in the NT Curriculum Framework (NTCF) is currently under revision.

As the NTCF is also in a renewal phase, the timing of an updated policy and updated NTCF will be aligned - it is anticipated that any renewed documents would be endorsed through the NT Board of Studies .

Although Language and Culture is listed as a priority in the Indigenous Education Strategic Plan 2006-2009, the NT currently has no Territory-wide Languages (Indigenous or other languages) policy. There is little overall prioritisation of Indigenous languages at the Territory or Federal government level.

With the relatively strong language situation in the NT, there is room for a great deal more in the way of sustained, innovative, community-based and cross-departmental programs to support language maintenance, revival and revitalisation .

Sources:

NTCF - Indigenous Language and Culture component

NTCF intro including reference to the languages policy

The directions that the NT are taking are reflected in the Indigenous Language & Culture Report 2004-2005

DEET Indigenous Education Strategic Plan 2005-2009

Learning Lessons - An independent review of Indigenous education in the Northern Territory. NTD Department of Education 1999

Victoria

Prior to the European colonisation of the area that was to become Victoria, there were approximately 40 languages spoken and about 19 sub dialects.

There are relatively low levels of documentation of languages in Victoria, compared to other states; there is currently no statewide policy on Indigenous languages or a comprehensive approach to languages in Victorian state schools. There are however processes underway to change this situation.

The main driver for Indigenous languages in Victoria is the Victorian Aboriginal Corporation for Languages established in 1994. VACL currently runs five language programs across the state that cover 10 languages. They also work with the Central Gippsland TAFE to deliver a Certificate in Australian Indigenous Languages which focuses on giving students revival skills rather than teaching specific languages.

In March this year (2007) the Victorian Government contributed \$11,000 towards a two day workshop looking at developing a statewide Indigenous languages policy. A draft policy is being developed stemming from the workshop recommendations and following extensive consultations with Indigenous communities across Victoria and a reference group including representatives of relevant government departments. John Atkinson, VACL Chair, said that the policy &ldquo;aims to make Indigenous language education more accessible to the Aboriginal community&rdquo;.

Indigenous languages are underrepresented in the state and independent school sector. The Gunnai language and culture is central to the curriculum of the government funded Woolum Bellum campus of the Victorian College of Koorie Education in Morwell, where the majority of students are Koorie and mostly from Gunnai (Kurnai) families. Yorta Yorta is taught at the Worowa Independent Aboriginal College in Healsville, but students come from all over Australia. Apart from these two schools there has been little take up of Indigenous languages.

To overcome the general lack of involvement in the school sector the Victorian Curriculum Assessment Authority will coordinate a consultation process towards developing an Indigenous languages syllabus for Kindergarten to Year 10, based on the NSW K-10 syllabus structure.

For more information: <http://www.vaclang.org.au>

ACT and Tasmania are currently being researched and will be added soon.

If you have any additions or further information regarding language programs and policy please get in touch with us.