

Language and Culture -

A MATTER OF

SURVIVAL

*Report of the Inquiry into Aboriginal and
Torres Strait Islander Language Maintenance*

House of Representatives Standing Committee on
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs
June 1992

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The photograph on the front cover is of the Mosaic Pavement of granite and mortar commissioned in 1987 for the forecourt of the New Parliament House.

Artist: Michael Tjakamarra Nelson

William McIntosh with Aldo Rossi and Franco Cocussi fabrications

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TERMS OF REFERENCE

That the Committee inquire into and report on:

- the nature and extent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language loss
- the means by which remaining Aboriginal languages can be maintained and recorded
- the funding of Aboriginal language programs
- what work is already under way in Australia in both recording and maintenance of language.

MEMBERSHIP OF THE COMMITTEE (36th Parliament)

Chair	Mr Duncan Kerr, MP
Deputy	Dr Michael Wooldridge, MP
Members	Mr John Anderson, MP Mr Garrie Gibson, MP Mr Michael Lavarch, MP Mr Peter Nugent, MP Mr John Riggall, MP Mr Rod Sawford, MP Mr Les Scott, MP Hon Warren Snowdon, MP Mrs Elaine Darling, MP*
Secretary to the Committee	Mr Allan Kelly
Staff	Ms Wynne Allen Miss Sharyn Hourigan Ms Penne Humphries Mr Peter Ratas Miss Heather Getz (3-1-91 - 2-7-91)

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Chair	Mr Les Scott, MP Mr Garrie Gibson, MP Dr Michael Wooldridge, MP
Secretary to the Inquiry	Mr Allan Kelly
Inquiry Staff	Mr Peter Ratas

*Mrs Elaine Darling replaced Mr Sawford on 7 May 1992

ABBREVIATIONS

AACLAME	Australian Advisory Council on Languages and Multicultural Education
AECG	Aboriginal Education Consultative Group
AEP	National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy
AESIP	Aboriginal Education Strategic Initiatives Program
AIATSIS	Australian Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies
ALES	Aboriginal Languages Education Strategy
ALIP	Aboriginal Languages Initiatives Program
ALLP	Australian Language and Literacy Policy
ALS	Aboriginal Literacy Strategy
ASSPA	Aboriginal Student Support and Parent Awareness Program
ATSI	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
ATSIC	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission
BRACS	Broadcasting for Remote Aboriginal Communities Scheme
CAAMA	Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association
CALL	Centre for Australian Languages and Linguistics
CES	Commonwealth Employment Service
DEET	Department of Employment, Education and Training
DILGEA	Department of Immigration, Local Government and Ethnic Affairs
DSS	Department of Social Security
ESD	English as a second dialect
ESL	English as a second language

IAD	Institute for Aboriginal Development
LLP	Local Language Programs
LOTE	Languages other than English
NAATI	National Authority for the Accreditation of Translators and Interpreters
NALLS	National Aboriginal Language and Literacy Strategy
NALP	National Aboriginal Languages Program
NPL	National Policy on Languages
NLLC	National Language and Literacy Council
RALMCs	Regional Aboriginal Language Management Committees
RATE	Remote Area Teacher Education
SAE	Standard Australian English
SAL	School of Australian Linguistics
TAFE	Technical and Further Education
TATE	Traditional Aboriginal Teacher Education
TESD	Teaching English as a second dialect
TESL	Teaching English as a second language

GLOSSARY

Koori: The self descriptive term used by Aboriginal people in South Eastern Australia. Similarly the word Murri is used in North Eastern Australia. Many other words are used around Australia such as Anangu in Pitjantjatjara.

CONDUCT OF THE INQUIRY

Following a suggestion from the Deputy Chairman Dr M. Wooldridge M.P., the Committee requested the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, the Hon. R. Tickner, MP to refer to the committee an inquiry into Aboriginal Language Maintenance. In referring the inquiry on 22 May 1990, the Minister said 'that there had been a disturbing decline in the number of languages with only about 20 in a healthy state. The task of Aboriginal language maintenance is an urgent one and is important for this country that the languages and culture of the Aboriginal people be protected and retained'.

The committee advertised nationally on 16 June 1990 and sent out 700 letters inviting Aboriginal communities, teaching institutions, a wide range of other organisations, Commonwealth Ministers and State and Territory governments to make written submissions. Fifty six submissions were received, as listed at Appendix 1.

The Committee decided that the most effective method of assessing language loss, observing language maintenance programs and listening to Aboriginal people's wishes was to undertake a series of informal discussions and inspections. The Committee embarked upon an extensive program of visits, holding informal discussions with 62 organisations, as listed at Appendix 2 and held public hearings in Sydney, Canberra, Darwin, Brisbane, Melbourne, Perth, Alice Springs and Adelaide taking evidence from 47 witnesses. The committee took over 1200 pages of evidence.

The Committee thanks those who have made submissions to the inquiry, witnesses who gave evidence at hearings and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in communities who gave their time to have discussions with the Committee.

On 4 May 1992 the name of the committee was changed from the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs to the Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs. This gives clearer recognition to Torres Strait Islanders.

LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS

The committee recommends that:

Language Maintenance Objectives

1. The Commonwealth fund a language awareness campaign aimed at assisting all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities with living traditional languages, to draw attention to the dangers posed to languages, even strong languages. This campaign need not be resource intensive. It should be integrated into the proposed network of regional language committees and should be primarily directed at self-help. Communities should be assisted in identifying steps they can take to strengthen their language and where training and other assistance may be obtained. Funding should be in addition to that proposed for the regional language committee network. (paragraph 4.17)
2. The nature and importance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages should be highlighted in general public education activities conducted by Commonwealth, state and territory authorities concerning Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their culture particularly in areas where traditional language is still used. (paragraph 4.19)

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Media

3. The Commonwealth ensure that trainee BRACS operators are encouraged during training to make greater use of local languages in their programming. The program content should continue to be decided by the community. (paragraph 4.77)
4. The Commonwealth should review the existing resources available through BRACS so that greater use can be made of this facility. The ongoing training of operators and maintenance arrangements for BRACS should also be reviewed to maximise their effectiveness. (paragraph 4.77)

Interpreter Services

5. The Commonwealth undertake a campaign to ensure that communities and agencies are aware of the need to employ trained Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language interpreters where appropriate. (paragraph 4.96)

6. Agencies reliant on Commonwealth funding be funded for the employment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language interpreters where appropriate. (paragraph 4.96)
7. Government agencies use interpreters when talking to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities where Standard Australian English is not the vernacular. (paragraph 4.96)
8. Government agencies use translators where appropriate to ensure information they send to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities is delivered effectively. (paragraph 4.96)
9. Government agencies pay a skill loading to staff, other than interpreters, who have interpreter training and who may be called upon to interpret in their normal work. (paragraph 4.96)
10. The Commonwealth establish under ATSIC a separate national interpreter service for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages to ensure that people have reliable access to trained interpreters and translators. The service should be separately funded. Because of the number and geographic distribution of language speakers, a network service utilising existing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language resources where possible, would be most appropriate. (paragraph 4.96)
11. In implementing recommendation 99 of the Report of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody a stronger obligation be imposed on courts to establish a person's fluency in Standard Australian English in determining the need for an interpreter. This would include translating Aboriginal English where required. (paragraph 4.96)

Teacher Training

12. The Minister for Higher Education and Employment Services in co-operation with the relevant state and territory ministers and teacher training institutions ensure that:
 - all teachers are adequately prepared by pre-service training to appreciate the special needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. This should include a general background in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, the history of ATSI people and their place in modern Australian society. This preparation should ensure that future teachers are trained to function sensitively and knowledgeably in cross-cultural situations and are aware of the socio linguistic differences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students including these speaking Aboriginal English. (paragraph 5.14)

13. more specialised training is provided to teachers before they are posted to more traditional communities. This should be followed up with in-service training to provide further specialist skills development while working in communities and other remote schools. (paragraph 5.14)
14. teachers in remote community schools where the vernacular is other than English should have prior training in teaching English as a second language. Where teachers with specialist training in English as a second language are not available, departments should develop and implement appropriate in-service training. In-service training is needed for teaching assistants as well. (paragraph 5.14)
15. The Minister for Higher Education and Employment Services in cooperation with the relevant state and territory ministers and tertiary institutions ensure that tertiary institutions provide more suitable programs for students from remote or traditional communities, either through support for students while residing in urban areas or the provision of external studies. (paragraph 5.27)

Training of Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander Teachers

16. The Minister for Higher Education and Employment Services ensure that adequate resources are made available to training institutions providing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander remote area teacher education to meet the growing demand for such training and to ensure the maintenance of accreditation standards. (paragraph 5.31)

Linguistic Training

17. The Minister for Higher Education and Employment Services in co-operation with the relevant state and territory ministers and teacher training institutions ensure that:
 - the availability of language teacher and linguistics training to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people be substantially increased. (paragraph 5.43)
18. additional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander training bodies, particularly those with experience in providing remote area teacher training programs, be encouraged to offer on-site language teacher and linguistic training. (paragraph 5.43)
19. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language training institutions should also provide interpreter training. (paragraph 5.43)

20. language teacher, linguistics and interpreter training should be undertaken in co-ordination with prospective employers to ensure graduates will be employed. (paragraph 5.43)
21. The Minister for Immigration, Local Government and Ethnic Affairs ensure that NAATI accreditation procedures for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language interpreters and translators are reviewed to better recognise demonstrated experience and not necessarily require tertiary qualifications as a pre-requisite. (paragraph 5.44)

Adelaide Conference

22. The Commonwealth formally endorse the structure for the delivery of the Aboriginal Languages Initiatives Program endorsed by the December 1991 Adelaide conference of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language organisations. (paragraph 6.42)
23. The Regional Aboriginal Language Management Committees and Centres be recognised as key reference points on indigenous language matters by schools, by institutions providing language worker and translator training and by Commonwealth, state and territory governments. (paragraph 6.42)
24. The Minister for Employment, Education and Training ensure that an external review of the Australian Language Initiatives Program is conducted at the end of 1994 which should include the adequacy of funding. (paragraph 6.42)

ALES and ALS

25. The Commonwealth ensure that funds allocated under the Aboriginal Languages Education Strategy and the Aboriginal Literacy Strategy are used appropriately by the state and territory governments and not used to replace existing mainstream program funds. (paragraph 6.47)
26. The Minister for Employment, Education and Training in co-operation with the relevant state and territory ministers ensure that English as a Second Language funding is distributed equitably to all children of non-English speaking background including those in remote community schools. (paragraph 6.50)

School based language education

27. The Minister for Employment, Education and Training in cooperation with the relevant state and territory ministers

ensure that bilingual or bicultural education be provided to all Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander children whose first language is other than English if sought by the relevant community and if there is a sufficient number of speakers to support a program. (paragraph 6.53)
28. ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language communities serviced by a school determine which model of language teaching is appropriate for their school. (paragraph 6.53)
29. ensure that bilingual education is clearly based on the maintenance model rather than the transfer-to-English model. (paragraph 6.53)
30. The Minister for Employment, Education and Training encourage state and territory governments together with unions and ATSI representatives to develop an appropriate pay scale for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language speakers employed as such, to reflect the special skills they possess. (paragraph 6.58)
31. The Minister for Employment, Education and Training in consultation with the states and territories commission the preparation of curriculum material for the teaching of English as a second dialect. This should be funded separately from the Aboriginal Literacy Strategy. (paragraph 6.61)
32. The Commonwealth fund an institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages within a university. The institute should have a predominantly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander board of management. (paragraph 6.65)
33. In the ongoing monitoring of state and territory strategic plans under AEP, the Commonwealth, in consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education organisations, ensure the effective implementation of Goals 1 and 17. (paragraph 6.70)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This inquiry was undertaken because of widespread concern over language loss amongst Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) people. Before European settlement of Australia there were approximately 250 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages. These were quite distinct languages which between them included about 600 dialects.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages have been poorly understood by non-Aboriginal people over the last 200 years and a number of misconceptions about them persist. In keeping with early colonial attitudes Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages were regarded as primitive and action was taken to eradicate them.

Contrary to popular misconceptions these languages had complex grammars, rich vocabularies and subtle ways of describing the world around them - a world in which they had lived for tens of thousands of years. Most indigenous language speakers at the time were multilingual.

These languages are also a means of group identification and contain embedded within them much of the culture, social values and world view of the language group. Each language probably had a vocabulary of at least 10,000 words, which is about the size of the receptive vocabulary of the average citizen in any country today.

Only about one tenth of the original languages survive today in a relatively healthy state. About a third of the original languages continue to be spoken but are under considerable threat, often being spoken by only a handful of elderly speakers.

Much of the language loss that has occurred is irretrievable. However, language maintenance activities can do much to maintain strong language and assist weakened languages. As it is not possible to revive dead languages it is necessary to assist languages before they reach a severely threatened state. The committee acknowledges that many severely weakened languages do not have good prospects for survival as a comprehensive living language.

The importance of a language to its speakers and descendants is much more significant than the linguistic aspects alone. Language goes to the very core of a person's identity and this inquiry has sought to cover the wider language needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, including those whose language has been partially lost.

Language Loss

The loss of language that occurred soon after European settlement was largely due to the reduction in speaker populations from the ravages of introduced diseases, to displacement and in some instances to massacres. The healthiest Aboriginal languages today are those in areas least settled by Europeans or where settlement has occurred comparatively recently.

Fragmentation of language groups and forced relocation into mixed language groups did considerable damage to these languages by limiting the opportunities for their use.

On missions and government run settlements the use of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages was frequently banned and in most cases discouraged. Children were severely affected where they were separated from parents at an early age and placed in boys or girls dormitories and the use of their language prohibited. The most crucial factor in language loss is the failure in the language link from parents to children.

At some stage a language loses its "critical mass" as a language. It ceases to be the main vehicle of communication. In the final stages of loss, only a handful of elderly speakers remain and the language as a fully spoken living language will die with these people.

Aboriginal English

There are a range of dialects of English known collectively as Aboriginal English. Aboriginal English is regarded by linguists as a valid rule-governed language capable of expressing the wide range of human experience. The failure to recognise it as a separate dialect leads to several problems. Many teachers still treat Aboriginal English as an uneducated or corrupted form of Standard Australian English. Children learn best when the school makes use of their language development prior to school.

While Aboriginal English and Standard Australian English are usually mutually intelligible there are major differences in vocabulary, grammar, meaning, sounding system, gesturing and sociocultural context.

The committee believes that the failure by schools and teachers to identify, accept and take into account the separate features of Aboriginal English is a major factor in Aboriginal children's poor performance in school. In other situations, such as courts or hospitals, the failure to identify and comprehend Aboriginal English significantly limits the effectiveness of those institutions.

What Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People want

The committee spoke with as many ATSI people as possible during this inquiry and heard about the state of their language, what it means to them and what they wanted to happen in language matters. Many expressed their deep concern at the loss which had already occurred in their language and the further loss that was likely. At various levels they wished to maintain, revive or retrieve as much as possible of their language.

A wide variety of needs and approaches were outlined by various groups, but most groups saw Aboriginal control of programs involving their language as essential, including school based programs.

Most groups sought external financial or resource assistance for language work. Professional linguistic assistance was sought as was language training for community members and language recording equipment. Help was also sought to find ways of stimulating language use among children and young adults.

Virtually all ATSI people wanted their children to gain a high level of competence in Standard Australian English. This was widely seen as empowering ATSI people within the wider Australian community and making them less dependent on the wider community. However, communities did not want proficiency in English to be at the expense of the community language or culture.

The committee believes that a flexible approach is required in supporting language maintenance with individual communities determining their own priorities.

Language maintenance activities

There are a number of objectives in language maintenance. These include increasing language awareness by drawing attention to its fragility, maximising its use amongst community members, increasing pride in language and culture and reducing unnecessary pressures that are destructive of language.

Language maintenance also involves the recording of languages and developing dictionaries and grammars. Recording needs to be done in such a way that the language can be subsequently transmitted. Many languages have been lost and there is an urgent need to record remaining languages.

The committee recommends that a language awareness campaign be directed to all Aboriginal communities with living traditional languages, to draw attention to the dangers posed to languages, even strong languages. This campaign should utilise the extended network of regional language centres and should be primarily directed at self-help. It should suggest steps that communities can take to strengthen their language and explain where training and other assistance may be obtained.

The lack of understanding in the wider community about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages places unnecessary barriers in the way of the use and maintenance of these languages.

Community based programs

Community based programs are nearly always under the control of the community and are adapted to the needs and priorities of the particular community.

Regional language centres service a number of language communities and are community controlled with representatives of their various language groups being on the management committee. Much of the work of regional language centres is in supporting community based programs. This can be in the form of access to a linguist, assistance in designing community programs, use of the centre and its resources, assistance with preparation of material for printing and publishing.

The value of regional language centres has been recognised by Aboriginal communities and a number of centres have now been successfully established. They are seen as countering the influence of other institutions which promote the English language, often incidentally to their main purpose.

The committee believes that the valuable role played by these centres should continue and that further centres should be established to service other language speaking regions. These regional language centres and community programs need to be adequately funded.

Interpreter services

Interpreter services are necessary for a variety of fairly obvious reasons. They are an essential part of language maintenance if traditional languages are not to be obliterated by the dominant language. Unfortunately there is an almost complete lack of ATSI interpreter services available.

There are many situations where Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people can be disadvantaged or harmed through being misunderstood. Interpreting requires skills over and above being fluent in the two languages involved and trained interpreters should be used wherever possible. In hospitals and court cases, for example, a trained interpreter is essential.

The committee makes a number of recommendations to improve the provision of interpreter services for ATSI languages. It also recommends that,

The Commonwealth establish under ATSIIC a separate national interpreter service for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages to ensure that people have reliable access to trained interpreters and translators.

The committee also recommends that a stronger obligation be imposed on courts to establish a person's fluency in Standard Australian English in determining the need for an interpreter. This would include translating Aboriginal English where required.

Teacher Training

Several aspects of general teacher training continue to have an adverse impact on the education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and the maintenance of their first language. ATSI communication and social interaction styles are usually not comprehended by teachers without appropriate training and consequently such teachers cannot be effective in teaching ATSI students.

While many schools now offer suitable language programs, some children coming to school with an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander language are still being taught only in English. Children are rejected by this lack of acceptance of their language and because some teachers still denigrate ATSI language whether it is a traditional language, a creole or Aboriginal English.

The committee believes these inadequacies have a disproportionately large negative effect on both the attitudes of ATSI students and their parents to schooling and on the students subsequent success in gaining adequate Western skills through education. Nonetheless the committee believes basic teacher training should adequately prepare teachers for the range of students they are likely to teach.

School based programs

Schools have a very large impact on language and in the past this has been a quite destructive one. It is important that they play a constructive role in language maintenance wherever possible. A major way in which schools have been involved in language maintenance has been through bilingual education.

There are sound educational reasons for establishing literacy in the child's first language before developing literacy in English. However, bilingual education in practice has sometimes been criticised as a transfer-to-English program. Bilingual education is still conducted largely in a non-Aboriginal way by largely non-Aboriginal teachers with speakers as teaching assistants. It is important that schools maintain a child's first language and not supplant it.

In two way schooling ATSI culture has at least equal status with white culture and language. ATSI matters are taught by ATSI teachers in an ATSI way usually in a separate domain from the white education part of the school. The committee supports the provision of two-way schooling at a school where this is sought by the relevant Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander community.

All states and territories have agreed to introduce Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander studies units into their curriculum to promote information and knowledge about ATSI cultures and languages. The committee was told about several successful programs along these lines which have had a disproportionately positive effect on Aboriginal students and their relations with non-Aboriginal students.

Most teachers do not recognise Aboriginal English as a separate dialect nor have they been trained to teach English as a second dialect. Those teachers are also unlikely to understand the socio-linguistic aspects of Aboriginal English and will be less likely to communicate effectively with such speakers. The committee believes these deficiencies have a disproportionately large adverse influence on the school education of those children with Aboriginal English as their only language.

In recent years there has been growing pressure for all students to learn a language other than English (LOTE) before leaving school. These changes emphasise the neglect of ATSI languages within schools and in the wider community. During the course of the inquiry no ATSI language had a curriculum to year 12 level. In fact it was extremely rare to find an ATSI language offered at high school. The committee finds it intolerable that while most migrant children with a first language other than English have been able to study that language up to matriculation level, ATSI children cannot study their language at high school.

A range of language and cultural activities have resulted from funding under the Aboriginal Student Support and Parent Awareness Program. ASSPA is a Commonwealth program which provides funding to school-based parent committees for a range of activities designed to increase school participation and attendance by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. At the same time the program seeks to develop the responsiveness of schools to the educational needs and aspirations of ATSI students. The success of many of these committees has been in bringing the ATSI community and the school together, providing them with real decision making powers and building a better mutual understanding.

Despite a number of improvements in the delivery of education services to ATSI students, education outcomes continue to fall well below the average for all students. School attendance levels and the number of years schooling completed, remain unacceptably low. Competencies gained in the 3Rs are inadequate to ensure the degree of independence within the wider Australian society sought by ATSI students and their parents.

The committee believes that the provision of a basic education is an essential human right that should be available to all children and young people in Australia. As a further human right, education should be available to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in a way which reinforces rather than suppresses or contradicts their unique cultural identity. This includes an understanding and respect for their home language.

The committee recommends that:

all teachers are adequately prepared by pre-service training to appreciate the special needs of ATSI students. This should include a general background in ATSI culture, the history of ATSI people and their place in modern Australian society. This preparation should ensure that future teachers are trained to function sensitively and knowledgeably in cross-cultural situations and are aware of the socio-linguistic differences of ATSI students including those speaking Aboriginal English;

more specialised training is provided to teachers before they are posted to more traditional communities. This should be followed up with in service training;

teachers in remote community schools where the vernacular is other than English should have prior training in teaching in English as a second language.

Training of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers

A school's support for language depends on relationships with the community, the teachers understanding and respect for the language and the rapport between teachers and children. These are generally going to be strongest with ATSI teachers.

Where appropriate, teachers should be fully fluent in the traditional language of the community. Such teachers are almost invariably Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. However, the number of ATSI teachers in community schools is much less than the number of non-ATSI teachers with the proportion of ATSI teachers in other schools being even lower.

Considerable efforts have been made by governments to increase the number of ATSI teachers but the poor schooling received by most ATSI students means that most do not leave school with tertiary entry qualifications. However, from a very low base the number of ATSI students gaining tertiary entry has been climbing steeply. The number of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders graduating as teachers is also increasing but is still well short of meeting the demand. ATSI people gaining a degree often have available to them more attractive employment options than teaching.

If the number of teachers fluent in a traditional language is to be increased then remote area teaching programs are the most likely providers of those teachers. Graduates of these programs are far more likely to stay and teach in their own community and are less likely to experience the high attrition rates for ATSI teachers elsewhere.

The committee recommends that adequate resources are made available to training institutions providing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander remote area teacher education so that the growing demand for such training can be met and accreditation standards maintained.

There is often a localised shortage of ATSI linguists and a heavy reliance on non-Aboriginal linguists. While there is a strong demand for linguistic training by ATSI people there is a sad lack of accessible training courses for ATSI people in the fields of linguistic analysis, language teaching, media and interpreting skills, despite the fact that such training is essential for ATSI control and participation in language maintenance activities.

