

COMMUNIQUE

Dareton – Coomealla Senior Citizens Centre

19 May 2017

The workshop commenced with a Welcome to Country.

There was support for the Bill being named 'First Nations Languages' or 'First Languages'. 'Aboriginal' was generally not supported, instead 'First Nations' was preferred as a reminder of the cultural and linguistic diversity of NSW. Even across a nation there are dialects and spelling variations (for example, Barkindji/Paakantji). The Bill should celebrate this diversity. However, a challenge for the Bill is cultural boundaries crossing State and Territory borders.

Culture must also be included in the Bill because languages cannot be disconnected from land, lore and culture. Historical treatment of languages, such as assimilation policies, also needs to be acknowledged. Terms like 'protection' should be avoided. While there are fluent speakers within the community, languages are in need of reawakening. The right to speak your own language must be recognised.

The legislation should include the promotion of Aboriginal languages within government for its role to be taken seriously. Similar for local government who can play an important role in wider awareness of language, such as street names and 'welcome' signs. The origin of Australian Rules Football (AFL) from the Aboriginal game (marangrook) also raises the profile for Aboriginal languages. Language awareness can help to overcome racism.

The legislation has to be strengthened with Aboriginal authority through local ownership and control of language development. Government ownership is not acceptable. Legislation has to also complement local community language activities and priorities already happening.

Teaching Barkindji language in schools is important and requires resources (such as the culture room), dedication of time, and links to existing cultural education (such as dancing and classes held 'on country'). Adult education, including within jails, was also seen as important. Qualifications for Elders to teach languages in schools were important. While the preference is for teaching language 'on country' it was recognised that languages many need to be taught 'off country'.

The term 'Centre' should be replaced with a better term like embassy, which less implies a physical building. A regional location for the Centre will still not guarantee access for local communities. It must be independent of government and provide state-wide coordination and building capacity of local language centres. It should also focus on repatriation of language materials, developing language teaching materials, and cultural tourism (such as Lake Mungo).

Dareton should have its own Aboriginal language centre that is accessible, resourced and is a keeping place. It will be the local authority to guide the development and evolution of the language. Copies of language materials would be kept locally and in a central location. Local centres will bring people together to talk about language and culture, share ideas, and celebrate success.

OCHRE - a continuing conversation

CONSULTATIONS ON ABORIGINAL LANGUAGES LEGISLATION

