

Aboriginal Languages Legislation – Community Workshop: COMMUNIQUE Carriageworks, 245 Wilson St, Eveleigh, December 6, 2016

Aboriginal Affairs thanks all participants at the Community Stakeholder Workshop on the proposed NSW Aboriginal languages legislation, held in Sydney on Gadigal land on 6 December 2016.

Uncle Charles ‘Chicka’ Madden gave the Welcome to Country, paying respect to Aboriginal people past and present.

The Workshop enabled community input into the development of the proposed Aboriginal Languages Legislation, Strategic Plan and NSW Aboriginal Languages Centre, as announced recently by the Government. The Workshop was facilitated by Professor Jack Beetson in open discussion style. This report reflects common and notable themes. Additional workshops will take place across NSW in early 2017.

Building on a legacy

NSW is well placed to become the first state in Australia to introduce landmark legislation to protect Aboriginal languages. Participants acknowledged the achievement is the result of the hard work and sacrifice of many, including those who are no longer with us. Participants also expressed that the legislation and related initiatives should honour these efforts and stay true to the values that drove them.

Drawing on existing knowledge, protocols and practices

It was emphasised that knowledge, protocols and practices regarding languages already exist and legislation should reflect these. It was highlighted that local engagement was the most effective way to accurately and meaningfully capture these elements, for their incorporation into the legislation drafting process.

Seeking the advice of elders

Participants said it was vital that elders guide the formation of the legislation. The necessity of their involvement requires a deliberate, and well-thought-out approach, to ensure their voices are heard. This engagement in right way may require extra effort – for example visiting elders at locations they have easy access too, and providing appropriate information to help them engage.

Breaking it down for people

The group requested the development of easy-to-understand information material that can support the consultation process. This information package could include Frequently Asked Questions, with answers provided in simple, plain language.

Reflecting the diversity and breadth of languages across the State

It was affirmed that it was important for all language groups to see themselves reflected in the legislation. It was also acknowledged that due to the existence of so many languages and dialects, this would be challenging.

Promoting opportunities for collaboration and sharing

Participants noted the importance of opportunities to continue to collaborate and share language knowledge and practices. It was suggested that an Aboriginal Language Centre may have a role in helping to promote collaboration and coordination.

Providing clarity on rights, roles and responsibilities

The group stressed that legislation must allow appropriate groups to make decisions relating to their language, including examples such as who can learn it, who can teach it and who may benefit. The point was made that there could be a balance between encouraging the openness and enthusiasm that will help languages thrive and ensuring things are done in the right way and with appropriate protections to help prevent exploitation. The issue of digital rights and protection of intellectual property were also raised, with the group seeking that items such as these be addressed in legislation.

Please note: opinions expressed in this workshop summary may not reflect the views or policy of the NSW Government.