The committee recommends that the availability of language teacher and linguistics training to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people be substantially increased.

History of policy and programs

From 1788 until the 1970s government policies are characterised as applying harsh assimilatory pressure in which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language and identity were largely denigrated and repressed. The beginning of recognition and support for some ATSI languages occurred in the 1970s through bilingual education and other institutions. The 1980s are characterised by a resurgence in ATSI language and awareness and the beginning of government sponsored language maintenance efforts in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Following the introduction of bilingual education in the 1970s a series of reports dealing with ATSI languages were prepared during the 1980s. These included a Senate committee report on *A National Language Policy* in 1984 and the Government's response, the *National Policy on Languages* in 1987. A House of Representatives Select Committee on Aboriginal Education in 1985 dealt with language issues within education. The Aboriginal Education Policy Task Force reported in 1988 and was followed by Commonwealth, state and territory agreement on the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy (AEP) in 1989.

A National Aboriginal Languages Program was established in 1987 under the National Policy on Languages. Following a Green Paper the Commonwealth released a White Paper in September 1991 on *Australia's Language* containing an Australian Language and Literacy Policy.

While the National Aboriginal Language Program (NALP) was criticised for some shortcomings it did begin to redress the serious neglect of ATSI languages and gave a large degree of control to ATSI people. Regional ATSI language centres grew and played a significant role in the program as well as direct assistance being given to many community based programs. A review of the program in 1989 found that the educational, linguistic and cultural potential of the program was enormous. The review also found DEET management of the program had an overly educational

orientation, lacked clarity in program goals, and provided little co-ordination between projects.

The committee is critical of DEET's limited outlook and management of the NALP program. Attempts by DEET to transfer NALP functions into an education program, the AEP, were totally inappropriate. An attempt was also made through the Green Paper to limit language maintenance activities to 20 languages claimed to be the only ones where language was being actively transmitted to children. This ignored the broader language service needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Fortunately this extremely restrictive view did not reappear in the White Paper.

The Aboriginal Languages Initiatives Program announced in the White Paper supports a national network of Regional Aboriginal Language Committees extending the present number of centres and increasing the level of funding. A conference of ATSI language organisations in December 1991 agreed to a structure for the network. The committee believes that structure should be endorsed by the Commonwealth and that state and territory governments should contribute more to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language maintenance.



CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Before European settlement of Australia there were approximately 250 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages. These were quite distinct languages which between them included about 600 dialects. Contrary to popular misconceptions these languages had complex grammars, rich vocabularies and subtle ways of describing the world around them - a world in which they had lived for tens of thousands of years.

1.2 Most Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders¹ at that time were multilingual and today this is still a common feature amongst strong ATSI language speakers. Individuals could speak the language of their mother, father and spouse which were frequently different. They often learnt the languages of other groups with whom they had contact.

1.3 People identified themselves by their language group as well as the geographic area they came from such that language provided a group and individual identity. Having an oral tradition, language served as the carrier of culture, law and history as well as day to day communication. It embodied the world view of its speakers.

1.4 A number of these languages still exist today and continue to serve many of the same purposes. However the changes wrought by European settlement have led to the diminished use of many of the languages and the loss or near extinction of many others. Of the estimated 250 or so languages that existed 200 years ago only a small number, about 1 in 10, survive in a relatively healthy state. Approximately one third of the 250 languages continue to be spoken by some people, but are under considerable threat. Of these a number are spoken only by a handful of older speakers and these languages are likely to die with them.

1.5 A healthy language is a living language which is used in every aspect of daily communication. It is passed automatically from parents to children and is spoken among and between all age groups. It does not require interpolation with another language for expression. Dr Annette Schmidt identifies two additional recurrent features of a healthy ATSI language as; a sizeable number of speakers

¹ The abbreviation ATSI is sometimes used in the report to refer to both Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders.

with 200 speakers being a bare minimum, and a strong language pride and awareness amongst both young and older generations.²

1.6 A healthy language is not necessarily a static language and some degree of change and development is normal. However the changes that have occurred to most Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages have involved the loss of all or most of the features of a living language. The committee notes that in some circumstances the slide of a language from being healthy to extinct can take as little as one generation.

1.7 This inquiry was undertaken because of the widespread concern over language loss amongst Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Language loss is difficult to regain and most of the losses that have occurred are irretrievable. Awareness of language loss has increased markedly in the last decade spurred on by the rapidly dwindling number of language speakers of some language groups.

1.8 In response to the threats posed to language a number of language projects have been undertaken to arrest the decline. This inquiry has looked at the extent of loss of language and language maintenance programs and the provision and resourcing of such programs. Early in this inquiry the committee had the benefit of receiving the results of an extensive survey of the extent of loss of Aboriginal languages. The report, *The Loss of Australia's Aboriginal Language Heritage* by Dr Annette Schmidt³, provides a detailed and contemporary account of language loss and the state of health of the remaining languages. While Dr Schmidt's survey was quite comprehensive, the figures for language and speaker numbers are rough estimates based on the data available⁴. These figures are useful for indicative purposes, subject to further information becoming available, and should not be used alone for determining program delivery (as occurred in the Green Paper - see Chapter 6). With this information available the committee undertook a series of consultations with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and particularly those actively involved in language issues. The committee also took evidence from federal, state and territory governments and other organisations involved in language and education.

Definition of Language Maintenance

1.9 The inquiry was advertised nationally and letters sent to a large number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations. While the inquiry's title and terms of reference are about language maintenance, there is some

² A Schmidt, *The Loss of Australia's Aboriginal Language Heritage*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 1990, p.2.

³ Schmidt 1990.

⁴ Schmidt, 1990, p.26.

divergence of opinion as to what this entails. Most linguists hold that only a healthy language is capable of being maintained. Consequently, language maintenance is an activity confined to those languages that are considered healthy. While this may be correct from a linguist's point of view other important issues such as the social, cultural, and educational value of a weakened language need to be taken into account. The committee has taken a broader view of language maintenance activities to include the appropriate promotion, development, recording and retrieval of language. This approach was also taken by most of the people with whom the committee met. The importance of a language to the descendants of its speakers is much broader and more significant than just the linguistic aspects alone. Language goes to the very core of a person's identity and this inquiry has sought to cover the wider language needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, including those whose language has been partially lost.

1.10 The National Policy on Languages in 1986 acknowledged the all-encompassing nature of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages:

In societies with oral language traditions the languages provide an irreplaceable repository of experience, history, mythology, spiritual belief, law and socio-cultural organisation and values. This derives from the very nature of language itself, the major mediator between experience and thought and culture. The Aboriginal interpretation of Australia - its landscape, environment and the experiences of its inhabitants - is among the most ancient of any in the world. Being unique to this continent these languages are an important and irreplaceable source of self-knowledge for Australia and of inestimable value to Aborigines and their prospects of cultural survival⁵.

1.11 The significance and value of partially lost languages is still very high to those belonging to those language groups. It is inappropriate to further disadvantage those whose language has been weakened or partially lost, often through external pressures, by not providing support to that language. Nonetheless the committee acknowledges that many severely weakened languages do not have good prospects for survival as a comprehensive living language. There is a strength and self-perpetuating capacity that living languages enjoy which once lost cannot be fully revived.

⁵ J Lo Bianco *National Policy on Languages*, AGPS, Canberra, 1987, p10.

CHAPTER 2

NATURE AND EXTENT OF LANGUAGE LOSS

Nature and extent of language before European settlement

2.1 As outlined in Chapter 1 there were approximately 250 distinct languages when European colonisation of Australia began just over 200 years ago. These languages each had their own range of dialects which probably totalled about 600. Professor R.M.W. Dixon estimates the number of speakers per language ranging from a few hundred to a few thousand speakers¹. Estimates of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population at the time vary but it is likely to have been more than 300,000. All of the population would have spoken at least one of the indigenous Australian languages. In the 1986 Census 227,645 people identified themselves as being of ATSI descent (206,104 Aboriginal and 21,541 Torres Strait Islanders) making up 1.5% of the Australian population. However, Dr Schmidt in her report estimated that only 10% of all ATSI people now speak an indigenous language. The Census identified 18.4% as speaking an ATSI language at home (6.4% in urban areas and 42.1 in rural areas) but this probably includes creoles and may be overstated for reasons discussed in Paragraph 2.16. At the same time it is believed that the Census undercounts ATSI people in isolated communities where traditional language is strongest².

2.2 The original language groups were small nations with their own culture, language, kinship rules and traditional boundaries. While dealings with nearby or related language groups were common as was intermarriage and resultant multilingualism these small groups were solely responsible for the maintenance of their particular language and culture.

2.3 The dependence on an oral heritage together with the small number of speakers of some languages meant that these languages and cultures were very vulnerable to the various influences wrought by European settlement. Unlike minority immigrant languages Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages do not have a large overseas pool of language speakers or literature to draw on when a decline in language threatens its continuance. Dr Schmidt observes that on an international level what are considered to be small minority languages tend to be numbered in tens of thousands of speakers.³ Dr Schmidt estimates that the four

¹ R.M.W. Dixon, *The Language of Australia*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1980, p.18.

² Evidence, p. 248-9.

³ Schmidt, 1990, p. 8.

largest surviving traditional language groups in Australia have between three and four thousand speakers and only six other languages have 1000 or more speakers⁴. In addition, there are two creoles each with around 15,000 speakers⁵.

2.4 For each Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language group, language was much more than a means of day-to-day communication. As with all other languages it is a means of group identification and contained embedded within it much of the culture, social values and world view of the language group. Adding to the crucial importance of ATSI language is the reliance on an oral heritage. Each language is a conduit of the group heritage which in many cases goes back thousands of years and conveys the history, culture and experience of the group. Stories and songs explain the origin of landforms, animals and plants, their special features and their uses. Rituals, law, social mores and technology are conveyed through, and are part of, the language. Similarly, their world view is embedded in the language that conveys it. This global view sees an individual, society, the land and nature as part of an integrated entity. The language that a person thinks in is an essential and distinctive part of that person.

2.5 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages are an important part of Australia's cultural heritage. Their unique linguistic features are also significant in terms of world heritage. These languages are characterised by subtle and intricate grammars.⁶ Each language probably had a vocabulary of at least 10,000 words, which is about the size of the receptive vocabulary of the average citizen in any country today.⁷ Many languages have ancillary vocabularies for special relational speech styles. Special styles and vocabularies may be used amongst initiated men. An avoidance style including its own vocabulary is used in many languages when in the presence of someone with whom minimal contact is required by kinship rules, eg. between a man and his mother-in-law.⁸ Kinship rules are quite elaborate and specific and govern a number of aspects of life such as marriageability. The terminology for these complex rules is embedded in language:

The Aboriginal relationship system is extremely complicated. In the Yolngu system, for example, there are literally dozens of kinship terms each bearing certain responsibilities and even certain feelings that go with that relation. Everyone in the Aboriginal world is related. Everyone fits irreplaceably into a complex circular system which

⁴ Schmidt, 1990, p.4-5.

⁵ Schmidt, 1990, p. 4 and 8.

⁶ Dixon, 1980, p. 1

⁷ Dixon, 1980, p. 2

⁸ Dixon, 1980, pp. 58-60.

accurately reflects the timelessness of their world views.⁹

2.6 Kinship rules often require, and usually permit, marriage between speakers of different languages or dialects. Consequently people learnt the language of their mother, father and spouse where these are different. In the past most Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were multilingual and many still are today.

Misconceptions about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages

2.7 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages have been poorly understood by non-ATSI people over the last 200 years. Few took the trouble to learn them or understand their nature. Instead ATSI people's tradition of multilingualism saw them learn European languages (overwhelmingly English). Although the ATSI tradition of multilingualism may have made it easier to learn English, colonial domination undoubtedly was a major factor. This lack of knowledge about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages together with other attitudes of the colonisers resulted in a number of misconceptions; some of which still have currency.

2.8 European settlers assessed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander technology and material goods as primitive. As a consequence they assumed that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language and culture must also be inferior. They did not comprehend the multiplicity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nations and ATSI people's complex social and intellectual developments. This prejudice, born out of an ignorance of the languages and culture that existed, led to persistent efforts to eradicate ATSI cultures and languages.

2.9 The Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody observed:

Every turn in the policy of government and the practice of the non-ATSI community was postulated on the inferiority of the Aboriginal people; the original expropriation of their land was based on the idea that the land was not occupied and the people uncivilised; the protection policy was based on the view that Aboriginal people could not achieve a place in the non-ATSI society and that they must be protected against themselves while the race died out; the assimilationist policy assumed that their culture and way of life is without value and that we confer a favour on them by assimilating them into our ways; even to the point of taking their children and removing them from family.¹⁰

⁹ M Christie "The Aboriginal World View: A White Person's Ideas" in *The Aboriginal Child at School*, Vol 12, No. 1, Feb-Mar 1984, p. 4.

¹⁰ Royal Commission Overview Report, 1.4.8.

The Royal Commission concluded:

The damage to Aboriginal society was devastating. In some places, it totally destroyed population. In others, dependency, despair, alcohol, total loss of heart wrought decimation of culture.¹¹

2.10 The pidgin English sometimes used was mistakenly viewed as an ATSI language and dismissed as primitive. Alternatively, it was viewed as an incapacity to learn English properly. Professor Dixon places this in perspective by noting:

Aboriginal Australians were eager and able to learn normal English, if they were exposed to it. But they were often not addressed in the standard dialect. The pioneer missionary E.R.B Gribble described a typical situation around 1900: 'in the early days of our work pidgin English was used by us all, and a beastly gibberish it was. As time passed, I determined that it should cease, and good English be used; and, strange to say, the people seemed to find it easier to avoid than did the staff, who had got so accustomed to its use that they found it extremely difficult to avoid addressing in pidgin English every black they met.' It was because they were spoken to in this way, that Aboriginal Australians initially adopted a poor type of pidgin English. As T.G.H. Strehlow put it, with typical directness: 'Northern Territory pidgin English is not English perverted and mangled by the natives; it is English perverted and mangled by ignorant whites, who have in turn taught this ridiculous gibberish to the natives and who then affect to be amused by the childish babbling of these "savages"'.¹²

2.11 The poor assessment of indigenous languages by Europeans was not uncommon at the time. Harris and Sandefur report:

With the great colonial expansion and the accompanying linguistic imperialism, many new languages were encountered and the accusation of inadequacy now fell upon these so-called 'primitive' languages of illiterate cultures. Linguistic research eventually showed the accusation of inadequacy to be false.¹³

When unbiased observers began to look at the so-called 'primitive' languages, however, they often met with intricacies of grammatical organisation that were not found in the languages familiar to them. Thus, the notion that there were

¹¹ Royal Commission Overview Report, 1.4.7.

¹² Dixon 1980, p. 71.

¹³ J Harris and J Sandefur, "The Creole Language Debate and the use of Creoles in Australian Schools", in *The Aboriginal Child at School*, Vol 12, No. 1, Feb-Mar 1984, p. 9.

developed and underdeveloped languages began to make way, in the late 19th century, to the now generally accepted view that all human languages are of comparable grammatical complexity and that the many surface dissimilarities found in the languages of the world are all manifestations of a deeper universal 'human language capacity'.¹⁴

Indications of language loss

2.12 The features of a healthy language were identified in Paragraphs 1.5-1.6. Indications of a weakening language are:

- a number of members of a language group speaking another language within the group.
- failure in the traditional link of language transmission from parents to children. In these situations children do not fully learn and use their parents language and use another language to fill in the gaps in their language knowledge or use another language altogether.

2.13 At some stage a language loses its "critical mass" as a language. It ceases to be the main vehicle of communication. With the further weakening of a language it has limited social function, it tends to be spoken only by older people and the opportunities for its use diminish. Younger people cease to speak the language apart from a few words and phrases. At this stage the language is in steep decline. Its continued loss in value and utility within the community speeds its demise.

2.14 In the final stages of loss only a handful of elderly speakers remain and, unless a large scale language reversal were to occur, the language as a spoken living language will die with these people. Some linguists regard such large scale reversals as highly unlikely.

2.15 A dead, or extinct, language is one with no living speakers remaining. Dictionaries, word lists, some spoken words and phrases may survive but it is virtually impossible for the language to ever again become a living means of full everyday communication. Remaining words and phrases, however few, may still retain considerable significance to those whose ancestral language they come from. They provide some group identification, spiritual meaning, and a link with the past culture.

¹⁴ P Muhlhausler, "Remarks on the pidgin and creole situation in Australia", *quoted in Harris & Sandefur, 1984, P. 9.*

2.16 It is perhaps the importance of remaining fragments of language to their owners that results in some people saying they speak language when in fact they are unable to construct sentences or only speak with minimal fluency. Professor Dixon points out that a speaker of a language must "have a full command of its phonetics, grammar and vocabulary, and an ability to understand recordings of stories in that language." Recent research in the Barkly region of the Northern Territory found self-reporting to be more accurate with people saying they speak "a bit" or "half and half" when they lack fluency¹⁵. However, those who say they speak the language do so fluently with very few exceptions.

2.17 There are four types of loss of traditional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages:

- replacement by English
- replacement by Aboriginal English
- replacement by another traditional language
- replacement by a creole

The losing process

2.18 Languages can be lost in many ways. Some were lost quickly while most were lost slowly over several generations until only a few old people still speak the language. The language is very likely to then die with these few speakers.

2.19 Some extracts from the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody give a brief history of the effects of European settlement on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander life, culture and language:

That Aboriginal people were dispossessed of their land without benefit of treaty, agreement or compensation is generally known. But I think little known is the amount of brutality and bloodshed that was involved in enforcing on the ground what was pronounced by the law. Aboriginal people were deprived of their land and if they showed resistance they were summarily dealt with. The loss of land meant the destruction of the Aboriginal economy which everywhere was based upon hunting and foraging. And the land use adopted by the settlers drastically reduced the population of animals to be hunted and plants to be foraged. And the loss of the land threatened the Aboriginal culture which all over Australia was based upon land and relationship to the land. These were the most dramatic effects of European colonisation supplemented by the decimating effects of introduced diseases to which the Aboriginal people had no resistance. These matters are understood to a very imperfect degree by non-ATSI society

...

¹⁵ Mr R. Hoogenraad, unpublished

Having reduced the original inhabitants to a condition, in many places of abject dependency the colonial governments decided upon a policy of protection which had two main thrusts: Aboriginal people were swept up into reserves and missions where they were supervised as to every detail of their lives and there was a deliberate policy of undermining and destroying their spiritual and cultural beliefs. The other aspect of that policy as it developed was that Aboriginal children of mixed race descent - usually Aboriginal mother and non-ATSI father - were removed from their family and the land, placed in institutions and trained to grow up as good European labourers or domestics ... A person could not live on a reserve without permission, or leave or return after leaving without permission, or have a relative to live with them without permission, or work except under supervision. The extent of control seems incredible today ...

The theory was that the 'full blood' Aboriginal people would die out and they should be provided with a little care while they did so; and that the 'mixed blood' would be bred out. When these expectations proved ill founded, another policy was tried, that of assimilation. But the old supervisor remained in place; in the Northern Territory Aboriginal people remained wards of the State, in the States the Protectorate and the Boards remained in place with all their powers, children continued to be removed but the whole aim was now to assimilate the Aboriginal people by encouraging them to accept the Western culture and lifestyle, give up their culture, become culturally absorbed and indistinguishable, other than physically, from the dominant group.¹⁶

Past and present causes of language loss

2.20 The loss of languages that occurred soon after European settlement was largely due to the reduction in speaker populations from the ravages of introduced diseases to which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people had no resistance. Language loss was also the result of the displacement of people and in some instances the massacre of people.

2.21 In a few places killings were so severe that whole speaker populations perished:

There is known to have been a language called Yeeman spoken around Taroom in south-east Queensland. That is all we know - its name. Not a word of the language was recorded before the entire tribe was wiped out in 1857.¹⁷

¹⁶ Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, *Overview*, p. 8.

¹⁷ RMW Dixon, "The Original Languages of Australia", in *Vox*, Issue 3, 1989, DEET, Canberra.

The healthiest ATSI languages today are those in areas least settled by Europeans or where settlement has occurred comparatively recently.

2.22 This first wave of language loss radiated out from the original centres of white settlement such that languages from the Sydney region for example, have long since ceased to exist as living languages. The Aboriginal populations of these areas who survived initial contact were forced to move away and into the country of different language speakers.

2.23 The dispersal of populations in response to white settlement destroyed the cohesion of communities. This was followed by forced removal of communities frequently involving the splitting up of communities and the establishment of multi-tribal settlements. This fragmented kinship systems, culture and language, often intentionally. Having to live in close contact with other groups imposed other pressures and conflict which further damaged the fabric of social life and language.

2.24 On missions and government run settlements use of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages was frequently banned and in most cases discouraged¹⁸. Employers also commonly prohibited the use of language. Children were severely affected where they were separated from parents at an early age and placed in boys or girls dormitories and the use of their language prohibited. Dormitories were often made up of children from different language groups and with English the only permitted language it quickly became the lingua franca. In addition the dormitory system often involved the active denigration of parents' language as "primitive" and so discouraged children using it on the short occasions when they saw their parents. Schools similarly imposed an English-only regime.

2.25 A major factor in language loss is increasing contact with people outside of the language group. As most Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were traditionally multilingual, the learning of another language alone is unlikely to have lead to the serious losses that have occurred in languages. The circumstances in which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people had greater contact with other language groups, determined the effect. Where the greater contact was due to removal from other speakers of the same language then the opportunity for the full range of language use declined. As more of daily communication is undertaken in another language then that increasingly becomes the person's own language.

2.26 Increasingly, only those groups relatively isolated from external contact managed to retain strong languages. While some groups have lost their language and gained another ATSI language most have lost it to English or Aboriginal English. English was the language of the colonising settlers and its use was frequently insisted upon. It was and is the language of government, commerce and the courts and is aptly described as the language of power. It was the only language of education. English is a prestige language and has considerable resources to back

¹⁸ Schmidt, 1990, p.37.

it up. It has a very large pool of fluent speakers and has an extensive written language heritage. Consequently English has become a strong second language for many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and the first language for many of their children. To the extent that these children learned an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander language it is much weaker through the lack of a full range of social opportunities to use it.

2.27 In addition to forced relocation and the dispersal of language communities thereby destroying their cohesion, intense assimilatory pressure was imposed on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to abandon their culture and language. The dormitory system and schools described in paragraph 2.28 were part of that pressure. ATSI languages and culture were so demeaned that many parents came to think that their own language was not worth passing on to their children. Some sought to avoid embarrassment or punishment for their children by not teaching them language or sought success for their children by insisting they learn only English to equip them for a different future. Dr Annette Schmidt reports that deliberate non-transmission of minority languages due to intense assimilatory pressures has been involved in many language-loss situations worldwide.¹⁹ However, this break in the transmission to children brought about by the dormitory system, the school system and through assimilatory pressure has been one of the major contributors to language loss in Australia.

2.28 The influence of English as the dominant language has increased exponentially with better communications and transport. Access to radio, videos and television has been extended across Australia including the most remote areas. This has increased exposure to English language and worldwide English-speaking culture. Consequently, English has a wider daily use and, as an example, teenagers in those remote communities adopt rock music and fashions much the same as elsewhere in the world. Newspapers, magazines, comics and books have also encouraged English as a main language. In the last two decades, increased government interest in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander affairs, including many government meetings conducted almost exclusively in English, has increased the pressure for communities to switch to English.

