

COMMUNIQUE

Bourke – Diggers on the Darling

3 May 2017

The workshop commenced with a Welcome to Country by Phil Sullivan.

Participants said the languages Bill should build on the strength from within NSW, and recognise First Nations for both their diversity and role as the keepers of knowledge and identity – for instance, people from 24 First Nation groups reside in Bourke.

There was support for ‘First Languages of NSW’ and ‘First Nations Languages of NSW’ to replace the word ‘Aboriginal’. The Bill must include resources, local data collection and support local decision making on languages. The Bill needs to be in plain English and have meaning to Aboriginal people. The term ‘recognition’ should be replaced with a term that has longevity and meaning, and “intangible cultural heritage of all people of NSW” needs clearer explanation.

There was support for the statement that language belongs to the land, and language teaching should occur on the land. The Bill should acknowledge the cultural authority of First Nations as custodians and owners of languages, the connectedness of language to land and to each other, and the importance of obligation, responsibility and accountability.

Governments should do all in their power to support language revival, through legislation and resourcing the strategic plan. Those resources must be ongoing, sustainable and protected from changes in government. Additionally, the resources should not encourage competition and division within communities.

The Strategic Plan should include preservation of language materials both on country and in cultural institutions. Nests and other language education will lead to strong interest especially amongst young people. The local vision was to make local language and culture part of school-based learning, so that the next generation could talk their language. The Aboriginal languages workforce should be ready in five years, including Aboriginal linguists. There are also employment opportunities in addressing language barriers to justice and health, and in land management agencies such as National Parks and Wildlife Service. Police are interested in encouraging language use in their daily business. There was support for adding “communication” as another element of the strategic plan.

The Centre for Aboriginal Languages of NSW must be independent of government with its own resources and staff. Membership for the Languages Centre, should comprise First Nation groups and be skills based, to give ownership, strength and good governance.