

COMMUNIQUE

Lismore – Lismore Workers Club

6 June 2017

The Workshop commenced with a Welcome to Country and introductions to staff and participants.

The legislation must be “owned” by Aboriginal people – not government. Aboriginal language should be used in the name of the Bill, and the Bill could be printed in the major NSW languages. The Bill must be easy to read and understand, but still legally binding. Aboriginal meanings for words should be included in the definitions section.

The recognition statements should say that language is the foundation for culture, and land facilitates the language, therefore removing language has a ripple effect. The loss of language through past government legislation and action must be recognised and the reawakening of languages celebrated in the Bill. The recognition statements should separate the value of languages to Aboriginal people from their value to non-Aboriginal people. Aboriginal languages should benefit Aboriginal people first, and then grow the appreciation and respect for Aboriginal languages amongst non-Aboriginal people. Diversity of NSW Aboriginal languages, including dialects of languages, must also be recognised.

Aboriginal ownership and authority must be written into the legislation. The rights to learn and maintain Aboriginal languages should be expanded to teaching, accessing and building community capacity. Responsibility for teaching, developing and protecting language rests with local Aboriginal communities, within cultural boundaries. Intellectual and cultural property rights in language must also be protected, including the commercial and academic use of language materials. Protection and survival of languages depends on local communities taking responsibility through local language centres, which have authority to do so.

Government’s role is not to own and protect languages, rather to facilitate and empower Aboriginal communities to protect their languages through providing resources and assistance. Government is accountable for how it performs this role and how its actions benefit Aboriginal people. Aboriginal language areas cross state boundaries, which should be considered by COAG.

An independent state-wide authority should implement the legislation, further the development of Aboriginal languages, and negotiate agreements between the State and local communities. The authority makes the strategic plan jointly with the Minister.

The legislation builds on the work of Aboriginal Land Councils and the Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (AECG) in language revival, and they remain important partners. Resources must be flexible to adapt to future challenges and be accessible to the whole Aboriginal community.

The qualifications to teach language in schools, TAFE and universities remains a contentious issue. Aboriginal community control of teaching languages in schools should be Education policy. Repatriation of materials and knowledge from cultural institutions is also a priority.