2.29 Increased use of motor vehicles has reduced physical isolation. One observer points out:

It is only twenty years since Aboriginal people gained award wages and only about fifteen years since they began to use that economic capacity to travel extensively and purchase radios and audio and video cassettes.²⁰

While increased mobility has increased exposure to situations where English is

¹⁹ Schmidt, 1990, p. 19.

²⁰ S Harris, *Two Way Aboriginal Schooling*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 1990, p. 69.

necessary for communication it also improves access to other speakers of the same language where the language is spread over several communities. Similarly, small television networks such as the proposed Tanami Communications Network for Warlpiri potentially allow speakers in separate communities to share their experiences in their common language. Increased mobility and better communications have probably assisted the spread of creoles.

Extent of Language Loss

2.30 Of the estimated original 250 languages only about 90 are still living languages. The remainder are either extinct or have only a handful of elderly speakers left.²¹ In arriving at these figures Dr Annette Schmidt counted as living languages only those having more than 10 speakers. She also noted that the language and speaker numbers were rough estimates based on the data available and should be amended as further information comes to hand. Recent surveys in the Northern Territory of Alyawarre indicate the number of speakers may be 60-80% higher than previous estimates²² Nonetheless these figures paint a grim picture for language survival. Of the 90 or so living languages surviving, Dr Schmidt assesses around 20 as being in a healthy state. All languages face a severe threat of extinction, with about 50 of these languages having less than 100 speakers.²³

2.31 Dr Schmidt estimates only ten languages have 1000 or more speakers. They are²⁴:

Kala Lagaw Ya (Torres Strait)	3,000-4,000
- Kalaw Kawaw Ya	
Warlpiri (Western Northern Territory)	3,000 +
Arrandic languages (Central Australia)	3,000 +
- Western, Eastern Arrernte	
- Anmatyerre	
- Alyawarre	
- Kaytitj	
Western desert, eastern (Central Australia)	3,000+
- Pitjantjatjara	
- Yankunytjatjara	

²¹ Schmidt, 1990, p. 1.

²² Evidence, p.249.

²³ Schmidt, 1990, p. 1, 4-5.

²⁴ Schmidt, 1990, p. 4-5.

- Luritja	
- Pintupi	
Dhuwal-Dhuwala dialects (Yolngu) (Arnhem Land)	1,700 - 2,000
- Gupapuyngu	
- Djambarrpuyngu	
- Gumatj	
Tiwi (Bathurst and Melville Islands)	1,400
Western Desert, western (Central Australia)	1,000 +
- Manjiljarra	
- Yulparija	
- Kukatja	
- Ngaanyatjara	
- Ngaatjatjarra	
Anindilyakwa (Groote Island)	1,000 +
Walmajarri (Kimberleys)	1,000
Wik Mungkan (Cape York)	900 - 1,000

Some observers do not break the Western Desert language group into Eastern and Western which makes it the largest group with 4,000-5,000 speakers.

Creoles

2.32 A distinction between pidgins and creoles should be drawn. A pidgin language is one used for communication between groups with no other language in common. It is not the first language of those that use it and it usually has a limited vocabulary and simplified grammar. A creole is a pidgin that has undergone expansion to become the mother tongue of the members of a speech community. In this process of creolisation its vocabulary becomes vastly expanded and its syntax more flexible so that it is able to express the whole range of human experiences.²⁵

2.33 There are two large creole languages in Australia. They are Kriol, which extends across the Katherine region of the Northern Territory through to the Kimberleys in Western Australia, and Broken (Torres Strait Creole). Each of these creoles is estimated to have around 15,000 speakers and numbers are increasing.²⁶ These are very large language groups compared with the four largest indigenous

²⁵ Harris and Sandefur, 1984, p. 10.

²⁶ Schmidt, 1990, p. 111.

traditional language groups which range up to a possible 5,000 speakers.

2.34 The creolisation process is largely undertaken by children. Kriol had its beginnings at Roper River in the Northern Territory at the beginning of this century. Following five years of systematic massacres in the area survivors moved to the newly established Anglican mission for protection. About 200 people from 7 language groups settled at the mission within a year of its establishment in 1908. The adults were multilingual and could talk to one another in language. The children were not yet multilingual and to communicate with one another used the English pidgin used between Aboriginal and European people.²⁷ Harris and Sandefur describe the remainder of the process:

With this limited input, it was this younger generation who, in the course of their lifetime, created the creole, manipulating the lexical resources available to them and drawing on linguistic universals to create a language which catered for all their communicative needs. That language has now been named *Kriol*.²⁸

2.35 Similar creolisation occurred in several other northern communities one, Bamyili, as recently as the Second World War. Over the years movement of Aboriginal people led to a standardisation of these creoles which were not dissimilar from one another to start with. There are recognisable regional dialects but they are mutually intelligible amongst Kriol speakers.²⁹

2.36 Because of their mixed origins creoles are often looked upon as marginal or mongrel languages and inferior to their parent languages. While there is increasing acceptance of the merit and validity of all languages in the world, particularly those previously thought to be primitive this recognition has only recently been extended to creoles.³⁰ The creoles continue to grow while the traditional indigenous languages they impinge upon are declining. Fluent traditional speakers who are opposed to the spread of creole tend to be the older members of the community. Those taking up creole most enthusiastically are the young who see it as a modern language more suited to their needs than traditional languages.

2.37 Australian creoles serve several clear purposes. They are the first language of a large number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. They are capable of communicating across a wider range of people than traditional languages. At the same time creoles serve as an identity marker for Aboriginal and Torres Strait and Islander people in a similar way to Aboriginal English. Implicit

²⁷ Harris and Sandefur, 1984, p. 14-15.

²⁸ Harris and Sandefur, 1984, p. 15.

²⁹ Harris and Sandefur, 1984, p. 16-17.

³⁰ Harris and Sandefur, 1984, p. 9.

in the adoption of creole is a wish to maintain some separation from Standard Australian English (SAE). However in rejecting traditional languages there is some rejection or loss of the culture, knowledge and values that the language is part of. It is this aspect which most distresses traditional language speakers whose language is being superseded by creole.

2.38 It is a difficult decision within some communities as to whether a creole or a traditional language should be supported in a community e.g. by being used or taught at school. While the decision should be made by the community there will be many communities where no one language will be clearly preferred. Where a creole is preferred to a traditional language, special attention should be paid as to whether there is a need for other language maintenance activities in support of the traditional language.

2.39 Torres Strait Creole which is usually called Broken (short for Broken English) was derived from Pacific Pidgin English. This was spoken by marine workers of different nationalities across the Pacific. Around the turn of the century it was creolised by the children of Erub, Ugar and St Paul's Community and became a regional common language throughout the Torres Strait Islands.³¹ Torres Strait creole expresses pan-Islanderness and marks an identity separate from European and Aboriginal ethnicity. Young Western Islanders are trilingual speaking their traditional language, Broken and English.

2.40 Creoles are significant languages in hundreds of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. While in most of those communities it is spoken by two generations as a mother tongue in some it is spoken by four or more generations.³²

2.41 The committee believes that when children whose first languages is a creole are being taught English particular care needs to be taken. Much of the vocabulary in Kriol, for example, is derived from English and the grammar is simplified from English grammar having eliminated many of the irregularities.

Aboriginal English

2.42 Aboriginal English is a continuum of dialects ranging from close to Standard Australian English through to being close to Kriol. In the 1986 Census 76% of people identifying as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander said they spoke only English and only 3.4% said they spoke no English at all. It is impossible to quantify precisely but many of the 76% speak dialects of English known as Aboriginal English. Aboriginal English is spoken throughout Australia, as either a first or second language by the great majority of Aboriginal people. These dialects,

³¹ A Shnukal, "Language Shift and Maintenance in Torres Strait," in *Vox*, No. 3, 1989, p. 43.

³² Harris and Sandefur, 1984, p. 11.

considerable exposure, are mutually intelligible with Standard Australian English but differ in systematic ways.³³ Those dialects closest to Kriol are much more difficult for Standard Australian English speakers to comprehend. These dialects have derived from pidgins (through depiginisation), creoles (through decreolisation) and in some instances from the Aboriginalisation of the language by Aboriginal Standard Australian English speakers.³⁴ These dialects serve as a marker of Aboriginal identity and for many, Aboriginal English is their first and only language.

2.43 While some speakers are bilingual or bidialectal and can switch quickly between one dialect and another, young children with Aboriginal English coming to school for the first time, usually have it as their only language. Aboriginal English is now widely regarded by linguists as a valid rule-governed language capable of expressing the wide range of human experience. The failure to recognise it as a separate dialect leads to several problems. It is often looked upon as bad English with both the language and the speaker being devalued. Speakers often undervalue their dialect as a result of years of disparagement.

2.44 The traditional educational approach to non-standard dialects such as Aboriginal English is outlined by one observer:

In the past, any 'mismatch' which occurred between the language of education systems and the language of children from minority or socially underprivileged groups was 'remedied' in a rather simple manner. It was the speech habits of children which were attempted to be changed to bring about a better 'match'. Such attempts were carried out by 'eradication' procedures, aimed at 'stamping out' the non-standard dialect, in a kind of process akin to weeding a garden. It is now a well-known fact that such 'weeding' programmes were mostly unsuccessful: the 'precious plant' of standard English did not often grow 'naturally' on the silenced lips of non-standard speakers³⁵

2.45 Many teachers still fail to see Aboriginal English as a different dialect of English. They treat it instead as an uneducated or corrupted form of Standard Australian English. These misconceptions in the wider community do considerable damage but in the classroom the damage is much greater. This approach is beginning to change. The rejection by teachers of children's home language as corrupted or substandard gives these children a bad start in an education system which contains a number of other cultural barriers. These teacher attitudes are

³³ D Eades, "Aboriginal English - An Introduction", in *Vox*, 5, 1991, p. 57-59.

³⁴ Eades, 1991, p. 56-57.

³⁵ S Kaldor, "Standard and Non-Standard English in the School" in *Varieties of Language and Language Teaching*, F Christie and J Rothay (eds), 1980, Applied Linguistics Association of Australia, Occasional Paper No.4, p.12.

perceived by children as devaluing them, their family and friends. Children faced with the choice of loyalty to family, friends and their way of life or of accepting the authority of a comparatively foreign institution such as the school, not surprisingly, frequently reject the school.

2.46 The committee believes that failure by schools and teachers to identify, accept and take into account the separate features of Aboriginal English is a major factor in Aboriginal children's poor performance in school. In other situations such as courts or hospitals the failure to identify and comprehend Aboriginal English significantly limits the effectiveness of these those institutions.

2.47 While Aboriginal English and Standard Australian English are usually mutually intelligible there are important differences which need to be better understood. Major differences occur in the vocabulary, grammar, meaning, sounding system, gesturing and sociocultural context. If these major structural differences are not understood and addressed in teaching Aboriginal English speakers the level of misunderstanding between teachers and students will remain high. Some English words have a different or more specific meaning than in Standard Australian English. Some examples are: "Him finish" meaning "He is dead," "Jar" as a verb meaning scold and "dust" as a verb meaning to overtake a car on a dusty road.³⁶ Other differences include the lack of the possessive " 's" and the lack of the initial h sound in words beginning with "h."

2.48 However one of the most significant differences between Aboriginal English and Standard Australian English is in the sociocultural context. This context is established in early childhood. Of Aboriginal child rearing Irruluma Guruluwini Enemburu comments:

Children brought up within Koori families in urban areas are still likely to be affected by child rearing practices which maintain many of the characteristics of the traditional patterns...

Certain aspects of child rearing are not the same as those of the non Koori society. This point is stressed, as within the patterns of child rearing the foundations are established for the use of language within varying contexts, thus affecting the manner in which knowledge is conceptualised and regarded, and so shaping the learning style of the child. These parameters will in later life affect the manner in which the child communicates and so distinguish an important aspect of Koori English.³⁷

2.49 Some of these differences include the way information is usually sought of another person, the use of silences in conversation, eye contact and gestures.

³⁶ Eades, 1991, p. 58.

³⁷ I.G. Enemburu, *Koori English*, State Board of Education Victoria, 1989, p. 2-3.

Speakers of Standard Australian English are used to asking direct questions to elicit information, but as Dr Diana Eades points out:

where Aboriginal people want to find out significant or personal information they do not use direct questions. It is important for Aboriginal people not to embarrass someone by putting them 'on the spot'. So people volunteer some of their own information, hinting about what they are trying to find out about. Information is sought as part of a two-way exchange. Silence and waiting till people are ready to give information are also central to Aboriginal ways of seeking any substantial information...

Although people in mainstream Australian society can recognise these ways of seeking information they use them only in sensitive situations. In Aboriginal interactions these are the everyday strategies used to seek substantial information.³⁸

2.50 Enemburu differentiates two important perspectives when looking at Aboriginal English. One is their evolution which can be described from a historical and linguistic perspective and the second is the sociopolitical perspective through which identity is expressed. He says of its sociopolitical significance:

... the growing importance of the social role of Koori English is becoming increasingly obvious with the emergence of strong feelings of ingroup solidarity, the re-establishment of Koori identity, the growing awareness of Koori culture and the drive of Koori people to maintain levels of education within their cultural framework.³⁹

2.51 In the past non-standard dialects such as Aboriginal English were seen by schools as aberrant and were to be eradicated. However eradication procedures have been largely unsuccessful in that the stifled speakers have failed to gain in Standard Australian English skills and only learnt that their language, which is also the language of their family and friends, is a poor one. Instead of being language nurturing institutions schools have been instruments of language suppression. Aboriginal English speakers are often unaware of the full extent of the differences from Standard Australian English. Teachers frequently do not understand what students are saying because the teachers have not learnt to understand the dialect. As many children have shown in traditional language situations it is possible to understand a language as a listener without being able to speak the language.

2.52 Where children come to school with Aboriginal English as their mother tongue, it represents strongly ingrained language habits and embodies the speaker's early life experiences and learning. It is also the language that the child will

³⁸ Eades, 1991, p. 58.

³⁹ Enemburu, 1989, p. 13.

continue to use at home and with same-language friends.

2.53 Children learn best when the school makes use of their language development prior to school. When their mother tongue is suppressed or even denigrated and they are taught in a language which seems very similar to them but without the differences being clearly identified, they quite understandably become confused, hurt and withdrawn. These difficulties usually form an overlay to other social difficulties encountered by children from a different cultural background to that of the school.

2.54 The committee believes that while attitudes to Aboriginal English may be changing, the change is far from complete and basic teacher training still does not adequately prepare teachers for teaching such children. Curriculum material to support teachers in the classroom teaching English as a second dialect is still extremely meagre.

CHAPTER 3

WHAT DO ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER PEOPLE WANT?

3.1 It was a major priority of the committee during this inquiry to speak with as many ATSI people as possible about their language. The committee listened to many people who talked about the state of their language, what it meant to them and what they wanted to happen in language matters. Many expressed their deep concern at the loss which had already occurred in their language and the further loss that was likely. At various levels they wished to maintain, revive or retrieve as much as possible of their language.

3.2 Concerns included the non-transmission to children, simplification or pidginisation of the language, and the encroachment of English, creole or another traditional language. People from mixed language communities outlined the difficulties they faced in maintaining or regaining language proficiency. Members of the Moomba Aboriginal Corporation at Coen told the committee:

We were all forced to live away from our cultural home and land base. Because of the variety and diverse nature of our languages in this small township, and because of the very strong thrust towards assimilation in a white controlled township, the common way of communicating had to be English and/or Kriol. This has resulted in a very limited contact of our children with their true mother tongue.¹

3.3 Many people pointed to the effects of school, television and videos in lowering the value of the community's language. In many communities the committee heard that only the older generations spoke language fluently and when these people were gone the language would die. Help was sought by those communities to find ways of stimulating language use among children and young adults.

Wide range of approaches

3.4 Given the wide range of people that the committee spoke with, in many different types of situations, it is not surprising that quite a range of needs and approaches were put forward. As outlined in Chapter 2 each language situation is different and requires its own approach. This underlines the necessity as in all areas of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander affairs of local communities being the

¹ Evidence, p. S159.

ones to identify their own needs and the way in which they should be addressed. Communities should then be supported in addressing those needs.

3.5 While there were many different views received from the various communities visited there were also a number of strong elements common to most. One of the strongest commonalities was the need for pride in and respect for the community language and the culture of which it is an integral part. There was also very large agreement that there be complete Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander control over Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander language programs. There was a virtually universal view that children should gain strong skills in "good English" (Standard Australian English).

3.6 While most groups saw ATSI control of programs involving their language as essential, attitudes on other ownership issues varied. Not all groups were happy for non-ATSI to learn their language. However, virtually all wanted greater propagation of the language within their group and the means to maintain the language in the face of increasing external pressures.

Strong skills in English

3.7 Regardless of the health of their community language, virtually all people that the committee spoke to were adamant that they wanted their children to gain a high level of competence in Standard Australian English. Proficiency in the 3Rs is seen by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as necessary for them to have equal access to services and employment. Proficiency in English is seen as empowering Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people within the wider Australian community and making them less dependent on the wider community. However, communities did not want proficiency in English to be at the expense of the community language or culture.

Pride in and respect for language

3.8 All of the people the committee spoke to saw pride in and respect for their language as an important element in its survival. They emphasised that people should not be ashamed to speak their language nor should others seek to shame or otherwise punish them for speaking it. Because language, culture and pride are mutually interdependent they must continue to be maintained and promoted if Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are to maintain their self-esteem and increase their self sufficiency.

Support for language work

3.9 Most language groups the committee spoke to sought external financial or resource assistance for language work. Professional linguistic assistance was sought as was language training for community members and language recording

equipment. Where communities had access to regional language resource centres they sought better funding so that all language groups could be serviced.

3.10 The financial priority attached to language work by communities themselves varied. However, it is a very difficult choice for a community to make when language work has to compete for scarce community resources with more immediate and pressing needs such as housing and health. Most communities are not financially self-sufficient and lack adequate financial resources. From the committee's consultations and from the observations of others, priority is often not given to language programs until the language is under severe threat and when the chances for revival are minimal. However, several healthy language groups saw impending threats to their language and wished to have effective programs in place to protect, maintain and promote it.

3.11 A number of communities were acutely aware of the loss taking place in their language but were unsure as to how to go about addressing the problem. These communities knew what they wanted to happen but saw themselves surrounded by insurmountable barriers. With only the old speakers being fluent in the language the community largely comprised several generations of partial or non-speakers. Children and young adults prefer to spend free time with friends their own age, watch TV or videos, play sport or listen to or play rock music. Their parents usually do not speak the traditional language in the home and children's contact with the language is minimal. At Tully, in Far North Queensland, the committee heard that efforts to supplement the necessarily limited language classes at the high school by having older people meet the children for a period immediately after school had been unsuccessful as children had sport, homework and other higher priorities which kept them away.

3.12 The committee heard that many communities have found bush trips to be a very successful way of bringing younger and older generations together with a focus on the skills and knowledge of the elders. These provide opportunities to learn how to identify plants and animals, hunting and collecting, their uses and preparation. As well as learning traditional names, these trips also provide the opportunity for more extensive language use. Some communities are able to make these trips "traditional language only" trips, providing the possibility of introducing young people to some of the higher levels of language where initiation ceremonies are no longer held. In other communities where young people do not speak the language these trips can expand their limited vocabulary and provide an opportunity to learn other traditional matters. Bush trips are sometimes used as part of school language programs, where photos, videos and recordings from the trip can be taken back to support classroom work and produce additional learning material.

3.13 The need for language work to be carried out in an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander setting rather than a European institution was stressed by many groups. Some sought to set up their own language or cultural centre. People at Kununurra, in Western Australia, said:

Traditionally, language and culture based activities have been woven into the fabric of everyday life with no need to create a particular centre or organisation. However, nowadays Aborigines have increasingly less time and opportunities in which to conduct these important language and cultural activities and so require a centre from which these can be focused. Today there is a very rich tradition of the activities which might take place in such a centre, ranging from story telling, singing and dancing to miming, game playing and acting. These cultural activities, which once occurred in a variety of settings as people travelled through their country, now must be stored in one place.²

3.14 The Kombumerri Aboriginal Corporation for Culture in Southern Queensland told the committee of their plans:

we propose to establish an educational centre through which we can impart information about the Yugambeh people and the appreciation that they had for their environment. We have already accumuluated a huge volume of data about Yugambeh tribal burial grounds, sites, shell mounds, habitation sites, ceremonial bora rings, tool-making sites, religious sites and genealogies.³

Who should teach the language?

3.15 Most people the committee spoke to felt that parents should teach language to their children wherever possible but in many cases the parents do not speak the traditional language. This is the result of the removal of children and other dislocations in the past which have broken the language chain. In other instances grandparents did not pass on the language to parents. In some communities parents speak to their children in language but the children reply in another language such as a creole or English. Children frequently do not hold their traditional language in high esteem. In communities where parents do not speak the language sufficiently to be able to teach their children then a variety of other ways of propagating the language were sought. Parents who are multilingual are often not fully aware of which language they use most with their children.

3.16 Miriwoong and Gajirrawoong people at Kununurra told the committee of the need to convince younger people to use their language:

At the moment there is no-one under forty who can speak either of these languages fluently, though there are many younger people who understand, but are too shy, or lack a suitable context to try to speak themselves.

² Evidence, p. S55.

³ Evidence, p. S513.

If children are to learn the language, not only their grandparents, but their parents must speak it with them and ideally re-embrace it as their principal means of communication.⁴

3.17 Where traditional languages are taught within schools most communities were quite clear that such language teaching should be under ATSI control. In the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Lands bilingual education has been terminated at the request of the community. Teaching in Pitjantjatjara by non-Pitjantjatjara speakers was seen to be corrupting the language through mispronunciation, improper grammar and pidginisation. Domain separation or two-way schooling is now their preferred method of schooling with English speakers teaching the European part of the curriculum and Pitjantjatjara speakers taking the Pitjantjatjara parts.

3.18 At Yirrkala, in the Northern Territory, there is strong community control over language matters. While one dialect is taught within the school, the many clan dialects are taught by clan members in a setting away from the school but as part of the community school program. Students are then able to produce classroom materials in their own dialect.

3.19 Two-way schooling overcomes the difficulty encountered at some schools where traditional limits on who may teach what and to whom are sometimes offended against. In non two-way schools, ATSI control over ATSI matters is low. While language speakers are employed as teaching assistants or teacher's aides the class teacher or co-ordinator is usually non-ATSI. Many communities expressed dissatisfaction of varying degrees with their relationship with the school and their control over what is taught and how it is taught. Similarly, many were concerned that awareness and respect for other cultural matters was low. While a few made this criticism of community schools it was a far more common complaint about town schools. These parents sought a greater involvement in their schools and increased responsiveness from the schools.

3.20 Because of the range of views expressed the committee believes that a flexible approach is required in supporting language maintenance with individual communities determining their own priorities.

⁴ Evidence, p. S57.

