

COMMUNIQUE

Coffs Harbour – Cavanbah Centre

7 June 2017

The Workshop commenced with an Acknowledgement of Country and story told in Gumbaynggirr language. Bishop Drutt College students spoke about their Gumbaynggirr classes and William Bayldon Public School students demonstrated a Gumbaynggirr lesson.

The Bill should be carefully written so that community members understand it. Terms ‘revival’ and ‘protection’ incorrectly describe the status of some languages which are in use, growing, and developing. ‘First peoples’ was preferred over ‘Aboriginal’ in the title. The Bill should be about legally enforceable rights to language and culture, and community empowerment. Strong aspirational language in the Bill and review by an independent legal expert will give people faith in it.

The Languages Bill must work with the *Aboriginal Land Rights Act* and the proposed Aboriginal Cultural Heritage reforms. Language is embedded in the land where it belongs, and cannot be divorced from land and culture. The proposed legislation will need support from Aboriginal bodies like the Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Advisory Committee to get through government.

Community ownership and control must be acknowledged and respected by governments. Government control and ownership is not acceptable. Communities have the right to develop their language. Intellectual property rights in language must also be protected. Languages should be celebrated and shared through signage, dual naming, school-based learning, local government recognition, and language use in a wide range of settings (such as supermarkets and cultural tourism). The local goal was that in every household, parents spoke to their children in Gumbaynggirr exclusively.

Government’s role is facilitating community and individual empowerment, and accountability to community for funding. ‘Recognition’ is ambiguous and lacks government accountability. The legislation should not rely on trust in the government of the day.

“Road map” was preferred over strategic plan because it is about where people want to get to, and what is on the horizon for the long term sustainability of languages, and it should be prepared in partnership with communities (from an Aboriginal perspective). It should be a value proposition that includes government accountability (across whole of public sector) and local measures of success.

All schools should teach, and all students should learn Aboriginal languages. Schools should not own languages, and community should determine how language is taught and who teaches it. Teaching languages in the community is vital, and should be accessible and not affected by funding cuts. People should be fairly rewarded for teaching language.

Any Language Centre must be independent of government. Its resources must support effective local activities, rather than servicing a central bureaucracy, and its ‘experts’ should not just be academics favoured by the Minister. The Centre should also monitor language teaching for integrity and ethical delivery. Its advisory board should be drawn from existing language centres and all staff should be Aboriginal.