

COMMUNIQUE

Griffith –Griffith Aboriginal Community Centre

17 May 2017

The workshop commenced with a Welcome to Country and a demonstration of Wiradjuri language teaching by Griffith Wiradjuri Pre-school.

There was concern about the genuineness of the consultations and the ability to influence real change to the proposal. There was also criticism of Aboriginal Affairs' previous Aboriginal language programs and the lack of Aboriginal Language and Culture Nests in the region. The Bill does not say who owns Aboriginal languages but the draft implies that government has control (for example section 3(1)(c)) – which is totally unacceptable. It must also not use the word protection. The legislation must provide for local control of languages. It should empower, not limit, Elders and communities. There were concerns about how to control languages “off country” and challenges such as technology.

Languages of the First Nations was suggested as a possible name for the Bill. The definition should also include First Nations and clans rather than Aboriginal and occupants. Acknowledgment statements have to celebrate the diversity of Aboriginal languages across the State, that languages are being reawakened after past attempts to outlaw them, and that languages are connected to culture, land and lore.

Legislation needs adequate resources. The role of government is to financially support the work occurring in communities. Bill should say that all government agencies are responsible for Aboriginal languages. Language investment should focus on language teaching in communities rather than academia. Language teaching in school is important but so too is reinforcement at home. There was concern with language teaching in schools such as who can teach language, retention of teaching materials and the running of language programs. However, teaching Wiradjuri (such as at Darlington Point) promotes harmony, pride and cultural acceptance. The Bill should address the role of Education Department and schools.

Local government involvement is important such as street names, welcome to country signs, building names. Use of language in official ceremonies such as Australia Day important too.

The Centre must be accessible to regional communities and not within government. There was support for a physical centre but built on Aboriginal land and under Aboriginal control. The Centre must be able to manage resources without nepotism, lateral violence and conflict, and be closely linked with local communities, including smaller remote communities. It will do more than language including dance, storytelling and healing. The Centre should form partnerships with cultural institutions (such as AIATSIS) on sharing resources and materials and with the Federal Government. Alternative structures were considered, such as organisational membership where local language organisations own the central body.

Participants also raised concerns that an increased focus on language brought about by the legislation may draw adverse public criticism and that there needs to be an effective response from government.