CHAPTER 4

EXISTING LANGUAGE MAINTENANCE MEASURES

Language maintenance objectives

4.1 There are a number of objectives in language maintenance. The first is to increase language awareness by drawing attention to its fragility, its value and the need for its transmission to children. It is essential that parents speak to their children in language and insist on it being spoken back. ATSIC in its submission said:

It falls to language speakers themselves to maintain community languages. For a language to survive in a 'living' sense it is necessary for it to be used for communication among community members and be taught to children to ensure its carriage to successive generations.¹

Pride in a language and its culture is also essential and should be increased through language maintenance activities.

4.2 Exposure to the particular language needs to be maintained or increased. As the ATSIC quote above points out, the use of a language must be maximised among community members if it is to survive as a living language. To the extent that it is not used for everyday communication it loses currency as a living language and risks entering a slide to extinction. In communities where language is being lost additional social contexts and opportunities need to be provided for language use. This can only come from a community wide recognition of the problem and agreement to increase language use opportunities.

4.3 Language knowledge needs to be increased and reinforced. Changed lifestyles with less reliance on bush tucker or children attending school for a large part of the day results in less frequent use of some parts of the language. Many communities have arranged bush trips to increase familiarity with names of animals and plants, how to identify and process them and to provide an opportunity for strengthening social language use.

4.4 Another objective of language maintenance is to reduce unnecessary pressures destructive of language. This involves restoring and maintaining pride in the language and maximising the use of language within the community rather than allow English to be used for everyday items such as posters, road signs etc. The production of books, newsletters, videos and contemporary songs in language are

¹ Evidence, p. S235.

also useful in maintaining pride in language. The recent success of *Yothu Yindu* and other Aboriginal bands in the mainstream music world, while using traditional language in songs, has raised the awareness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages. It has also helped make traditional language less "old-fashioned" to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teenagers.

4.5 The committee was concerned to see public health information booklets in some communities written in English and including translated information in a number of migrant languages but not the language of that particular community. Government agencies have a role to play by either producing information material for communities in the appropriate language or paying someone to translate it. An audio tape may need to be produced for those lacking literacy.

4.6 Similarly interpreters should be used by all governments in their official dealings with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities where the vernacular is not Standard Australian English. This includes dealings in communities where the vernacular is Aboriginal English.

4.7 A broad range of activities can be part of the language maintenance process. Amongst communities with fairly strong language use, language awareness programs are important to draw attention to the value of the language and increase pride in it. The risk, even to strong languages, of language loss needs to be emphasised. The committee notes that in its visits to strong language communities there was a good awareness of the risk of language loss.

4.8 Awareness needs to be raised of the importance of speaking in language to children and insisting that they use it in return. In a number of communities that the committee visited, it was told that children understood the language when they heard it but would not or could not speak it. If these children do not learn to speak the language the transmission link to subsequent generations will be broken. These children need structured opportunities where they can try to speak for themselves and overcome their shyness in a supportive atmosphere. All children in a community need to be encouraged at the same time, otherwise play language will revert to the lingua franca.

4.9 The role of children, teenagers and young adults in language maintenance cannot be over-stressed. They have been the creators of the two large creoles in Australia. Successive generations of children and teenagers across the world continue to bring new words into their language or change the meaning of existing words. It should be a major objective of maintenance programs for each language to maintain the interest of children, teenagers and young adults in their traditional language and to encourage its use in a variety of ways.²

4.10 Language maintenance also includes recording of languages, developing dictionaries and grammars. While some recording of languages has been undertaken

² Harris, 1990, pp. 82-3.

in an ad-hoc manner over the last 200 years only a few languages have been adequately recorded. Recording needs to be done in such a way that the language can be subsequently transmitted. Many languages have been lost and there is an urgent need to record remaining languages. The development of dictionaries and grammars should be undertaken by people with linguistic training. Unfortunately, there continues to be a shortage of funding for trained linguist positions to undertake Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language work. The training of linguists is discussed in Chapter 5.

4.11 The development of dictionaries and grammars is a time-consuming business. In languages not previously written, orthographies (spelling systems) need to be settled. Where this is being undertaken by outside linguists, agreement with the language speakers is necessary. It is desirable that an orthography is settled before printed stories, dictionaries or text books are produced but this is not essential.

4.12 Tape recorders have been used for some time in recording spoken language. Today video cameras are being used increasingly for this purpose. Video recording can convey lip movements in pronunciation, facial expressions, and accompanying gestures. They may also show the country related to a particular story. As an aside, the committee notes that there is potential for the commercial production of some stories about the origins of plants, animals and landforms told in language with sub-titles in English or other languages for overseas markets.

4.13 The recording of stories is an important part of language maintenance. Although video is growing in use, print and audio tapes are still common. Communities have increasingly ready access to videos, magazines, books and music in English. Access to similar material in their own language is needed if English is not to take over completely. Radio and television broadcasts in language are highly desirable if the relevance and status of language is to be maintained. Printed material in language is important for both adults and children but to date there has been a dearth of suitable material for adults. Several communities produce community newspapers in their own language. Many songs in vernacular, or English and vernacular, are also being composed, played and recorded.

4.14 Language resource centres have become a major feature of language maintenance in Australia. Their establishment alone can be beneficial in raising language pride and awareness but the major benefits are from the programs they co-ordinate and the resources they provide or give access to. Although there are benefits, considerable money can be wasted and there can be much disappointment if people working at the language centres and on projects are not trained.

4.15 There is currently a resurgence in language awareness and pride, however it is somewhat uneven in its spread. Many communities already have the greatest single resource needed in any language maintenance program, which is the remaining speakers of that language.

4.16 The committee believes that language groups need to be more aware of the potential dangers to their language and be more prepared to discuss these problems within the community.

4.17 The committee recommends that:

the Commonwealth fund a language awareness campaign aimed at assisting all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities with living traditional languages, to draw attention to the dangers posed to languages, even strong languages. This campaign need not be resource intensive. It should be integrated into the proposed network of regional language committees and should be primarily directed at self-help. Communities should be assisted in identifying steps they can take to strengthen their language and where training and other assistance may be obtained. Funding should be in addition to that proposed for the regional language committee network. (Recommendation 1)

4.18 As discussed in Chapter 2 the wider non-ATSI community has a poor understanding of the nature of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages and many misconceptions continue. This lack of understanding frequently places unnecessary barriers in the way of the use and maintenance of ATSI languages. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people frequently feel ashamed or otherwise inhibited about using their language in the presence of non-ATSI people. The existence of their language is sometimes ignored and they are denied a voice in matters affecting them. These deficiencies do not warrant a public awareness campaign of their own. The correction of some specific deficiencies are addressed elsewhere in the report, eg. in Chapter 5 on teacher training. Schools throughout Australia are introducing Aboriginal Studies curricula so that successive younger generations will be better informed about the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander way of life including languages.

4.19 The committee recommends that:

the nature and importance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages should be highlighted in general public education activities conducted by Commonwealth, state and territory authorities concerning Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their culture particularly in areas where traditional language is still used. (Recommendation 2)

Community based programs

4.20 Community based programs take many forms such as bush trips, formation of language groups, and the preparation of dictionaries, story books or videos. The recording of older fluent speakers can be undertaken both in everyday language use and in the telling of stories. Most importantly, these programs are nearly always under the control of the community and are adapted to the needs and priorities of the particular community. With appropriate training one or more community members could undertake language maintenance work, which would provide employment within the community and reduce reliance on outside assistance. Generally, many more women than men are involved in language work but this pattern is not uniform.

4.21 Regional language centres service a number of language communities and are community controlled with representatives of their various language groups being on the management committee. Much of the work of regional language centres is in supporting community based programs. This can be in the form of access to a linguist, assistance in designing community programs, use of the centre and its resources, assistance with preparation of material for printing and publishing. It may even extend to the provision of transport to bring people together for language programs.

4.22 While regional language centres have worked fairly well, with some excellent models, they are not without difficulties. They largely rely on non-ATSI linguists as there is often a local shortage of trained Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander linguists. There is not enough funding to employ linguists in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language work. The resources of these centres are limited and it is not possible to meet the needs of all of the language communities they represent.

4.23 Another difficulty, particularly apparent in the establishment phase, is finding an appropriate structure for such organisations. Waringarri Aboriginal Corporation and Mirima Council in their proposal for establishing a language centre, Mirama Dawang Woorkab-Gerring, point out:

In non-ATSI cultures there are clear images of institutions for learning and teaching such as schools and colleges, and for sharing traditional knowledge, such as religious orders and clubs. But there is no precedent within traditional aboriginal cultures such as Miriwoong and Gajirawoong for setting up a language and cultural organisation or centre³.

4.24 Despite these difficulties the value of regional language centres has been recognised by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and a number

³ Evidence, p. S55.

of centres have now been successfully established. They are seen as countering the influence of other institutions which promote the English language, often incidentally to their main purpose.

4.25 Regional language centres are able to co-ordinate and provide services at both the regional and local level under the control of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in a region. They are also able to represent the language interests of a region at the national level.

4.26 The committee believes that the valuable role played by these centres should continue and that further centres should be established to service other language speaking regions. The committee further believes that regional language centres and community programs need to be adequately funded. Further discussion and recommendation concerning the establishment of a broader network of regional language resource centres are in Chapter 6.

School based programs

4.27 Schools have a very large impact on language and in the past this has been a quite destructive one. It is important that they play a constructive role in language maintenance wherever possible. Different language situations faced by schools, sometimes in combination, include:

- children with a strong Aboriginal language and no English - usually schools in remote communities.
- children with some of their parents' language - often coming from town camps.
- children from several language groups - some community schools.
- children speaking creole.
- children speaking Aboriginal English - community schools through to metropolitan schools.

With such a range of different language requirements schools obviously need to structure their courses to meet the local situation.

Bilingual Education

4.28 A major way in which schools have been involved in language maintenance has been through bilingual education. Children are taught in their early years of schooling mainly in their first language which, in later years, continues to be used for some of each day as a language of instruction. As the child

progresses through primary school, English plays an increasingly important part until it eventually becomes the main language of instruction. However, the traditional language continues to be recognised and used in the schooling program.

4.29 The first bilingual programs were introduced in the 1960s and 1970s. Prior to that, the significant number of children in Western Australia, Northern Territory, Queensland and South Australia who spoke only an Aboriginal language were taught in English. All but a few were taught in English by non-ATSI teachers who often had little or no knowledge of the local Aboriginal language or culture. Unfortunately, there are still many areas in northern Australia where children whose first language is a traditional language are taught in English by non-ATSI teachers, eg. in the Alyawarre and Anmatyerre areas of the Northern Territory.

4.30 In December 1972 the Whitlam Government launched its policy of self-determination for Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders, which included a campaign to have children living in communities given primary education in community languages. By 1973 a program of bilingual education was launched in a number of schools in the Northern Territory. Experimental programs were initially introduced into five government schools in Northern Territory communities. This grew to twenty schools in 1977. There are now 25 bilingual schools in Australia. The Northern Territory has 21, and Western Australia 4. Some of these Northern Territory programs would be more accurately described as two-way rather than bilingual. There are no government schools in Western Australia with a full bilingual program. Bilingual/bicultural programs in Western Australia are in Catholic or independent community schools. South Australia had 8 bilingual schools until recently, mostly in the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Lands. At the request of Aboriginal communities, South Australian Government policy now does not support bilingual schools but instead supports domain separation or two way schooling⁴.

4.31 The definition used by the Commonwealth when introducing bilingual education into the Northern Territory was from the U.S Bilingual Education Act of 1967:

Bilingual Education is the use of two languages, one of which is English, as mediums of instruction for the same pupil population in a well organised program which encompasses part or all of the curriculum and includes the study of the history and culture associated with the mother tongue. A complete program develops and maintains the children's self-esteem and a legitimate pride in both cultures.

4.32 The House of Representatives Select Committee on Aboriginal Education described the benefits of bilingual education:

There are sound educational reasons for establishing literacy in the child's first language before developing literacy in English. It breaks

⁴ Evidence, p.370.

the pupil's initial learning tasks into two: first they learn to read and write, then they begin to cope with English. The child only has to tackle one major task at a time, that of learning to read without the added burden of learning a new language at the same time. The child understands his mother tongue and therefore what he reads makes sense. Once the child knows how to read he can apply basic reading skills to learn to read in English. The child will also gain a sense of satisfaction, rather than frustration, at being able to read and express himself orally and in writing initially in his first language and later in English.⁵

4.33 Bilingual education in practice has sometimes been criticised as a transfer-to-English program. The Select Committee observed:

As with Aboriginal education generally, bilingual education reflects the tensions which exist between the acquisition of knowledge and skills to allow Aboriginal people to live without disadvantage in the wider society on the one hand, and the retention of Aboriginal culture on the other. Much debate about bilingual education has taken place between those who see bilingual education merely as an effective way of developing literacy in English ('transfer' model of bilingual education) and those who see bilingual education as being an important means of maintaining Aboriginal language and culture while also enabling the acquisition of literacy in English (a 'maintenance' model of bilingual education).⁶

That committee said that the emphasis should clearly be on the maintenance model.

Bicultural or Two- Way Education

4.34 While ideally bilingual education incorporates the history and culture associated with the traditional language it is still taught largely in a non-ATSI way by largely non-ATSI teachers with speakers as teaching assistants. This reliance on non-ATSI teachers to teach Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander matters sends a negative message to children about the status of ATSI people, their authority and the value of their language and culture. In two way schooling ATSI culture has at least equal status with white culture and language. Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander matters are taught by ATSI teachers in an ATSI way usually in a separate domain from the white education part of the school.

⁵ House of Representatives Select Committee on Aboriginal Education, *Aboriginal Education*, Canberra, September 1985, p. 109.

⁶ *Aboriginal Education*, p. 109.

4.35 Stephen Harris describes his book *Two Way Aboriginal Schooling - Education and Cultural Survival* as being about:

the struggle against cultural absorption, the felt need of Aborigines to live in two social worlds, and the search for a design of bicultural school which allows the learning of a second culture without destroying or demeaning the first.⁷

Harris points to the need for a better schooling design because:

Experience has also shown that Aboriginal schools, in spite of much genuine effort, are generally failing to produce students competent in the three Rs to the level of Year 10 high school and beyond. Yet, Aborigines cannot avoid learning Western skills if they are to become less dependent in the Western world.⁸

Evidence to the committee indicates that in many places, competencies in the three R's do not reach year 7 levels.

4.36 In this book Harris draws the following conclusion before setting out the nature and benefits of two-way education:

The nature and degree of the difference between Aboriginal and European culture is so great that the only honest conclusion we can arrive at is that they are largely incompatible. The two cultures are antithetic - consisting of more opposites than similarities. They are warring against each other at their foundations. Recognising and accepting the truth of the term incompatible was for me in this study the point of theoretical liberation and the starting point for a more effective education theory to be applied in Aboriginal schools.⁹

Some people, including many Aborigines, disagree with Harris and see two-way as a way of life where two laws and two cultures run side by side.

4.37 In South Australia, schools in the Pitjantjatjara lands have discontinued bilingual education at the request of communities. Community representatives told the committee that they did not want non-Pitjantjatjara teachers teaching Pitjantjatjara even with the assistance of language speakers. These communities want Pitjantjatjara matters taught in a Pitjantjatjara way. Ms M McColm a witness for the South Australian Government described the situation:

⁷ S Harris, *Two Way Aboriginal Schooling - Education and Cultural Survival*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra 1990, p. 1.

⁸ Harris, 1990, p. 1-2.

⁹ Harris, 1990, p. 9.

"The Anangu Pitjantjatjara education committee, which actually makes decisions about education on the Pitjantjatjara-Yankunytjatjara homelands, decided that they wanted much stronger outcomes in English and that bilingual education had not provided that. So they opted to go for Stephen Harris's idea of domain separation or two-way schooling.

Each community on the Pitjantjatjara-Yankunytjatjara lands decided what form that two-way schooling would take - in other words, how much time during the day the Western domain, or the Anangu, the Aboriginal domain, would be covered and when that time would happen during the school day. It varies from community to community. Some are about 50 per cent and others are about 80 per cent to 20 per cent. Each community made its own decision on that. One of the communities, Kenmore Park, for example, is all English. It has an all English program."¹⁰

This opposition to bilingual education is not an isolated case. Some other areas with strong traditional language have expressed opposition to bilingual education. Parents want the best Western education for their children and for traditional language matters to be kept separate.

4.38 At Yipirinya School in Alice Springs and at Yirrkala school the committee saw and heard about the bicultural education programs they operated. These programs are aimed at overcoming the conflict, outlined above by the Select Committee and by Stephen Harris, between teaching those skills needed in the wider Australian community and the retention and strengthening of students Aboriginal culture and language.

4.39 The committee supports the provision of two-way schooling at a school where this is sought by the relevant Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander community.

Homelands

4.40 The homelands movement is making a contribution to language maintenance. This is where small clan groups move out of larger communities to outstations or homeland centres. This allows them to live a more traditional lifestyle, usually on traditional land. Often the community they move out of comprises several language groups, where it is more difficult to keep each language strong.

4.41 An important feature of homeland education is that the community decides what aspects of ATSI culture will be taught and by whom. This control allows the school to be part of the community rather than a separate non-ATSI

¹⁰ Evidence, pp. 370-371.

institution. School attendances tend to be higher as a result¹¹, although access to full time schooling is often not available.

English as a second dialect

4.42 In many Aboriginal communities as well as many mainstream schools, both urban and rural, Aboriginal students come to school with Aboriginal English as their first language. This is the language of their parents and friends. Unfortunately these students are usually treated as though they speak Standard Australian English incorrectly. The damaging effect this has on their self-esteem and their attitude to school is totally unnecessary and is due to inadequate preparation of teachers.

4.43 Most teachers do not recognise Aboriginal English as a separate dialect nor have they been trained to teach English as a second dialect. Those teachers are also unlikely to understand the socio-linguistic aspects of Aboriginal English and will be less likely to communicate effectively with such speakers.

4.44 Teachers must have accurate and reliable information on the speech of their students as such information is essential to communicating and teaching¹². Teachers must be aware of the differences and similarities between their own speech and that of their students if they are to effectively teach those differences to students speaking another dialect.

4.45 Aboriginal English speaking students do not speak a foreign language and justifiably expect their teacher to understand them. Teachers of such students need to develop "receptive" competence in Aboriginal English so that they can understand their students¹³.

4.46 The learning of Standard Australian English as a second dialect is a difficult task:

Second dialect learners (in contrast with second language learners) have to build up the target language variety (SAE) out of elements they are already using as part of their mother tongue and out of new elements which they have previously not used in their speech. At the same time they must learn to distinguish between elements of their dialect which are also part of SAE and those elements that are not shared and keep the latter out of their speech when speaking SAE.

¹¹ *Aboriginal Education*, 1985, p.115-6.

¹² Kaldor, 1980, p.15.

¹³ Kaldor, 1980, p.15.

These are very difficult processes involving the observation and memorising of fine distinctions¹⁴

4.47 Because of the similarity between the dialects and a lack of awareness of the differences, Aboriginal English speaking students may regard learning English as a pointless and boring exercise¹⁵

4.48 Education authorities need to address these deficiencies. The committee believes these deficiencies have a disproportionately large adverse influence on the school education of those children with Aboriginal English as their only language.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies Curriculum

4.49 The many factors contributing to language loss were described in Chapter 2. One important factor was the level of misunderstanding about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages by most non-ATSI people in Australia. All states and territories have agreed to introduce Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander studies units into their curriculum to promote information and knowledge about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and languages.

4.50 These units vary from state to state and between schools. It is highly desirable that the course content covers the specific language(s) and culture(s) from the school district. As these units are usually taught by mainstream teachers it is inappropriate that they try to teach a language but some word lists and perhaps basic grammar give a greater feel for the subject. The committee was told about several successful programs along these lines which have had a disproportionately positive effect on Aboriginal students and their relations with non-ATSI students. The benefits gained were much greater than might otherwise be expected from the time and resources allocated.

Languages other than English

4.51 In recent years there has been growing pressure for all students to learn a language other than English (LOTE) before leaving school. The second goal of the recently released Australian Language and Literacy Policy is that:

The learning of languages other than English must be substantially expanded and improved to enhance educational outcomes and

¹⁴ R. Eagleson, S. Kaldor and I Malcolm, *English and the Aboriginal Child*, Curriculum Development Centre, Canberra, 1983, p.198.

¹⁵ Eagleson, Kaldor and Malcolm, 1983, p.197-8.

communication within both the Australian and the international community.¹⁶

4.52 While the goal is quite laudable it emphasises the neglect of Aboriginal languages within schools and in the wider community. During the course of the inquiry no Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander language had a curriculum to year 12 level. In fact it was extremely rare to find an ATSI language offered at high school. Torres Strait High School believes that it is close to gaining approval of its Kala Lagaw Ya curriculum to Year 12 level.

4.53 The committee finds it intolerable that while most migrant children with a first language other than English have been able to study that language up to matriculation level, most Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children cannot study their language at high school. As states and territories move to make LOTE compulsory the situation is exacerbated even further. Dr Schmidt cites as an example the NSW Education Department spending \$3000 in 1989 for just one student to sit a Higher School Certificate exam in Estonian. She notes:

In sharp contrast, none of the Aboriginal students in the entire State were provided the opportunity of formally studying an Aboriginal language in the school system, let alone have their language recognised and catered for at matriculation level.¹⁷

4.54 The NSW Government advised the committee that Aboriginal language courses were not currently provided nor included in their strategic plan for Aboriginal education. It said that there were "limited curriculum language resources",¹⁸ that language programs were extremely costly and it was difficult finding fluent speakers with a background in teaching.¹⁹ Despite this the NSW Government pointed to its curriculum reform document *Excellence and Equity* which has a large sector "on languages and language learning because the State is making quite a strong thrust to enhance language learning in schools".²⁰ Secondary students will be required to undertake at least 100 hours of study in years 7-10 under this reform.²¹ It does not include any Aboriginal languages. The same witnesses gave as some of the reasons for low Year 12 retention rates for Aboriginal students:

¹⁶ *Australia's Language*, 1991, p. 14.

¹⁷ Schmidt, 1990, p. 42.

¹⁸ Evidence, p. 16.

¹⁹ Evidence, p. 28.

²⁰ Evidence, p. 17.

²¹ Evidence, p. 19.

"It is a matter of satisfaction with going to school; satisfaction with the curriculum itself; a sense of whether they are achieving or not."²²

4.55 The committee formed the view that the New South Wales Education Department, while articulating its desire to support Aboriginal languages, had no serious intention of undertaking any specific program within the next decade.

4.56 A limited Banjalang language program operated at Tabulam Public School and Lismore High a few years ago under the Commonwealth's Disadvantaged Schools Program resulting from community initiative not that of the Department.²³ NSW has 26% of Australia's Aboriginal population.

4.57 In comparison the Northern Territory Government in addition to running 21 bilingual programs has recently commissioned an extensive survey in one area (the Barkly region) so that:

We, as a Department of Education, would best know how we could respond to what Aboriginal people were requesting in support of Aboriginal languages and Aboriginal culture.²⁴

4.58 The Northern Territory Department of Education acknowledged that the development and ongoing support of Aboriginal language programs is a long term and costly activity.²⁵ The Northern Territory has 15% of Australia's Aboriginal population. Aborigines constitute a very significant proportion of the Northern Territory's population and have many living languages.

4.59 Clearly the resources allocated within education systems in developing curriculum for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language studies have been inadequate. While it may be argued that not many ATSI students go through to Year 12 and some leave before Year 10, it can be equally argued that these students leave because the school does not have enough relevant courses to offer them or is too assimilationist. Resources for language curriculum development are dealt with in Chapter 6.

4.60 The little evidence gained on language programs in TAFE indicated that there had been few programs and that they tended to be sporadic.²⁶ Several people noted that the introduction of courses and their continuity depended on the

²² Evidence, p. 30.

²³ Evidence, p. 18-19.

²⁴ Evidence, p. 59.

²⁵ Evidence, p. S268.

²⁶ Evidence, p. 367.

level of interest of individual course co-ordinators and of individual college administrations. Adult education agencies such as TAFE are suited to language revival or retrieval courses where this is acceptable to the language group. At university level the University of South Australia offers Pitjantjatjara 1, 2 and 3 and Monash University has in the past run courses in Banjalong.

ASSPA

4.61 The Aboriginal Student Support and Parent Awareness Program (ASSPA) is a Commonwealth program which provides funding to school-based parent committees for a range of activities designed to increase school participation and attendance by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. At the same time the programs seeks to develop the responsiveness of schools to the educational needs and aspirations of ATSI students. Funding is provided to schools on the basis of the number of ATSI children enrolled. It is intended that the parent committee decides how the funds are to be spent within the school. While this is the practice in most schools receiving ASSPA money, there are some instances where the principal or head teacher makes these decisions, contrary to the ASSPA provisions.

4.62 A range of language and cultural activities have resulted from ASSPA funding. These include producing language teaching resources and bush trips but not all activities are language related. Localisation of decision making has yielded activities suited to the particular school. However, the formation of parent committees has been far more beneficial than anticipated. DEET admitted that in many cases: "They have become very powerful, much more powerful bodies in their own right than we had ever anticipated that they would be."²⁷ The success of many of these committees has been in bringing the Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander community and the school together, providing them with real decision making powers and building a better mutual understanding. This success has not been uniform across all schools where ASSPA committees operate as some schools have been less receptive of ATSI parent involvement or there are barriers to free communication between the school and the committee.

Other Language Activities

Language Recording by linguists

4.63 Since James Cook beached the Endeavour at present day Cooktown attempts have been made by European settlers and their descendants to record what they can of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages. However, with few exceptions these efforts have been sporadic and piecemeal. While some languages have had quite extensive work done in compiling dictionaries, analysing grammar rules, sound or video recording of speech, story recording, etc, most others have had

²⁷ Evidence, p. 409-10.

no work done on them. There has never been any systematic effort to undertake a program or recording of languages. It has been left to the interests of individual researchers and sponsoring institutions as to which languages would be studied.

4.64 In recent decades Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people themselves have sought professional assistance with language work and have increasingly undertaken some of this work in the community. While the number of ATSI people undertaking linguistic training is growing, it is insufficient to meet the demand. There remains a reliance on non-ATSI linguists and a shortage of reliable employment, funds and other opportunities to do field work. Linguistic training and the need to train more ATSI people is discussed in Chapter 5.

AIATSIS

4.65 The Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) based in Canberra conducts and commissions research in ATSI studies including languages. As well as making grants to external organisations and individuals it commissions research and conducts special projects mainly in the form of Visiting Research Fellowships. It was through one of these fellowships that Dr Annette Schmidt undertook the survey work which resulted in her report *The Loss of Australia's Aboriginal Language Heritage*.

4.66 As well as publishing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander studies material the Institute maintains an extensive archive including records of language work undertaken over many years, and audio and video tapes of language speakers. In many instances these are the only recordings of languages which may now be extinct or nearing extinction. These resources are made available to researchers and are increasingly being used by ATSI communities undertaking work on their own language.

4.67 Prior to the establishment of the National Aboriginal Languages Program (NALP) in 1987, AIATSIS was the main funding body for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language maintenance activities, albeit on a much smaller scale than NALP given its more limited funding. Grants are made on the basis of applications approved by the AIATSIS Council.

4.68 Recently AIATSIS received funding for a national project to support dictionary and word list production. This project utilises computer software and templates to assist in dictionary preparation by language communities.

IAD

4.69 The Institute for Aboriginal Development (IAD) in Alice Springs is an Aboriginal controlled, community based organisation. It is primarily an adult education and resource centre as well as providing research facilities to the community. The Institute conducts a considerable amount of language work. It co-

ordinates the local interpreter service which is virtually the only Aboriginal interpreter service in Australia. (See paragraph 4.81)

4.70 The Institute trains interpreters, translators and literacy workers. It also provides cross cultural training. A number of major dictionary projects are being undertaken in Pitjantjatjara/Yankunytjatjara, Alyawarre, Eastern Arrernte, Western Anmatyerre and Warlpiri.

4.71 The IAD functions as a regional Aboriginal language resource centre but is unusual in having a strong in-house research capacity. It has links with the Centre for Aboriginal Languages and Literacy (CALL) at Batchelor and the Northern Territory Department of Education. IAD provides language curriculum development, language teaching and other help to schools in the area and two linguists from the Department of Education are based at IAD.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Media

4.72 A range of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander media has developed in the last decade or so to meet the needs of ATSI people which are not met by the mainstream media. ATSIIC advises that over 30 ATSI groups are producing programming for public radio with about 180 hours on-air a week.

4.73 The Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association (CAAMA) provides a range of media services including television through its Imparja station, radio and music recording and sales. The Imparja satellite footprint covers all of central and much of Northern Australia. Imparja has a commercial licence and broadcasts predominantly mainstream television programs. However, it does broadcast approximately one hour a week of Aboriginal material including material in language.

4.74 Only one public broadcasting license has been granted for an Aboriginal special interest service. This is 8 KIN in Alice Springs operated by CAAMA. 8 KIN broadcasts over several different frequency services and now covers the entire area serviced by Imparja television through a "piggy back" FM carrier on the Imparja satellite signal. A considerable amount of 8 KIN material is in language including much Aboriginal music both traditional and contemporary. The committee believes that community radio stations providing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander programming offer considerable benefits to wider Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander audiences and should be further encouraged.

4.75 The Broadcasting for Remote Aboriginal Community Scheme (BRACS) was designed to give remote communities access to and control of local television and radio services in their community. These small scale stations allow the broadcast of locally produced material, including material in language, as well as access to mainstream radio and television programs from satellite broadcasts. They can broadcast in local languages in communities where English is very limited but more importantly they can broadcast programs to strengthen language in

communities where that language is not strong. These facilities provide a useful means of promoting Aboriginal languages utilising media which are usually associated with language loss. The power of the media can be used to enhance the authority and prestige of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages they broadcast. The committee was surprised to learn at one community, where three traditional languages were used and widely understood, that the BRACS station did not carry any programs in these languages.

4.76 Included in the BRACS equipment are video and radio production facilities. The committee saw excellent local productions of community activity and news magazine programs which highlighted the value of BRACS. Maintenance of equipment and training of replacement staff were common BRACS problems encountered by the committee on visits to BRACS communities. Where BRACS stations lack trained staff, or production equipment is not working, mainstream programs only are broadcast. The broadcast of culturally inappropriate programs without any local content defeats the main objectives in establishing BRACS.

4.77 The committee recommends that:

the Commonwealth ensure that trainee BRACS operators are encouraged during training to make greater use of local languages in their programming. The program content should continue to be decided by the community; (Recommendation 3)

the Commonwealth should review the existing resources available through BRACS so that greater use can be made of this facility. The ongoing training of operators and maintenance arrangements for BRACS should also be reviewed to maximise their effectiveness. (Recommendation 4)

Interpreter services

4.78 Interpreter services are necessary for a variety of fairly obvious reasons. They are an essential part of language maintenance if traditional languages are not to be obliterated by the dominant language.²⁸ Unfortunately there is an almost complete lack of ATSI interpreter services available. A telephone interpreting service operating 24 hours a day and widely advertised by the Commonwealth Government does not provide interpreters of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

²⁸ Evidence, p. S259.

languages. This is despite its advertised injunction: "If you have difficulty communicating in English ring the Translating and Interpreting Service."

4.79 This is a prime example of the insensitivity of a government department to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. It continues the denigration of ATSI people and their languages by behaving as though they do not exist.

4.80 The White Paper *Australia's Language, The Australian Language and Literacy Policy*²⁹ proposes the establishment of a national language services organisation under the Department of Immigration, Local Government and Ethnic Affairs (DILGEA). The Minister for Immigration, Local Government and Ethnic Affairs advised the committee that the national language services organisation is now unlikely to go ahead due to insufficient support. The committee does not believe that DILGEA is an appropriate body to provide an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander interpreter service as it has demonstrated no commitment to ATSI languages. The committee believes that the interpreter service should be a separate specialist service under ATSIC.

4.81 The only formally established interpreter service is that co-ordinated by IAD in Alice Springs and obviously only covers Central Australian languages. In South Australia interpreters are provided through the Language Services Commission of the Office of Multicultural and Ethnic Affairs. While non-English speaking ATSI people elsewhere in Australia probably have access to someone who can translate or interpret for them they may not always be accessible and are unlikely to be trained³⁰. More to the point, non-language speakers may not know how to contact such interpreters, particularly in an emergency. The Department of Social Security provides interpreters at offices in Alice Springs, Broome, Port Hedland and Brisbane³¹. Interpreting requires skills over and above being fluent in the two languages involved and trained interpreters should be used wherever possible. In hospitals and court cases, for example, a trained interpreter is essential.

4.82 There are many situations where Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people can be disadvantaged or harmed through being misunderstood. For example ATSI health workers often untrained in interpreting constantly provide the link in communities between ATSI patients with little or no English, and English speaking medical and nursing staff. In these cases poor communication can result in poor patient treatment or in extreme cases, serious harm. At the very least, it results in ineffective health service delivery.

²⁹ J. Dawkins, *Australia's Language - The Australian Language and Literacy Policy*, AGPS, Canberra, 1991, p.20.

³⁰ Evidence, p.S659.

³¹ Schmidt, 1990, p.76.

4.83 In the same way Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community council leaders often have the responsibility of explaining important English language documents to community people and of interpreting for visiting officials. Misrepresentation and misunderstanding can severely disadvantage individuals or the whole community during negotiations with officials and the signing of contracts with outside agencies and government departments.

4.84 The IAD outlined the kinds of translating work they are asked to do:

When people need interpreters or translating work they get in touch with us. They are people like government departments, DSS, the hospital, the gaol, land councils, welfare, mining companies, the Hettie Perkins Nursing Home, CES, people that come up to do filming and things like that - anybody doing work with Aboriginal people who cannot understand what they are saying. The kinds of interpreting we do are medical, legal, interpreting in the courts, State and federal elections, and education interpreting.³²

4.85 The only two institutions which train interpreters and translators in Aboriginal languages are CALL at Batchelor College and IAD. The dearth of interpreter services has resulted in a number of Batchelor graduates being unable to get work as interpreters despite an obvious need for their services. This situation underlines the attitude to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages in many quarters. That is that they are a poor relation and if a non-fluent English speaker is not understood it doesn't matter. Interpreting is expected to be done for nothing and if it is to be charged for then it will be dispensed with. The latter attitude was claimed to prevail in some hospitals and government departments.

4.86 The training and employment of sufficient interpreters will provide a number of benefits. It will lift the barriers to communication which handicap many Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders in their dealings with Standard Australian English speakers and vice versa. It will relieve some of the intense assimilatory pressure which continues in the absence of such services. Better recognition will be given to ATSI languages and their speakers. Employment opportunities will be increased within communities for trained people. At present these people are being asked to work without payment.³³ Information directed to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities will be more effective if it is translated into a more appropriate language. This includes Aboriginal English as well as traditional languages and creoles.

4.87 There are a number of situations where accurate information needs to be conveyed. The clearest example is in the courtroom. Several submissions pointed to the difficulties Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experience with courtroom processes and courtroom language. The language difficulties overlay even

³² Evidence, p. 306.

³³ Evidence, p. 376.

greater cultural differences. It would appear that the judicial system has not been able to satisfactorily overcome these difficulties.³⁴ One researcher has pointed out that courtroom language may itself be a separate dialect from Standard Australian English.³⁵ Regular participants such as magistrates often talk in a low, even unclear tone and use the specialised register of the court which is unnecessarily obscure to many participants, not just ATSI witnesses, such as addressing a person as "defendant."³⁶

4.88 Even with speakers of Aboriginal English evidence can be misunderstood. A number of features of court questioning are quite foreign to many ATSI people. Examples include: direct questioning (especially where the questioner is known to already know the answer), exact quantification of time, number, direction etc, talking about or naming dead people and either-or questions.

4.89 Equally a number of Aboriginal communication styles are frequently misunderstood in court. Examples include avoidance of eye contact and periods of silence even when asked a question. Both are normal in Aboriginal conversation but taken for rudeness, evasion or even guilt in a courtroom. Another example is the response "I don't know" or "I don't remember" which Eades points out is often not a statement of the speaker's knowledge or memory but a comment on the communication strategy being used which would translate as "This is not an appropriate way for me to provide information of this nature."³⁷

4.90 The most frequent cause for misunderstanding in Aboriginal courtroom communication is the tendency known as "gratuitous concurrence" in which a speaker tends to agree with the last proposition put by the other speaker. This can be in response to an either-or question or one seeking agreement to a proposition. It has been suggested that this tendency has been exploited by some court practitioners. This situation continues even though the linguist Strehlow pointed out in 1936:

the white man putting the questions will usually receive answers which are calculated either to avoid trouble or to excite his pleasure: he will be given the information which he desires to get.³⁸

4.91 Access to interpreters is not straightforward, even when one is present in court, if the witness is moderately fluent in English. The need for accurate

³⁴ Evidence, p. S677.

³⁵ D Eades, "A case of communicative clash: Aboriginal English and the legal system", p.4 in J Gibbon (ed), *Language and the Law*, Longmans, (forthcoming).

³⁶ Eades (forthcoming), p. 15.

³⁷ Eades, (forthcoming), p. 10.

³⁸ Eades, (forthcoming), p. 12.

evidence to be given would be best served by evidence being given in the language in which the person is most fluent. A submission describing a recent court case in the Northern Territory outlined how a lawyer objected when a witness sought the assistance of an interpreter part way through his evidence. The objection was disallowed.³⁹

4.92 A report by the Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department, *Access to interpreters in the Australian legal system*, found:

In their dealings with the legal system, Aborigines may be disadvantaged to a considerably greater extent than many migrants. For a variety of reasons, Aborigines have a disproportionate contact with the criminal law. Problems faced by Aborigines include racism, cultural differences, illiteracy and language problems. In *Fry v Jennings*, Muirhead J stated:

Daily experience in this Territory illustrates the difficulties Aboriginal people experience in giving evidence in Courts, difficulties compounded by the lack of comprehension of issues, language barriers and at times, embarrassment and fear.⁴⁰

4.93 In another case in 1980 where evidence had been mutilated by language difficulties Justice Muirhead observed:

I was moved to request that the depositions of the girl principally involved be referred to the Solicitor-General. They illustrate graphically what has been known for so long, namely that without aid of trained and skilled court interpreters in Aboriginal languages, the administration of justice in the Northern Territory remains sadly impeded.⁴¹

4.94 The Attorney-General's Department report found that systems for ensuring the availability of competent interpreters for Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders in the legal system are not well developed.⁴²

4.95 The Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody made two recommendations on interpreters in court. They were:

That legislation in all jurisdictions should provide that where an Aboriginal defendant appears before a Court and there is doubt as to

³⁹ Evidence, p. S684-6.

⁴⁰ Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department, *Access to interpreters in the Australian legal system*, AGPS, April 1991, p. 127.

⁴¹ *Access to interpreters in the Australian legal system*, 1991, p. 133.

⁴² *Access to interpreters in the Australian legal system*, 1991, p. 133.

whether the person has the ability to fully understand proceedings in the English language and is fully able to express himself or herself in the English language, the court be obliged to satisfy itself that the person has that ability. Where there is doubt or reservations as to these matters proceedings should not continue until a competent interpreter is provided to the person without cost to that person. (Recommendation 99).

That governments should take more positive steps to recruit and train Aboriginal people as court staff and interpreters in locations where significant numbers of Aboriginal people appear before the courts. (Recommendation 100).

4.96 Recommendations about the training of interpreters are made at the end of Chapter 5. The committee recommends that:

the Commonwealth undertake a campaign to ensure that communities and agencies are aware of the need to employ trained Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language interpreters where appropriate; (Recommendation 5)

agencies reliant on Commonwealth funding be funded for the employment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language interpreters where appropriate; (Recommendation 6)

government agencies use interpreters when talking to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities where Standard Australian English is not the vernacular; (Recommendation 7)

government agencies use translators where appropriate to ensure information they send to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities is delivered effectively; (Recommendation 8)

government agencies pay a skill loading to staff, other than interpreters, who have interpreter training and who may be called upon to interpret in their normal work; (Recommendation 9)

the Commonwealth establish under ATSIC a separate national interpreter service for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages to ensure that people have reliable access to trained interpreters and translators. The service should be separately funded. Because of the number and geographic distribution of language speakers, a network service utilising existing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language resources where possible, would be most appropriate; (Recommendation 10)

in implementing recommendation 99 of the Report of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody a stronger obligation be imposed on courts to establish a person's fluency in Standard Australian English in determining the need for an interpreter. This would include translating Aboriginal English where required. (Recommendation 11)

CHAPTER 5

PROFESSIONAL TRAINING

Teacher Training

5.1 Several aspects of general teacher training continue to have an adverse impact on the education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and the maintenance of their first language. As discussed in Chapter 2, language and cultural issues are closely related. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communication and social interaction styles are usually not comprehended by teachers without appropriate training and consequently such teachers cannot be effective in teaching ATSI students. Susan Kaldor and Ian Malcolm outline some of the sociolinguistic patterns of Aboriginal speech which teachers need to be aware of:

Aboriginal children, even those who speak only English, are heirs to traditional patterns of speech use of great subtlety and complexity. In Aboriginal society all aspects of speech use are carefully controlled, with the controls extending to who may speak to whom, about what topics, when, in whose presence and in what way. Speech restraints may be associated with kinship relationships, name taboos (associated with deceased persons) and with traditionally restrained subject matter. Speech behaviour may also be affected by a different understanding of group relationships. For example, it may be unacceptable for a child to walk across a conversing group or for an addresser not to be at the same (physical) level as the addressee, while it may be quite acceptable for an addressee not to respond to a question or for an audience to be inattentive while being addressed.

Aboriginal children are much more likely to talk freely when they have the initiative and when they are free to contribute speech without being singled out. In their play, they are often highly verbal and in certain settings will tell stories to one another for hours on end. They are, however, highly sensitive to 'shame' which may be occasioned by being made unduly prominent in the presence of their peers. They also may take time to adapt to unfamiliar addressees and conventions of speech use.¹

5.2 While many schools now offer suitable language programs some children coming to school with an ATSI language are still being taught only in English. Children are rejected by this lack of acceptance of their language and because some

¹ S Kaldor and I G Malcolm, "Aboriginal Children's English - Education Implications", in Michael Clyne (ed), *Australia, meeting place of languages*, Pacific Linguistics, 1985, p. 236.

teachers still denigrate ATSI language whether it is a traditional language, a creole or Aboriginal English. Many children speaking Aboriginal English are told they (and therefore their parents and friends) are not talking properly and yet the differences from the "proper way" of Standard Australian English are not always clearly evident to them.

5.3 The initial rejection experienced by a student when their language is not recognised nor their home culture respected has serious long term effects. Teachers need to be trained to recognise Aboriginal English as a separate dialect from Standard Australian English. In-service training should be provided to enable them to teach Standard Australian English as a second dialect. This includes the provision of appropriate teaching materials.

5.4 The committee believes these inadequacies have a disproportionately large negative effect on both the attitudes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and their parents to schooling and on the students' subsequent success in gaining adequate Western skills through education. As students' work is often assessed largely on written material a lack of awareness by teachers may produce very inaccurate results for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

5.5 Many of these problems are deficiencies within the education system or within particular schools and should not all be laid at the feet of teachers; particularly those fresh from pre-service training. Nonetheless the committee believes basic teacher training should adequately prepare teachers for the range of students they are likely to teach and the range of conditions they may teach under.

5.6 Most preservice teacher training does not provide adequate preparation for the possibility of teaching Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander children. As the House of Representatives Select Committee on Aboriginal Education in 1985 noted:

Teachers selected to serve in schools with significant Aboriginal enrolment are often not adequately prepared for the experience or supported in the school. The school staffing policies in many States means that young and inexperienced teachers are often posted to remote, traditional Aboriginal communities and to rural schools with high Aboriginal enrolments to the detriment of the students of Aboriginal communities and of the teachers themselves.²

5.7 Adequate preservice training is essential as new teachers continue to be posted to remote schools and there is a high turnover.³ It must be remembered that the majority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people live in urban areas and

² *Aboriginal Education*, 1985, p. 190. The Aboriginal Education inquiry was conducted by the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs in the 32nd and 33rd Parliaments and completed by the Select Committee in the 34th Parliament.

³ Evidence, pp. 230, 372.

the committee believes that few teachers in their first three years of teaching will teach in schools having no ATSI students.

5.8 The Select Committee said:

pre-service courses should ensure that all new teachers have a general background in Aboriginal culture, the history of Aboriginal people and their place in modern Australian society. The purpose of these courses should be to ensure that all teachers are aware of the special educational needs of Aboriginal students and have adequate understanding of the context in which the needs arise. Such courses should not be regarded as specialist qualifications in Aboriginal education. They also should not be regarded as special elective units on Aboriginal education, but should be seen as an integrated part of the teacher training program for all teachers to prepare them to teach in a multi-cultural Australia.⁴

and went on to recommend that:

all teachers should be adequately prepared by pre-service training to appreciate the special needs of Aboriginal students. This should include general background in Aboriginal culture, the history of Aboriginal people and their place in modern Australian society. This presentation should aim to ensure that future teachers are trained to function sensitively and knowledgeably in cross-cultural situations.⁵

5.9 The Select Committee pointed out that as well as better preservice training there should be more specialised induction training given to teachers before they are posted to more traditional communities. The need for better in-service teacher training programs was also stressed. The report canvassed the idea that teachers in isolated ATSI communities should be treated as requiring specialist training. The present committee supports this view. One specialist skill which is necessary for teachers in communities where the vernacular is not English is that of teaching English as a second language.

5.10 The recommendations of this 1985 Report have not been fully implemented and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education continues to lag behind that of the wider Australian community. This applies to ATSI children in major urban centres as well as in rural and remote schools.

5.11 Despite a number of improvements in the delivery of education services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, education outcomes continue to fall well below the average for all students. School attendance levels and the number of years schooling completed remain unacceptably low. Competencies gained

⁴ *Aboriginal Education*, 1985, p. 192.

⁵ *Aboriginal Education*, 1985, p. 194.

in the 3Rs are inadequate to ensure the degree of independence within the wider Australian society sought by ATSI students and their parents⁶.

5.12 Where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students do succeed it is often at some cost to their ATSI identity. In the worst cases ATSI students lose part of their ATSI identity and self-esteem but also fail to gain sufficient Western skills from the education process to escape dependency on the Western system. The committee believes that the provision of a basic education is an essential human right that should be available to all children and young people in Australia. As a further human right, education should be available to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in a way which reinforces rather than suppresses or contradicts their unique cultural identity. This includes an understanding and respect for their home language.

5.13 The committee recognises that many demands are made for subjects to be incorporated into basic teacher training. However, the lack of success of the current system and the significant negative impact inadequate training has on teacher effectiveness leads the committee to repeat the recommendation of the Select Committee on teacher training but with an additional emphasis on Aboriginal English.

⁶ Harris, 1990, pp. 1-5.

5.14 The committee recommends that:

the Minister for Higher Education and Employment Services in co-operation with the relevant state and territory ministers ensure that:

all teachers are adequately prepared by pre-service training to appreciate the special needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. This should include a general background in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, the history of ATSI people and their place in modern Australian society. This preparation should ensure that future teachers are trained to function sensitively and knowledgeably in cross-cultural situations and are aware of the socio linguistic differences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students including those speaking Aboriginal English; (Recommendation 12)

more specialised training is provided to teachers before they are posted to more traditional communities. This should be followed up with in-service training to provide further specialist skills development while working in communities and other remote schools; (Recommendation 13)

teachers in remote community schools where the vernacular is other than English should have prior training in teaching English as a second language. Where teachers with specialist training in English as a second language are not available, departments should develop and implement appropriate in-service training. In-service training is needed for teaching assistants as well. (Recommendation 14)

5.15 The committee acknowledges that there are many highly skilled non-ATSI teachers with specialised teaching skills and well-developed cross cultural awareness who are involved in the teaching of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. However, throughout the inquiry the committee heard of education system deficiencies and of teacher training inadequacies affecting the teaching of ATSI students in a wide variety of educational settings.

5.16 Cross cultural awareness is essential for those non-ATSI teachers teaching in community schools or in schools attended by students from more traditional ATSI communities. Education departments advised the committee that they provided cross cultural awareness programs for teachers being posted to such schools, if time permitted. It appears that in many cases teachers do not have adequate notice of their posting to undertake these courses.

5.17 Developing cross cultural awareness would help to avoid the hidden

curriculum in most non-ATSI teaching. The hidden curriculum is that which is imparted to students through the school experience, although it may not be deliberately taught. It includes values, priorities, attitudes and what is regarded as normal. Where teachers are unaware of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander rules and values their behaviour tells children that the rules are not important and can be broken⁷. This can also apply to the values attached to language and the traditions supported by that language. A teacher's attitude to language would be crucial where the language transmission gap in a community is occurring in the generation currently at school. Stephen Harris recommends that teachers in traditional communities:

need to make it clear over time that what the children are learning about Western culture they are learning because it is needed for surviving in the Western domain, not because it is intrinsically better or more valuable.⁸

5.18 In strong language areas, students come to school with an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander language as their first language. Teachers of these students need to be trained in teaching English as a second language (ESL) and should preferably be fluent in the students' language. Ideally the teachers would be bicultural being proficient in both European and ATSI cultures. Unfortunately the number of ATSI teachers remains grossly inadequate.

Training of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers

5.19 The importance of having Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers in ATSI schools has a much wider educational significance than just this committee's interest in language maintenance. However, a school's support for language depends on relationships with the community, the teachers' understanding and respect for the language and the rapport between teachers and children. As these are generally going to be strongest with ATSI teachers some examination of the opportunities for teacher training for Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders has been made by the committee.

5.20 The number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers in community schools is much less than the number of non-ATSI teachers with the proportion of ATSI teachers in other schools being even lower. Stephen Harris observes:

For example, in the Northern Territory in 1989 there were 390 teaching positions in Aboriginal schools, thirty of them filled by qualified Aboriginal people. With a dozen or so Aborigines graduating with Diplomas of Teaching

⁷ Harris, 1990, p. 8.

⁸ Harris, 1990, p. 145.

from Batchelor College each year and even as this rate increases it will be some time before there will be sufficient Aboriginal teachers to fill all the positions.⁹

5.21 The need for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers is greatest in schools with high proportions of ATSI students. The message given to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in community schools where the teachers are predominantly or exclusively non-ATSI, is that ATSI people and ATSI ways are inadequate and lacking in authority. This perception by students and their parents and the conflicts that this perception raises, limit the effectiveness of the school from the outset. Where appropriate, teachers should be fully fluent in the traditional language of the community. Such teachers are almost invariably Aborigines or Torres Strait Islanders.

5.22 Considerable efforts have been made by governments to increase the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers. It is hoped that these teachers will bring a greater bicultural awareness to schools, their presence will improve perceptions and relations with the community and that they will serve as role models for students.

5.23 The poor schooling received by most Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students means that most do not leave school with tertiary entry qualifications. However, from a very low base the number of ATSI students gaining tertiary entry has been climbing steeply. The number of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders graduating as teachers is also increasing but is still well short of meeting the demand. ATSI people gaining a degree often have available to them more attractive employment options than teaching.

5.24 Not all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teacher graduates return to their community, either through choice or because no vacancies exist at the time. A number of ATSI teachers leave teaching. Some leave to have a family, some to take up other employment. The skills gained through tertiary training are attractive to employers both within the ATSI community and in the wider community. Market forces will continue to divert ATSI teachers from teaching given salary relativities and the limited availability of qualified Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.¹⁰

5.25 The Select Committee on Aboriginal Education endorsed the National Aboriginal Education Committee's target of 1,000 trained Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers employed in schools by 1990.¹¹ While this objective has not been met for some of the reasons set out above, the committee believes that

⁹ Harris, 1990, p. 157.

¹⁰ Evidence, p. 234-6.

¹¹ *Aboriginal Education*, 1985, pp. 177-8.

priority should continue to be given to raising the number of ATSI teachers in school.

5.26 Tertiary institutions have improved access for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students by introducing enclave programs, special entry provisions and bridging courses. These programs have assisted mainly urban ATSI trainee teachers but are usually unsuitable for students from remote or traditional communities. The committee believes that tertiary institutions need to address the question of more suitable programs for the latter category of students.

5.27 The committee recommends that:

the Minister for Higher Education and Employment Services in cooperation with the relevant state and territory ministers and tertiary institutions ensure that tertiary institutions provide more suitable programs for students from remote or traditional communities, either through support for students while residing in urban areas or the provision of external studies.

(Recommendation 15)

5.28 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students from traditional areas are often reluctant to move to urban areas while they undertake tertiary studies. Those who do move often find it difficult to continue in their studies away from their family and community support. Several states and the Northern Territory provide remote area teacher training programs. Most of the training takes place within the student's community with some use of external studies. The courses have a flexible training and certification program with multiple exit points. As well as providing a full career structure the courses also provide strong community-specific qualifications.

5.29 If the number of teachers fluent in a traditional language is to be increased then remote area teacher education (RATE) programs are the most likely providers of those teachers. Graduates of these programs are far more likely to stay and teach in their own community and are less likely to experience the high attrition rates for ATSI teachers elsewhere.¹² On its visit to Batchelor College the committee met students from many different language groups who were keen to go back to their communities as teachers with a key objective being to strengthen and maintain the community language. Many of the trainees are teaching assistants with many years of experience. Remote areas courses allow these people to build on their experience and to have a career path. Evidence in the Northern Territory indicated that literacy workers otherwise earned little more than unemployment

¹² Evidence, p. 234.

benefits.¹³ The Northern Territory now has a career path for literacy workers but unfortunately, it is not articulated with teacher training and teaching.

5.30 Remote area programs are being well utilised in the Northern Territory and South Australia but not in Western Australia or Queensland. In Western Australia the only Traditional Aboriginal Teacher Education (TATE) program is at Noonkanbah. However, a similar number of Western Australian students is being taught under the Batchelor College RATE program at Warralong under a private arrangement. The committee believes that access to remote area training courses should be increased, particularly in Western Australia and Queensland.

5.31 The committee recommends that:

the Minister for Higher Education and Employment Services ensure that adequate resources are made available to training institutions providing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander remote area teacher education to meet the growing demand for such training and to ensure the maintenance of accreditation standards. (Recommendation 16)

5.32 Questions were raised as to the standard of graduates from training institutions such as Batchelor. Several points need to be made. Graduating teachers from all teacher training bodies from around Australia are not fully proficient on graduation. They continue to learn "at the chalk face" how to put their largely theoretical training into personal practice. They are also expected to gain further training through in-service courses. Students at institutions such as Batchelor already have strong skills that teacher training bodies are not capable of producing. They will have a much stronger grasp of traditional values, behaviour and ways of learning. They will have greater skills in communicating with the school community and be better able to delineate the boundaries of Western education and traditional matters. They will be better able to accept the community's right to decide on ATSI matters within the school.

5.33 Nonetheless the committee believes that these institutions should maintain adequate standards if the long term interests of the school community is to be served. The quality of their teaching will be a significant factor affecting the extent to which their students and the community gain self determination and retain their cultural freedom. The committee is not saying that there should be any reduction in the supportive environment of these institutions nor in their sensitivity

¹³ Evidence, pp. 67-8.

to community obligations during training but rather these should not result in lower standards of graduates.

Linguistic training

5.34 As noted earlier in the report there is a shortage of trained ATSI linguists in some locations and a heavy reliance on non-ATSI linguists. Dr Annette Schmidt states:

A serious problem encountered by many language maintenance projects is lack of skilled staff to develop, organise and run the program. In particular, there is a striking shortage of trained teacher-linguists (possessing both teaching and linguistic skills in Aboriginal languages). It must be stressed that many 'teacher-linguists' employed by State education departments do not have linguistic training or experience. The term is often a euphemism for teachers who work on Aboriginal language programs.¹⁴

5.35 While there is a strong demand for linguistic training by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people there are only two tertiary linguistic training programs for ATSI people in Australia. These are Pundulmurra College at South Hedland in Western Australian and Batchelor College in the Northern Territory.

5.36 Pundulmurra College began the Certificate of Aboriginal Language Work in 1990 to train ATSI people in literacy, literature production and oral language teaching methods. Most of the courses are on-site, and are designed to train ATSI language speakers in the necessary skills and techniques to operate school and community language programs.

5.37 From its establishment in 1974 until becoming part of Batchelor College in 1989, the School of Australian Languages (SAL)¹⁵ was the only institution in Australia providing linguistic training for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander speakers. This training enabled them to devise orthographies and write grammars of their own languages. Language speakers are trained in literacy work, transcription, linguistic analysis, translation and interpreting. Staffing and student numbers at SAL were reduced in the mid 1980s and on current growth rates CALL will not reach similar student numbers until 1993. CALL recognises the large demand for linguistic training and seeks to provide on-site training along similar lines to remote area teacher training programs, using tutors living in the community.

5.38 The committee strongly supports the on-site training of language teachers and linguists. It offers similar advantages to the on-site training of

¹⁴ Schmidt, 1990, p. 86.

¹⁵ Now called the Centre for Australian Languages and Linguists (CALL).

teachers in that students are already skilled in the community language. Units taught in the community such as recording, analysing and documenting of the language are community specific, overcoming the usual problem of transfer of general theory to particular community practice.

5.39 The capacity of Pundulmurra and CALL to meet the linguistic training needs of traditional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities is severely limited. Dr Schmidt observes:

There is a sad lack of accessible training courses for Aboriginal people in the fields of linguistic analysis, language teaching, media and interpreting skills, despite the fact that such training is essential for Aboriginal control and participation in language maintenance activities.¹⁶

5.40 The only institutions providing ATSI interpreter training are CALL at Batchelor College and the Institute for Aboriginal Development (IAD) in Alice Springs. As discussed in Chapter 4 there is a dearth of interpreter services available for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people especially when compared with those available for other languages. Interpreter training should also be provided by the same institutions offering other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language training.

5.41 While graduating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers are virtually all assured of employment, language workers and interpreters are far less certain of employment despite the urgent need for their services. Training in these areas must therefore be co-ordinated with prospective employers and, where appropriate, employer funding agencies.

5.42 The National Authority for the Accreditation of Translators and Interpreters (NAATI) has various levels of accreditation depending on training, language proficiency etc. As the most skilled Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander interpreters usually do not have degrees they are limited in the NAATI level they can be recognised at and consequently the level of remuneration they receive, for example when working in courts. The most experienced interpreters are at present limited to Level 2 despite frequently undertaking work of a higher level. The committee recognises the difficulties of examining people in ATSI languages where independent peer review is not available. However, the committee believes that until a wider review network can be established for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language workers, provision should be made by NAATI for a limited time to allow people with demonstrably strong experience to be accepted at the appropriate higher level.

¹⁶ Schmidt, 1990, p. 87.

5.43 The committee recommends that:

the Minister for Higher Education and Employment Services in co-operation with the relevant state and territory ministers and teacher training institutions ensure that:

- . the availability of language teacher and linguistics training to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people be substantially increased (Recommendation 17)
- . additional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander training bodies, particularly those with experience in providing remote area teacher training programs, be encouraged to offer on-site language teacher and linguistic training (Recommendation 18)
- . Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language training institutions should also provide interpreter training (Recommendation 19)
- . language teacher, linguistics and interpreter training should be undertaken in co-ordination with prospective employers to ensure graduates will be employed (Recommendation 20)

5.44 The committee further recommends that:

the Minister for Immigration, Local Government and Ethnic Affairs ensure that:

- . NAATI accreditation procedures for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language interpreters and translators are reviewed to better recognise demonstrated experience and not necessarily require tertiary qualifications as a pre-requisite. (Recommendation 21)

CHAPTER 6

WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE

History of policy and programs

6.1 Apart from some very occasional exceptions where Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander languages were recognised, languages recorded or some missions taught in language, official attitudes to ATSI languages since European settlement were those of repression. These attitudes and official discouragement continued until the 1970s. Dr Annette Schmidt characterises three periods of government attitudes and policies on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages:

- the "crunch point" of harsh assimilatory pressure in which ATSI language and identity were largely denigrated and repressed from 1788 until the 1970s;
- the beginning of recognition and support for some ATSI languages in the 1970s through bilingual education and other institutions;
- the resurgence in ATSI language and awareness and language maintenance efforts in ATSI communities in the 1980s.¹

6.2 One of the first programs established which gave recognition to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages was bilingual education in some community schools where the children's first language was an Aboriginal one. Bilingual education began in some South Australian schools in the late 1960s and in some Northern Territory schools from 1973. In 1984 the Senate Standing Committee on Education and the Arts produced a report *A National Language Policy*, one chapter of which dealt with ATSI languages. The report recommended, among other things, that an accurate assessment be made of the health of ATSI languages, the extension of two-way schools and bilingual education and better training of teachers both ATSI and non-ATSI.²

6.3 The Government responded to the Senate report in 1987 with the report *National Policy on Languages* by J Lo Bianco. The Lo Bianco report was also supportive of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages by acknowledging and affirming that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages are the indigenous

¹ Schmidt, 1990, p. 37.

² A full list of the Senate Committee's recommendations are at Appendix 5.

languages of Australia and explicitly declared the right of use, acceptance and respect.³ A major objective of the National Policy on Languages (NPL) was "to stimulate, co-ordinate and initiate significant long and short term activity to assist in the preservation, continued use and appreciation of and salvage work on Aboriginal language."⁴ The Prime Minister announced his full endorsement of the National Policy on Languages in April 1987 and in June of that year Cabinet voted a budget towards its implementation.

6.4 In December 1987 the Australian Advisory Council on Languages and Multicultural Education (AACLAME), was announced. The Council was the advisory body with oversight of the implementation of the National Policy on Languages.

6.5 It was under the framework of the NPL and AACLAME that the National Aboriginal Languages Program (NALP) was established in 1987. The National Aboriginal Languages Program which is described in detail below, has been criticised for failing to follow the goals of the National Policy on Languages.

6.6 In 1985 the House of Representatives Select Committee on Aboriginal Education tabled its report Aboriginal Education. While covering the full range of educational issues from pre-school to tertiary education some coverage was given to bilingual education. That committee recommended that bilingual and bicultural programs be adequately resourced and run in close consultation with the community. It also recommended the extension of bilingual and bicultural programs to those communities seeking them and having a sufficient number of speakers to support a program.

6.7 In April 1988 an Aboriginal Education Policy Task Force was appointed under the chairmanship of Mr Paul Hughes. It reported that an Aboriginal Education Policy should be based on the following five broad objectives:

- to achieve equity in the provision of education to all ATSI children, young people and adults by the year 2000;
- to assist ATSI parents and communities to be fully involved in the planning and provision of education for themselves and their children;
- to achieve parity in participation rates by ATSI people with those of other Australians in all stages of education;
- to achieve positive educational outcomes for ATSI people in schooling and tertiary education; and

³ J Lo Bianco, *National Policy on Languages*, AGPS, Canberra, 1987, p.73.

⁴ J Lo Bianco, 1987, p. 105.

to improve the provision of education services across the nation at the local level.⁵

6.8 Following the reports of the Select Committee and the Aboriginal Education Policy Task Force (1988) the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy (AEP) was launched in October 1989 following formal endorsement by State, Territory and Commonwealth Governments and the National Aboriginal Education Reference Group. Amongst the broad range of long-term educational goals of the AEP is one "to develop programs to support the maintenance and continued use of Aboriginal languages". (Goal 17)

6.9 In December 1990 the then Minister for Employment, Education and Training, the Hon. J Dawkins, released a Green Paper on Literacy and Languages. Widespread concerns were expressed about the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages provisions. These were largely addressed in the White Paper released in September 1991. The White Paper, *Australia's Language* contains the Australian Language and Literacy Policy which replaces the National Language Policy. The Green and White Papers are discussed further at paragraph 6.19.

NALP

6.10 The main Commonwealth language maintenance program over the last five years has been the National Aboriginal Languages Program. The program ran from 1987 to 1990. In 1989 consultants were appointed to conduct a review of the National Aboriginal Languages Program. The NALP Review has pointed out that NALP should have been called a "fund" rather than a "program" as a program should have sound principles, aims, objectives and guidelines. NALP had instead a sum of money available for allocation⁶. The allocation was decided on the basis of project submissions.

6.11 NALP funding was:

\$0.5m	-	1987-88
\$1 m	-	1988-89
\$1 m	-	1989-90

The NALP Review in 1989 noted:

that NALP was funded by the Government at half the level requested - \$2.5 million instead of \$5.0 million over three years. AACLAME has made recommendations to the Minister that the level of funding be doubled.

⁵ *Report of the Aboriginal Education Policy Task Force*, AGPS, Canberra, 1988, p. 16-17.

⁶ L Riley-Mundine and B Roberts, *Review of National Aboriginal Languages Program*, AACLAME Occasional Paper No.5, March 1990, p. 15-16.

However, no further funding is envisaged.⁷

6.12 The distribution of funds across groups was given by the Review as:

- 56% of NALP funding has gone to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and regional language centres
- 20% to government schools
- 5% to independent ATSI schools
- 2% to Catholic schools
- 17% to institutions, private companies, individuals⁸

The Review found that in 1988-89 some 91 languages were assisted with 5600 people benefiting directly or indirectly. This comprised 1500 adults and 4100 children.⁹

6.13 Mr Jo Lo Bianco from AACLAME commented on the shortfall in NALP funding:

It would have been possible for us to have done a much better job had we had the extra money, not just because more money is what people always ask for - I am cautious about that sort of argument - but because when we looked at the amount of demand for support under NALP and what we were able to provide, we were just a little bit under what we were being asked for.¹⁰

6.14 The review of NALP in late 1989 by consultants Riley-Mundine and Roberts criticised NALP for having an overly educational orientation, lacking clarity in program goals, and having little co-ordination between projects. The Review stressed regional language centres as the key to developing language education projects. Approximately 200 people were consulted in the review. The Review found that NALP had begun to redress the serious neglect of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages and that the educational, linguistic and cultural potential of the program was enormous. They stressed, however, that language has a far greater significance than education. "Language is the key to a person's culture and culture is the very essence of a person's identity."

6.15 The brief for the NALP Review team included assisting in the incorporation of NALP activities into the Aboriginal Education Policy (AEP). The Review report stated that:

DEET's current intention is to integrate NALP and mainstream its funding

⁷ Riley Mundine and Roberts, 1990, p. 3.

⁸ Riley Mundine and Roberts, 1990, p. 10.

⁹ Riley Mundine and Roberts, 1990, p. 11

¹⁰ Evidence, p 168.

under the AEP and has requested the Review Team to establish factors which have contributed to the success or otherwise of the program. In implementing the AEP the Minister has agreed, on advice from his Department, that at least 60% of NALP funds is to be allocated to projects having a direct educational focus supportive of and complementary to the access, retention, attainment and equity objectives of the AEP. The remaining 40% of projects are to have a research and/or educational focus. This allocation, based on 1988/89 expenditure, has not been accepted by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Reference Group.¹¹

6.16 From its consultation on this issue the Review team found that this proposed integration "was viewed with concern by all parties associated with the NALP program except for certain DEET staff."¹² The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Reference Group also expressed concern as they were not convinced that the AEP was an adequate vehicle for ATSI language maintenance and development.¹³

6.17 The NALP Review concluded "that the activities of NALP cannot be incorporated fully into the Aboriginal Education Policy. Language involves much more than education as is apparent in the NPL endorsed by the Government. This does not mean that some NALP activities cannot be incorporated into the Aboriginal Education Policy."¹⁴ The Review report stressed that the central place of language in education needs to be restated before any incorporation into AEP occurs as the review team "was not convinced that some people understand its pivotal role."¹⁵ The funding breakup above indicates that only 27% of NALP funding went to schools and that 56% of the funding went to ATSI communities and regional language centres.

6.18 Despite these findings DEET advised the committee in December 1990 that "NALP along with other Aboriginal educational programs" had been incorporated into the Aboriginal Education Strategic Initiatives Program (AESIP) from 1 January 1990 as part of the establishment of the AEP.

¹¹ Riley Mundine and Roberts, 1990, p. 6-7.

¹² Riley-Mundine and Roberts, 1990, p. 41.

¹³ Riley-Mundine and Roberts, 1990, p. 41.

¹⁴ Riley-Mundine and Roberts, 1990, p. 41.

¹⁵ Riley-Mundine and Roberts, 1990, p. 41.

The Green and White Papers on Australian Language and Literacy Policy

6.19 The Green Paper on a draft Australian Language and Literacy Policy was released in December 1990¹⁶. The third of its 3 goals dealt with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages and stated:

Those Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages still actively transmitted to and used by children must be maintained and developed. All others should be recorded, where possible, for the benefit of the descendants of their speakers and for the nation's heritage¹⁷.

6.20 As the Green Paper claimed only 20 languages were "still actively transmitted", the remaining 70 surviving languages were to be ignored by the proposed policy. The proposed policy offered only recording for those languages.

6.21 The Green Paper proposed four strategies for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language maintenance and development, to be implemented as relevant under the AEP or through the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission. It described them as:

1. Sustained support for a comprehensive network of regional language centres including centres which already exist.

These centres would appoint teacher/linguists and would be responsible for the development of curricula and teaching programs for Aboriginal languages identified by the Aboriginal communities as priorities to be accommodated by the general curricula for schools and other education institutions. This appears to be a cost-efficient way of providing the necessary infrastructure to support Aboriginal language maintenance and development.

2. In consultation with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission and the Aboriginal Employment, Education and Training Committee, establishment of a national Aboriginal language network based on the regional Aboriginal language centres.

This network would determine priorities for the accommodation of Aboriginal languages within education systems.

3. Research, recording and retrieval of Aboriginal languages.

¹⁶ J. Dawkins, *The Language of Australia - Discussion Paper on an Australian Literacy and Language Policy for the 1990s*, December 1990.

¹⁷ Green Paper, p.ix.

This would need to be considered by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission and the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies.

4. Appropriate training for Aboriginal people to implement programs supporting Aboriginal languages¹⁸.

6.22 It is clear that DEET still believed that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language could be taught successfully by a predominantly European education system and controlled by that system.¹⁹ The very narrow DEET view of language maintenance, being primarily conducted through schools with curriculum development and teaching programs being devised by regional language centres, was strongly criticised for these shortcomings. It was certainly not based on experience with NALP where only 27% of funds went to schools. The Green Paper ignored the 56% of funds that went to ATSI communities and regional language centres and the 17% that went to institutions, private companies and individuals. It proposed turning these funds over to education systems through the AEP. **The committee is critical of DEET's failure to comprehend the full nature of language maintenance and its efforts to restrict the program to an education system base.**

6.23 The way in which the Green Paper was released was damaging to the morale of those working in language maintenance outside of schools. It failed to comprehend the nature of language maintenance activities and was prepared with little or no consultation with ATSI people. The only consultation that could be said to have occurred was that associated with the NALP Review. As outlined in paragraphs 6.16 and 6.17 those consulted in the NALP Review were opposed to language maintenance being integrated into AEP. Despite these clearly articulated concerns the Green Paper proceeded on the basis of recommending incorporation.

6.24 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language maintenance does not have a long history of Commonwealth Government support. Apart from the bilingual schools established by the Commonwealth in the Northern Territory in the mid 1970s no other programs were established until the NALP was established in 1987. While offering help and encouragement to many language projects in its short lifetime its submission-based annual funding meant that projects were never certain of ongoing funding or the level of that funding. This hindered effective long-term planning within many projects. The NALP was a fixed term program and close to the end of that term the NALP Review was commissioned by DEET. However no forward planning had been evident as to what would replace NALP, if anything, when it finished. Instead projects were left on tenterhooks while DEET provided last minute extensions of funding for ongoing projects such as language centres and did not fund any new projects.

¹⁸ Green Paper, p.44-5.

¹⁹ Evidence, p. 365, 368.

6.25 In the period leading up to the release of the Green Paper, language maintenance agencies had become very uncertain about the continuity of their particular program or its level of funding. The uncertainty about funding left many language workers and the communities they served, uncertain as to the real commitment of the Government and the importance attaching to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages. When the Green Paper was released it stated that only 20 languages would be supported and that this would be done through the education system. Most of the work of language centres and field workers was apparently to be discontinued. This was a severe and unconsidered blow to communities and their language workers. The Green Paper did however provoke a unified response on a number of issues from ATSI language service agencies.

6.26 The White Paper was released in early September 1991 and announced a national policy and a national strategy to promote language and literacy in Australia through the Australian Language and Literacy Policy (ALLP). The White Paper claims that it:

delivers the Prime Minister's promise to maintain and develop the National Policy on Languages (NPL), incorporating the principles of the NPL into a new Australian Language and Literacy Policy (ALLP).²⁰

6.27 Of the four goals of the Australian Language and Literacy Policy the third relates specifically to ATSI languages:

those Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages which are still transmitted should be maintained and developed, and those that are not should be recorded where appropriate.²¹

6.28 Despite this being essentially the same as the goal strongly objected to in the Green Paper, the White Paper claims that responses to the Green Paper "revealed a high level of community support for the four key goals". This claim is clearly false. Fortunately the expanded version of the goal used elsewhere in the White Paper is a little more comprehensive. It states:

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages should be maintained and developed where they are still transmitted. Other languages should be assisted in an appropriate way, for example through recording. These activities should only occur where the speakers so

²⁰ J. Dawkins, *Australia's Language - The Australian Language and Literacy Policy*, AGPS, Canberra, 1991, p. vii.

²¹ J. Dawkins, 1991, p.4.

desire and in consultation with their community, for the benefit of the descendants of their speakers and for the nation's heritage.²²

6.29 The White Paper goes on to expand this policy:

The Commonwealth's policy is to preserve, protect and promote the rights and freedom of indigenous Australians to use and develop indigenous Australian languages. The use of indigenous languages as accredited vehicles of instruction is encouraged where possible, in order to develop and support:

- . the survival of indigenous Australian languages;
- . educational opportunity;
- . increased student success and performance;
- . increased student awareness and knowledge of their culture and history; and
- . increased student and community pride.²³

6.30 Despite the claim that this policy incorporates the principles of the National Policy on Languages it is nowhere near as comprehensive as the NPL. It continues to place an inexplicably heavy emphasis on school based educational programs and outcomes to the detriment of community language maintenance and development work and their expected socio-linguistic outcomes.

6.31 Under the ALLP the White Paper proposes a National Aboriginal Languages and Literacy Strategy (NALLS). The three parts of the strategy are an Aboriginal Languages Initiatives Program (ALIP), Aboriginal Literacy Strategy and an Aboriginal Language Education Strategy. Only the latter two will be under the AEP. The ALIP will replace NALP and will have significantly greater funding than NALP.

6.32 The White Paper described the Aboriginal Languages Initiatives Program as providing:

- . recurrent funding for Regional Aboriginal Language Centres that provide appropriate language activities and support for local community projects and education programs in more than one major language grouping. The Regional Aboriginal Language Centres will

²² J. Dawkins, 1991, p. 19.

²³ J. Dawkins, *Australia's Language - The Australian Language and Literacy Policy - Companion Volume*, AGPS, Canberra, 1991, p. 94.

build on existing Aboriginal language centres and similar organisations.

one-off project funding for local Aboriginal community groups undertaking similar work in their own language, with the necessary support provided by the Regional Aboriginal Language Centres.

limited financial support for the establishment of Regional Aboriginal Languages Committees across Australia, based on the Regional Aboriginal Language Centres, and comprising representation of major Aboriginal language organisations in the area, major Aboriginal language groups, Aboriginal education in the region and regional representatives of ATSIC. These committees will provide the key focus for decision-making about Aboriginal Local Languages Initiatives in each region.

the capacity for Regional Aboriginal Languages Committees to use some of their funds to sponsor the establishment of a National Federation of Aboriginal Languages Committees to discuss Aboriginal language issues with governments, relevant government authorities and other institutions involved with languages work in Australia and the wider community.²⁴

6.33 The Aboriginal Languages Initiatives Program will be funded \$1.75 million in 1991-92, rising to \$3.0 million from 1992-93. It will start on 1 January 1992 and replace NALP. This program consists of the \$1.0 million per year formerly under NALP and new funding of \$0.75 million in 1991-92 and \$2.0 million from 1992-93.²⁵ The \$7.75m for the first three years of operation is not markedly different to that originally recommended for NALP (\$6.00m in 1987 dollars)²⁶ in the National Policy on Language.

6.34 The Department of Employment, Education and Training (DEET) has proposed that it administer the Aboriginal Languages Initiatives Program separately from the AEP, in consultation with ATSIC, with decisions on implementation being made at the regional level by the Regional Aboriginal Languages Committees.²⁷

²⁴ Companion Volume, p. 95.

²⁵ Companion Volume, p. 94.

²⁶ Lo Bianco, 1987, p. 118.

²⁷ Companion Volume, p. 95.

Adelaide Conference

6.35 The consultations with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people foreshadowed in the White Paper took the form of a conference in Adelaide in December 1991. This conference was attended by representatives of a wide range of ATSI language organisations. The full set of recommendations adopted by ATSI participants at the conference are contained in Appendix 6. The conference endorsed DEET as the funding agency for the Aboriginal Languages Initiatives Program, with a national federation of language centre committees as the national co-ordinator of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language program policy. The language committee network together with an annual conference and newsletters would facilitate information exchange between language program providers and raise language issues and problems at a national level.

6.36 The conference endorsed the establishment of a more extensive network of regional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language management committees (RALMCs). Some of these regional committees would have their own language centre(s) but others may be an incorporated committee responsible for the oversighting of the funding and operation of a number of community based local language projects (LLPs). These committees may be able to use other existing buildings e.g. State Land Council offices in New South Wales. The conference agreed that the RALMCs are to be responsible for regional language policy matters as well as deciding the allocation of funds to LLPs within their region. The actual funding of programs would be direct from DEET according to the allocations decided by the RALMCs. Funding for LLPs is to be identified separately from language centre operational funding. It was agreed that RALMCs include as members one or two ATSI representatives.

6.37 The conference also endorsed the establishment of a national Federation of the Regional Aboriginal Language Management Committees, comprising one ATSI commissioner, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representative of the National Language and Literacy Council (NLLC), other invited representatives as decided by the Federation (eg AIATSIS) and RALMC representatives as outlined below:

- Preferably two delegates from each RALMC, one an RALMC member, and one being an ATSI Language worker (subject to funding).
- If the Federation has insufficient funds, RALMCs may choose to fund the second representative.

6.38 Steps to set up new regional committees and centres and an interim Federation were also agreed to. A break-up of the \$3m 1992-93 ALIP funding was agreed to. After taking out \$100,000 for funding the operation of the Federation and its annual conference, the remainder was divided into an arbitrary 20 shares. The number of shares to be allocated to each state is:

State	\$	Shares	Formula
NT	580,000	4	\$145,000 X 20 Shares
WA	580,000	4	=\$2,900,000 (20 shares agreed for fair distribution amongst States and Territories.)
NSW	435,000	3	
QLD	435,000	3	
SA	362,000	2.5	
VIC	290,000	2	
TAS	217,000	1.5	
Sub-Total	2,900,000		
National Reserve	100,000		
TOTAL	3,000,000		

6.39 These shares are largely notional and it will be up to state consultative workshops to decide how many committees or centres will be established and their funding allocations. Some existing centres are much bigger than others.

6.40 The South Australian Government representatives at the Adelaide Conference announced that South Australia should have 3 language centres and the South Australian Government would top up Commonwealth funding to ensure their establishment. The South Australian Government has reviewed, and is strengthening, its role in Aboriginal language maintenance. It is seeking better co-ordination of existing services, the creation of new services such as language centres and better recognition amongst other government agencies of Aboriginal language problems. The committee believes other state and territory governments could in a similar way contribute more to Aboriginal language maintenance instead of seeing it as a Commonwealth responsibility only.

6.41 The committee believes that the structure for the delivery of language programs agreed to at the Adelaide conference is an appropriate one. It has been agreed to by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language service providers and gives ATSI people control over the management of their language programs. Recurrent funding provides some certainty and stability to program operators, allowing long term planning to be undertaken. It facilitates information exchange between language workers. The Federation particularly through its annual conferences, will provide a strong national voice on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language issues.

6.42 The committee recommends that:

the Commonwealth formally endorse the structure for the delivery of the Aboriginal Languages Initiatives Program endorsed by the December 1991 Adelaide conference of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language organisations (Recommendation 22)

the Regional Aboriginal Language Management Committees and Centres be recognised as key reference points on indigenous language matters by schools, by institutions providing language worker and translator training and by Commonwealth, state and territory governments (Recommendation 23)

The Minister for Employment, Education and Training ensure that an external review of the Australian Language Initiatives Program is conducted at the end of 1994 which should include the adequacy of funding (Recommendation 24)

ALES and ALS

6.43 The other two strategies under the National Aboriginal Languages and Literacy Strategy, both part of the AEP, are the Aboriginal Literacy Strategy (ALS) and the Aboriginal Languages Education Strategy (ALES). Total funding for these two programs will be \$2.625m in 1992-93 rising to \$5.25m in each of the next two years.

6.44 The Aboriginal Languages Education Strategy will involve the targeting of funds under the AEP to:

develop strategies geared toward the teaching of Aboriginal languages in schools, including special languages other than English programs in Aboriginal languages for children in Aboriginal schools, bilingual/bicultural programs, measures for Aboriginal languages curriculum development and materials production, and the provision of Aboriginal bilingual language teaching and para-professional staffing resources; and

provide assistance in the development of Aboriginal language courses in higher education or TAFE, or the development of Aboriginal

language components for inclusion in other higher education and TAFE courses.²⁸

The committee believes that ATSI language courses offered should be relevant to the school area as far as possible.

6.45 The Aboriginal Literacy Strategy will involve the targeting of funds under the AEP to develop:

special supplementary strategies to improve the English literacy of Aboriginal primary and secondary school students, particularly students whose first language is not English, but also recognising the existence of Aboriginal English. Such strategies could focus on culturally relevant styles of literacy learning and ESL and ESD measures especially designed to meet the needs of Aboriginal students; and

TAFE-accredited English literacy and ESL courses especially for Aboriginal adults who have had limited access to education and who wish to improve their English competence.²⁹

6.46 The committee is concerned that these funds not be used by state and territory governments to replace existing funding. If these strategies are to be effective then the additional funds must reach their target.

6.47 The committee recommends that:

the Commonwealth ensure that funds allocated under the Aboriginal Languages Education Strategy and the Aboriginal Literacy Strategy are used appropriately by the state and territory governments and not used to replace existing mainstream program funds. (Recommendation 25)

Teaching English as a second language

6.48 While school-level education, including English as a Second Language, is primarily a state responsibility, the Commonwealth funds children's ESL under the States Grants (Schools Assistance) Act 1988. Eligibility under the General Support element of the ESL Program extends to all non-English-speaking

²⁸ Companion Volume, p. 96.

²⁹ Companion Volume, p. 96.

6.49 The ESL Program for children has both a general support and a new arrivals element. The General Support element which assists government and non-government education authorities to provide English language assistance to students permanently resident in Australia (including ATSI and other children of non-English-speaking background born in Australia) in the course of their general schooling. The budget for the General Support element was \$48.3 million in 1991.

6.50 The Minister for Employment, Education and Training in co-operation with the relevant state and territory ministers ensure that:

English as a Second Language funding is distributed equitably to all children of non-English speaking background including those in remote community schools. (Recommendation 26)

School based language education

6.51 The types of bilingual/bicultural programs operating in some schools were described in Chapter 4. However there are less than 35 such schools. Outside of South Australia and the Northern Territory there are no government bilingual or bicultural schools. Western Australia and Queensland have no such schools in the strong language areas of their respective states. Dr Annette Schmidt pointed out that most bilingual programs were of the transition to English type and promoted a permanent switch away from their first language.³⁰

6.52 Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language speaking children attending school for the first time are confronted by an institution that teaches them only in English and does not recognise their language. **The committee believes that it is totally inappropriate that any Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander child today begins school in a language other than their own. It is destructive of both the language and the child. The committee recognises the difficulties in servicing multilanguage schools but does not believe this is an excuse for doing nothing. Bilingual/bicultural education is essential if strong and weakening Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages are to be maintained.**

³⁰ Schmidt, 1990, p.6.

6.53 The Minister for Employment, Education and Training in cooperation with the relevant state and territory ministers:

ensure that bilingual or bicultural education be provided to all Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander children whose first language is other than English if sought by the relevant community and if there is a sufficient number of speakers to support a program. (Recommendation 27)

ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language communities serviced by a school determine which model of language teaching is appropriate for their school. (Recommendation 28)

ensure that bilingual education is clearly based on the maintenance model rather than the transfer-to-English model. (Recommendation 29)

6.54 The language objectives of bilingual/bicultural schools are not just to provide a supportive linguistic environment when children first came to school but also to build their language skills and develop literacy in their language. In bilingual schools these skills can be built up over a range of subjects and for many hours a day. In contrast language classes in non-bilingual schools are usually for a short period each week. This can be from 30 minutes to 3 or 4 hours a week. This time may be adequate for language retrieval work where the language level being taught is fairly basic. However to build literacy in an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander first language or to strengthen a weakening language these periods are inadequate. Language classes in non-bilingual schools are often unstructured, short term or sporadic. Consequently many of them are ineffective from a language teaching point of view although they many still have some indirect benefits.

6.55 The Western Australian Government has recently addressed the difficult question of teaching Aboriginal languages in a range of school situations. Following several earlier reports it commissioned Joyce Hudson of the Catholic Education Office in the Kimberley Region to develop a framework for teaching Aboriginal language as a second language in primary school. The introduction in the Draft Framework states:

This Framework is designed for use in primary schools with a significant proportion of Aboriginal students, in areas where the traditional Aboriginal language is still known and used by adults in the local community and where there is strong community support for the teaching of Aboriginal languages in the school.

The program is a second language program and therefore is not suitable for traditional Aboriginal first language speakers nor is it suitable for retrieval programs.

6.56 The W.A. framework is not language specific and outlines curricula and resources for a range of language situations. This can be seen from the grid for selecting the program type for a particular school. This grid is shown in Figure 1. Eight schools trialled the framework in 1991 and the W.A. Government expected an additional 20 schools to use the Framework in 1992. An estimated 120 schools in Western Australia might eventually use the program.³¹ The committee was impressed with the program and believes that it could be adopted in other states and territories where appropriate.

Figure 1

Program type

		Language Background			
		Children speak the Aboriginal Language fluently	Children use the Aboriginal language in limited contexts but speak mainly a variety of English	Children know fragments of the Aboriginal language and may understand some speech of adults but speak only a variety of English	Children identify closely with the Aboriginal language but neither understand nor speak it
School Population	School in Aboriginal Community	A	B	C	D
	Town Schools Majority of Aboriginal Students	E	F	G	H
	Town Schools Minority of Aboriginal Students	I	J	K	L

³¹ Evidence, p. 220-1.

6.57 The lack of trained Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers and language workers was dealt with in chapters 4 and 5. Another problem which was raised by many groups throughout the inquiry was the very low pay rates for language speakers without formal training who work in language programs. The Northern Territory Department of Education pointed out that while these people were vital to language programs they were paid little more than Unemployment Benefit.³² The Western Australian Government pointed to similar problems.³³ The Northern Territory Government has partly addressed this problem by creating a career path for language workers with on-site language courses providing skills for promotion to higher pay levels. However, many of the speakers are older people for whom such a solution is not appropriate. The committee believes cultural skills of language speakers, particularly elders, should be better recognised.

6.58 The committee recommends that:

**the Minister for Employment, Education and Training encourage state and territory governments together with unions and ATSI representatives to develop an appropriate pay scale for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language speakers employed as such, to reflect the special skills they possess.
(Recommendation 30)**

Teaching English as a second dialect

6.59 The discipline of teaching English as a second dialect is still young compared to teaching English as a second language. As observed throughout this report the need to teach English as a second dialect is not being met by the Australian education system. There continues to be inadequate teacher pre-service preparation, and a lack of suitable curriculum material. The Commonwealth Curriculum Development Centre did produce in 1983 a substantial report on *English and the Aboriginal Child* by Robert Eagleson, Susan Kaldor and Ian Malcolm. However, there appears to be a lack of substantial institutional support for teaching English as a second dialect in teacher training, education departments and schools.

6.60 The committee believes that the Commonwealth should give greater priority to the teaching of English as a second dialect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. Teacher training institutions must be encouraged to provide suitable training. The Commonwealth could make a significant contribution

³² Evidence, p. 67-8.

³³ Evidence, p. S660.

by commissioning the preparation of suitable curriculum material to be used by classroom teachers throughout Australia.

6.61 The committee recommends that:

the Minister for Employment, Education and Training in consultation with the states and territories commission the preparation of curriculum material for the teaching of English as a second dialect. This should be funded separately from the Aboriginal Literacy Strategy. (Recommendation 31)

Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages

6.62 The indigenous languages of Australia have been little studied at an academic level. This is not to say that excellent work has not been undertaken by some academics but rather too little has been done and the area generally lacks the prestige that it warrants. Consequently little academic support can be given to the many languages programs already underway let alone the expanded range envisioned in this report.

6.63 Given the unique nature of ATSI languages within Australian and world heritage it is appropriate that the main centre for their academic study should be within Australia. In Chapter 5 the training of linguists specialising in ATSI languages was discussed. The day-to-day work of linguists within language maintenance programs does not always lend itself to developing an academic framework of language study. The committee believes there is a need for an institute of ATSI languages and linguistics to specialise in the academic aspects of these languages at the tertiary level. The institute should be located within a university and have a predominantly ATSI board of management.

6.64 The board would oversee the functions of the institute and ensure that ATSI concerns and sensitivities are addressed. The primary focus of the institute would be to undertake research and to provide a permanent structure for the support of ATSI languages.

6.65 The committee recommends that:

the Commonwealth fund an institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages within a university. The institute should have a predominantly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander board of management. (Recommendation 32)

Strategic Planning Arrangements

6.66 As part of AEP each state and territory formulates triennial strategic plans for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education across all education sectors. These plans are developed and reviewed annually in consultation with the Commonwealth. The states, territories and the Commonwealth are required to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation in the development of the plans.

6.67 The 21 long term goals of the AEP are listed at Appendix 8. While all are undoubtedly very worthwhile goals, two goals relevant to this inquiry seemed to be well short of full implementation as far as the committee could establish in its inquiry. Goal 1 calls for effective arrangements for the participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents and community members in decisions about school service delivery. Apart from ASSPA many communities did not believe they had an effective relationship with the school and the school was unaware of or insensitive to their needs. Independent schools such as Yipirinya at Alice Springs have been taken up by ATSI parents and students who sometimes stayed away from mainstream schools.

6.68 Goal 17 of the AEP is to develop programs to support the maintenance and continued use of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages. The provision of such programs is still very uneven with many areas being completely neglected. As outlined in Chapter 4 the NSW Government did not believe it had any obligation to provide nor did it have any intention of resourcing, Aboriginal language programs.

6.69 The Aboriginal Languages Education Strategy and the Aboriginal Literacy Strategy both involve the targeting of funds within AEP. The committee is concerned that strategies within AEP be carefully monitored to ensure their full and effective implementation.

6.70 The committee recommends that:

in the ongoing monitoring of state and territory strategic plans under AEP, the Commonwealth, in consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education organisations, ensure the effective implementation of Goals 1 and 17. (Recommendation 33)

Duncan Kerr, MP
Chairman

Les Scott, MP
Sub-committee Chairman

2 June 1992

APPENDIX 1

Submissions

- 1 Senator B. Teague
- 2 Professor R.L. Specht - University of Queensland
- 3 Port Lincoln Aboriginal Organisation Inc.
- 4 Mr Robert Hill
- 5 Meg Mooney
- 6 Gil Robertson
- 7 Waringarri Aboriginal Corporation and
Mirima Council
- 7(a) Mirima Council
- 8 Torres Strait Cathedral College Inc.
- 9 Kevin Ford
- 10 Ravenshoe Adult Literacy Group
- 11 Dr L.A. Hercus
- 12 Professor R.M.W. Dixon
- 13 Bunbury Aboriginal Progress Association
- 14 NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group
- 15 Dr Patrick McConvell
- 16 Tully State High School
- 17 Moomba Aboriginal Corporation
- 18 Ms Barbara Jones

- 19 Summer Institute of Linguistics
- 20 Mr Neil Bell MLA
- 21 Wangka Maya, Pilbara Aboriginal Language Centre
- 22 Catholic Education Office

- 23 Department of Employment, Education and Training
- 24 Mr Alan Wason
- 25 Dr P. Chakravarti
- 26 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC)
- 26 (a) ATSIC
- 27 Mr John Heffernan
- 28 Finke River Mission
- 29 Northern Territory Department of Education
- 30 Dr Eve M. D. Fesl, AM
- 31 Kimberely Language Resource Centre
- 32 Brisbane Indigenous Media Association
- 33 Mr Ian Yule
- 34 Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association (CAAMA)
- 35 Australian Teachers Union
- 36 Kombumerri Aboriginal Corporation for Culture
- 37 Milingimbi School
- 38 Carolyn Coleman
- 39 Cecily Willis
- 40 Aboriginal Languages Association (ALA)
- 41 Linguists' Working Group, AIATSIS

- 42 John Ingram
- 43 Michael Quinn
- 44 Institute for Aboriginal Development Inc. (IAD)
- 45 Robert Hoogenraad
- 46 Dr Margaret Sharpe
- 47 Western Australian State Government
- 48 Michael Cooke
- 49 Warruwi School, Goulburn Island
- 50 South Australian Government
- 51 Barkly Regional Aboriginal Languages Centre
- 52 Thursday Island State Primary School
- 53 Lee Cataldi
- 54 Bentley James - Warlpiri Media Association
- 55 Ltyentye Apurte & Ntaria Teacher Education
Students - Batchelor College
- 56 Minister for Immigration, Local Government
and Ethnic Affairs

APPENDIX 2

List of Informal Discussions and Field Visits

NORTHERN TERRITORY

Yirrkala		
Yirrkala Community School		29/10/90
Batchelor		
Batchelor College		30/10/90
School of Language & Linguistics		30/10/90
Radio Rum Jungle		30/10/90
Bathurst Island		
Nguiu Community - St Theresa's School		29/10/90
Alice Springs		
CAAMA / IMPARJA		22/7/90
Tangentyere Council		22/7/90
Institute for Aboriginal Development		21/7/90
Catholic High School		22/10/91
Arrernte Catholic Women's Group		22/10/91
Yipirinya School		22/7/90
Northern Territory Department of Education		21/7/90
Yuendumu		
Yuendumu community		21/10/91
Mutitjulu		
Mutitjulu community		23/10/91
Tennant Creek		
Barkly Regional Aboriginal Language Centre		22/10/91

WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Kununurra		
Waringarri Aboriginal Corporation		31/10/90
Mirima Council		31/10/90

Halls Creek		
Kimberley Language Resource Centre		31/10/90
Broome		
Magabala Books		24/6/91
Catholic Education Office		24/6/91
Mamabulanjin Aboriginal Corporation		24/6/91
Broome Primary School		24/6/91
Yawaru Womens Group		24/6/91
Port Hedland		
Warralong Community School		25/6/91
South Hedland Primary School		25/6/91
Pundulmurra College		25/6/91
Wangka Maya - Pilbara Aboriginal Language Centre		25/6/91
Geraldton		
Geraldton Regional Community Education Centre (Yamaji Language Resource Centre)		26/6/91
Perth		
Institute of Applied Language Studies		
Edith Cowan University		26/6/91
Bunbury		
Bunbury Aboriginal Progress Association (Nyungar Language Project)		27/6/91

QUEENSLAND

Brisbane		24/4/91
Mrs Valma Leeding - Adviser on bilingual education programs in the NT.		
Ms Cheryle Andrews - Student		
Ms Christine Williams - Counsellor, Inala Family Education Centre		
Mr Ian Houston - Counsellor, Inala Family Education Centre		
Mrs Hope Neil		
Ms Penelope Bamblett		
Mr Victor Hart - Hopevale Aboriginal Community		
Prof. Bruce Rigsby - Professor of Anthropology, University of Queensland		
Dr Margaret Sharpe - Lecturer in linguistics and Aboriginal and Multicultural Studies, University of New England		

Ms Pat O'Connor - Secretary, Kombumerri Aboriginal
Corporation for Culture
Ms Ysola Best - research worker, Kombumerri Aboriginal
Corporation for Culture

APPENDIX 3

Public Hearings Held and Witnesses Heard

19 October 1990 - Sydney

New South Wales Aboriginal Education Consultative Group Inc.

Donovan, Mr M.G. Executive Officer

New South Wales Government

Eltis, Dr K.J. Director, Curriculum and Educational Programs
Department of School Education

Nean, Mr P.G. Acting Chief Education Officer,
Aboriginal Education Unit,
Department of School Education

30 October 1990 - Darwin

Northern Territory Department of Education

Benjamin, Mr G. Superintendent - equal opportunities
Jones, Mr P. Principal Education Officer - Bilingual Branch

Summer Institute of Linguistics

Kirton, Miss J.F. Translation Consultant

Private Citizen

McConvell, Dr P. Darwin

20 December 1990 - Canberra

Department of Employment, Education and Training

Elwell-Gavins, Ms V. Project Officer, Literacy and Language Task Force

Kamarul, Ms A. Director, Literacy and Language Task Force
Miller, Mr G.P. Section Head, Aboriginal Education Branch
Robinson, Mr C.J. Assistant Secretary, Aboriginal Education Branch
Shipp, Mr G.W.B. Manager, National Aboriginal Language Program

24 April 1991 - Brisbane

Queensland Government

Bamblett, Ms P. Principal Educational Officer, Aboriginal and Islander
Education Branch, Department of Education
Malezer, Mr R.L. Divisional Head, Division of Aboriginal and Islander
Affairs, Department of Family Services and Aboriginal &
Islander Affairs
Neil, Mrs H. Coordinator, Human Rights Division, Department of
Family Services and Aboriginal & Islander Affairs.
Williams, Dr N.M. Specialist Adviser (Lands), Department of Family Services
and Aboriginal & Islander Affairs.

30 April 1991 - Melbourne

National Languages Institute of Australia

Lo Bianco, Mr J. Director

Koorie Research Centre - Monash University

Fesl, Dr E.M. Director

Victorian Government

Graystone, Dr J. Chairperson, Implementation Steering Committee for the
Aboriginal Education Policy, Ministry of Education and
Training

27 June 1991 - Perth

Western Australian Government

McMahon, Mr B. Manager, Curriculum Development Branch, Ministry of
Education
Young, Ms N. Senior Curriculum Officer, Curriculum Development
Branch, Ministry of Education

22 October 1991 - Alice Springs

Northern Territory Department of Education

Hoogenraad, Mr R. Linguist, Barkly Region
Laughren, Dr M. Linguist

23 October 1991 - Alice Springs

Institute for Aboriginal Development

Abbott, Mr D. Interpreter, Pertame Speaker
Brown, Ms M. Cross-Cultural Secretary
Dobson, Mrs V. Language Researcher, Teacher
Ellis, Ms E. Language Teacher, Interpreter
Liddle, Miss M. Language Secretary
Scarce, Ms M. Cultural Revival Coordinator, Aboriginal Language
Centre
Swan, Ms C. Coordinator, Interpreter and Translation Service
Wilson, Ms L. Head, Language Centre

Aboriginal Languages Association

Abbott, Mr D. Interpreter, Pertame Speaker
Dobson, Mrs v. Language Researcher and Teacher
Ellis, Ms E. Language Teacher and Interpreter
Swan, Ms C. Coordinator, Interpreter and Translation Service
Wilson, Ms L. Head, Aboriginal Language Centre

Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association

Richards, Mrs B. Station Coordinator, Radio
Riley, Ms R. Program Producer
Watts, Ms L. Former Educational Consultant

25 October 1991 - Adelaide

South Australia Government

Kennedy, Ms J.	Project Officer, State Aboriginal Affairs
Knill, Mr G.	Director, Operations, State Aboriginal Affairs
Rathman, Mr D.J.	Director, State Aboriginal Affairs
McColm, Ms M.M.	Project officer, Aboriginal Education Curriculum Unit, Department of Education.

27 November 1991 - Canberra

Department of Employment, Education and Training

Elwell-Gavins, Ms V.	Acting Director, Literacy and ESL Section, Language and Literacy Branch
McCarthy, Mr J.	Principal Adviser, Aboriginal Programs Division
Prior, Mr A.	Director, Policy and Coordination
Shipp, Mr G.	Manager, Aboriginal Languages

18 December 1991 - Canberra

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island Commission

Bamblett, Mr A.	Commissioner
Christopher, Mr R.	Director, Office of Public Affairs
Maymuru, Mr Y.	Commissioner
Smith, Mr M.	Manager, Promotions and Cultural Development

APPENDIX 4

List of Exhibits

Yirrkala Community

1. Yutana Dhawu - Environment
2. Yutana Dhawu - School Improvement Plan
3. Yutana Dhawu - Minhala
4. Yutana Dhawu - Stories
5. 1st Primary Galtha Workshop, Sept 1989
6. Yutana Dhawu - Intergrated Curriculum
7. Yutana Dhawu - Newsletter
8. Workshop - Wanawuy Galtha, Oct/Nov 1989
9. Biranybirany Galtha Workshop
10. Wuyal - Galtha Workshop
11. Always Together, Yaka Gana - Participatory Research at Yirrkala as part of the Development of a Yolnu Education
12. Galtha Rom - Workshop 2, 16-18 May 1989

Darwin

13. NT Department of Education - Maningrida Literature Production Centre published books
14. Book entitled Ngalipa Karlipa Yani Wirlinyi, published by the Summer Institute of Linguistics

Batchelor College

15. Accreditation Document (stage 2) for Associate Diploma of Applied Science (Broadcasting and Journalism) 1988
16. Diploma of Teaching - Leaflets
17. Information on Languages from different areas of the Top End from the Students at Batchelor College
18. Ibid
19. Ibid
20. Ibid
21. Ibid
22. Ibid
23. Ibid
24. School of Australian Linguistics - SAL Review Report

Sydney

25. NSW Department of Education - Syllabus years 11-12 Aboriginal Studies
 26. New South Wales Aboriginal Education Consultative Group
- Articles of Association
-

Broome (WA)

27. Broome Primary School - Language class student work books
28. Broome Primary School language word books

Bunbury (WA)

29. Bunbury Aboriginal Progress Association - A Nyungar Language course
30. Nyungar Language Project Draft Dictionary
31. Book entitled, Kura, Compiled by Glenys Collard
32. Retention rates of Nyoongah Secondary Students in the South of Western Australia - Phase one Report.
33. Proposal for the operation of Aboriginal Regional Language Centres

Kuranda (Qld)

34. Book entitled - Bulurru Storywater
35. Book entitled Djabugay Ngirrma Gulu

Melbourne

36. Koorie Research Centre publication - GALAJA, A Feasibility Study to the teaching of Koorie Languages in Schools throughout Australia
37. Aboriginal Research Centre Monash University
38. Aboriginal Research Centre - Objectives of Centre
39. Koorie Research Centre publication - Koorie Women and Employment, A Discussion Paper.
40. Publication entitled - The Monash Orientation Scheme for Aborigines.
41. Synopsis of Victorian Government Response to Green Paper: Language of Australia, Paper on an Australian Literacy and Languages Policy for the 1990's.
42. Partnership in Education - Koorie Education Policy, Victorian Ministry of Education.
43. Koorie English - State Board of Education, Victoria.

Brisbane

44. Yugambeh - in defence of our country, by the Kombumerri Aboriginal Corporation for Culture.

Perth

45. Edith Cowan University - Major Activities Relevant to Aboriginal Language Maintenance

Geraldton (WA)

46. A model for funding community based Language Maintenance of Australian Languages - by Barbara Jones

Port Hedland (WA)

47. Summary of issues discussed during the Western Australian Language Centre's Workshop - Pundulmurra College, 23-24 March 1991

Alice Springs

48. CAAMA Imparja funding - Lisa Watts
49. Language Centre Staffing
50. Aboriginal Languages and Communities of the Northern Territory - Compiled by Lisa Watts, 1990
51. IAD Language Centre - A pictorial publication
52. Pertame Word List - Compiled by C.Swan and M.Cousens
53. Kamiku Arangka - Cultural Revival, Language Centre, IAD

Yuendumu (NT)

54. Warlpiri Media Association - Newletters
55. Warlpiri Media Association - The current situation of the language and cultural maintenance program of the W.M.A.
56. Written comments by Wendy Baarda, Teacher/linguist, Yuendumu School
57. Tanami Network Aboriginal Corporation - Funding Plan for the Establishment of the Tanami Network, Sep. 1991

Port Lincoln (SA)

58. Port Lincoln Aboriginal Organisation - Mural Project

Adelaide

59. Recommendations from a report by Prof. Colin Bourke MBE, Head SAIA, University of SA
60. School of Aboriginal and Islander Administration - Background information and courses available
61. Anangu Teacher Education Program (AnTEP) University of SA

Torres Strait Islands (Qld)

62. Music of the Eastern Islands of the Torres Strait,
63. Booklet entitled Torres Strait Studies
64. Thursday Island State High School
65. Pearlring in the Torres Strait - A collection of historical articles
66. The sinking of the Quetta, An imaginative reconstruction
67. Torres Strait picture dictionary - Thursday Island State High School
68. Shipwrecks and sea stories from the Torres Strait
69. Our Torres Strait Islands - a cultural adventure
70. Culture in change - Torres Strait history in photographs

Lismore (NSW)

71. Bundjulong Language and Cultural Centres operations

Tully

72. Tully State High School - Papers presented during visit
73. Tully State High School Jirrbal Work book

Kowanyama (Qld)

74. Community Education Training Centre - Kit

Tennant Creek (NT)

75. Letter by Alice Nelson

Kununurra (WA)

76. A Miriwoong Alphabet Book
 77. Introducing Aboriginal Languages in Kimberley Schools - A book by Eirlys Richards
 78. Handbook of Kimberley Languages, Vol.1 General information
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**Recommendations of 1984 Senate report *A National Language Policy*
relating to Aboriginal Languages**

The committee recommended that:

More resources should be provided to a body such as the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies to further the study and description of endangered Aboriginal languages. The training of Aboriginal linguists should be incorporated in this program. (paragraph 8.12)

A body such as the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies in consultation with the Aboriginal people should determine a comprehensive and universally accepted listing of all surviving Aboriginal languages, including the numbers of speakers of each language, as a basis for assessing those languages at greatest risk of extinction and those languages with the greatest potential for use in bilingual schools and in broadcasting. (paragraph 8.13)

'Two-way' Aboriginal schools should receive support from State and Commonwealth education authorities. (paragraph 8.24)

Maintenance bilingual programs should be supported and expanded, for children and adults, both in predominantly Aboriginal language communities and where Aboriginal language speakers form a minority group. (paragraph 8.26)

The Commonwealth Government, in consultation with the responsible State or Territory Government, should make the necessary support and resources available so that there are well-maintained bilingual education programs available for Aboriginal communities throughout Australia. (paragraph 8.26)

Aboriginal people should have access to English language programs which use TESL/TEFL techniques and which are appropriate to their linguistic environment and their educational, social and cultural needs. (paragraph 8.34)

The training of teachers for Aboriginal schools should include Aboriginal studies and other courses in Aboriginal languages and TESL/TEFL training. (paragraph 8.36)

More Aboriginal language centres should be established in areas of sufficient demand. (paragraph 8.42)

The teaching of, and about, Aboriginal languages should be promoted as part of Aboriginal studies programs in schools. (paragraph 8.47)

Opportunities for the study of Aboriginal languages to matriculation level should be provided and Aboriginal languages should be accredited for matriculation as demand requires. (paragraph 8.47)

Tertiary opportunities for the study of Aboriginal languages should be expanded. (paragraph 8.47)

The Commonwealth Department of Education and Youth Affairs should ensure that the number of Aboriginal teachers continue to increase and that prospective Aboriginal teachers be provided with training in bilingual/bicultural education methods. (paragraph 8.51)

More Aborigines should be trained and employed as linguists, teacher-linguists and producers of Aboriginal language curricular materials in bilingual programs. (paragraph 8.51)

Adequate funding should be made available to extend translating and interpreting services in Aboriginal languages. (paragraph 8.56)

The Commonwealth Public Service Board and State Governments should encourage Government officials to learn an Aboriginal language related to their work with Aboriginal communities. (paragraph 8.58)

The Department of Education and Youth Affairs should ensure that the language needs of linguistically disabled Aborigines be researched and assessed, and appropriate educational services provided. (paragraph 8.60)

Aboriginal people must be guaranteed the major role in decision-making relating to all Aboriginal language issues. (paragraph 8.62)

APPENDIX 6

Recommendations from the National Aboriginal Languages Workshop "Our Language, Our Future" 12th & 13th December 1991 Adelaide SA

1.0 DELIVERY ARRANGEMENTS

- 1.1 That a Federation of Regional Aboriginal Language Management Committees (RALMCs) be established, comprising one ATSIC Commissioner, the Aboriginal representative of the National Language and Literacy Council (NLLC), other invited representatives as decided by the Federation (eg Australian Institute Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander Studies - AIATSIIS) and RALMC representatives as outlined below:
 - Preferably two delegates from each RALMC, one an RALMC member, and one being an Aboriginal Language worker (subject to funding).
 - If the Federation has insufficient funds, RALMCs may choose to fund the second representative.
- 1.2 That the Federation be funded at a level of \$100,000 per annum out of the proposed National Reserve. This funding would cover the Federation Secretariat, as well as other functions, including regular national meetings.
- 1.3 That the Federation have responsibility to reallocate unspent Aboriginal Languages Initiatives Program (ALIP) funds to other Aboriginal Language Projects.
- 1.4 That a network of RALMCs be set up in each State and Territory (including the Torres Strait Islands). This network may consist of either Regional Aboriginal Language Committees (RALCs) which have RALMCs, or simply an incorporated committee responsible for overseeing the funding and operation of community based Local Language Projects (LLPs).
- 1.5 That the RALMCs include as members one or two ATSIC representatives. The RALMCs are to be responsible for regional language policy matters as well as the allocation of funds to LLPs.
- 1.6 That LLP funding be separately identified from Language Centre

operational funding.

2.0 CONSULTATIVE ARRANGEMENTS

2.1 That a two way information flow occurs between LLPs, RALMCs, the Federation, DEET/ATSIC and relevant Ministers.

3.0 STATE CONSULTATIVE WORKSHOPS

3.1 That State workshops be funded by DEET to enable advice to be provided on the following:

- roles and functions;
- identification of regions; and
- funding distribution within State/Territory planning figures.

3.2 That following these workshops, the names of regional representatives should be forwarded to the interim National Federation (Institute of Aboriginal Development - IAD), by 1 April 1992.

3.3 That decisions following State Workshops be finalised and submissions be provided to the interim National Federation (IAD) by 30 April 1992.

4.0 ALIP IMPLEMENTATION TIME TABLE

4.1 1 January 1992

- fund existing Aboriginal language committees/centres to the end of June 1992, which qualify for regional Aboriginal language committee and/or Regional Aboriginal Language Centre (RALC) status;
- rollover funding for other language centre/local projects to end June 1992, where this is required;
- fund regional workshops, where and as required for the establishment of new regional Aboriginal language committees and RALCs;
- has been reached on location and host organisation;

4.2 1 April 1992

- commence funding new regional Aboriginal Language committees and/or RALCs, where community agreement
- continue funding regional workshops where required;
- provide funds for the interim National Federation to convene a meeting on ATSIC language issues by mid May 1992.

4.3 1 July 1992

- commence full quarterly funding of all RALCs;
- commence quarterly local language project funding through regional Aboriginal Language Management Committees.

5.0 RECOMMENDED 1992-93 ALIP FUNDS DISTRIBUTION

State	\$	Shares	Formula
NT	580,000	4	\$145,000 x 20 shares = \$2,900,000 (20 shares agreed for fair distribution amongst States and Territories).
WA	580,000	4	
NSW	435,000	3	
QLD	435,000	3	
SA	362,000	2.5	
VIC	290,000	2	
TAS	217,000	1.5	
SUB-TOTAL	2,900,000		
NAT RESERVE	<u>100,000</u>		
<u>GRAND TOTAL</u>	<u>3,000,000</u>		

6.0 ATSI LANGUAGE FUNDING

- 6.1 That increased funding be sought for community based language initiatives, to the level of \$10 million per annum, as recommended at the "Living with Languages" workshop in April 1991.

7.0 NATIONAL LANGUAGE & LITERACY ADVISORY COUNCIL

7.1 That the participants of the "Our Languages, Our Future" National Aboriginal languages Workshop support the recent appointment of Ms Jeannie Bell as Aboriginal language representative.

7.2 That funds provided for English literacy support to Aboriginal people should not come from AEP resources but from ALLP/mainstream English literacy resources.

8.0 GENERAL

8.1 That the following issues be discussed at State/Territory Workshops and Federation meetings:

- the training and recognition of Aboriginal people as language specialists and administrators;
- the appropriate payment of Aboriginal people as language specialists; and
- the appropriate payment of Aboriginal people for the teaching of Aboriginal languages in schools.

Long term goals of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy

Involvement of Aboriginal people in education decision-making

1. To establish effective arrangements for the participation of Aboriginal parents and community members in decisions regarding the planning, delivery and evaluation of pre-school, primary and secondary education services for their children.
2. To increase the number of Aboriginal people employed as educational administrators, teachers, curriculum advisers, teacher assistants, home-school liaison officers and other education workers, including community people engaged in teaching of Aboriginal culture, history and contemporary society, and Aboriginal languages.
3. To establish effective arrangements for the participation of Aboriginal students and community members in decisions regarding the planning, delivery and evaluation of post-school education services, including technical and further education colleges and higher education institutions.
4. To increase the number of Aboriginal people employed as administrators, teachers, researchers and student services offices in technical and further education colleges and higher education institutions.
5. To provide education and training services to develop the skills of Aboriginal people to participate in educational decision-making.
6. To develop arrangements for the provision of independent advice from Aboriginal communities regarding educational decisions at regional, State, Territory and National levels.

Equality of access to educational services

7. To ensure that Aboriginal children of pre-primary school age have access to pre-school services on a basis comparable to that available to other Australian children of the same age.
8. To ensure that all Aboriginal children have local access to primary and secondary schooling.

9. To ensure equitable access of Aboriginal people to post-compulsory secondary schooling, to technical and further education, and to higher education.

Equity of educational participation

10. To achieve the participation of Aboriginal children in pre-school education for a period similar to that for all Australian children.
11. To achieve the participation of all Aboriginal children in compulsory schooling.
12. To achieve the participation of Aboriginal people in post-compulsory secondary education, in technical and further education, and in higher education, at rates commensurate with those of all Australians in those sectors.

Equitable and appropriate educational outcomes

13. To provide adequate preparation of Aboriginal children through pre-school education for the schooling years ahead.
14. To enable Aboriginal attainment of skills to the same standard as other Australian students throughout the compulsory schooling years.
15. To enable Aboriginal students to attain the successful completion of Year 12 or equivalent at the same rates as for other Australian students.
16. To enable Aboriginal students to attain the same graduation rates from award courses in technical and further education, and in higher education, as for other Australians.
17. To develop programs to support the maintenance and continued use of Aboriginal Languages.
18. To provide community education services which enables Aboriginal people to develop skills to manage the development of their communities.
19. To enable the attainment of proficiency in English language and numeracy competencies by Aboriginal adults with limited or no educational experience.
20. To enable Aboriginal students at all levels of education to have an appreciation of their history, cultures and identity.
21. To provide all Australian students with an understanding of and respect for Aboriginal traditional and contemporary cultures.