

COMMUNIQUE

Mount Druitt – Butucarbin Aboriginal Corporation Hebersham

23 June 2017

The workshop commenced with an Acknowledgement of Country.

Participants said that Aboriginal languages are living and dynamic, they have been modernised with new words for things like computers. Aboriginal languages are strong on the land, and language strengthens identity (individual and collective). Language can be taught in an institution, but can never replace the teaching of languages in the family home. Nurturing and teaching Aboriginal language in local communities avoids institutionalising the language. Western Sydney has the biggest Aboriginal population in NSW and is a melting pot of cultures and languages.

The Bill should be 'living' legislation, as it will influence other States and Territories. The legal ramifications of the legislation, and the wording used, must be considered. While the term 'Aboriginal' is contentious, alternative terms may affect other Acts (such as the Aboriginal Land Rights Act). So there was some support for the term First peoples/nations, there was some reluctance because it came from Canada. The Bill should also recognise cultural expression such as songlines and storytelling, and note the risk of losing languages that are considered "extinct".

Participants said Parliament should acknowledge communities' role of reviving and protecting languages. Local control through a decision making body with authority was important, and had to operate within cultural protocols and set its own priorities. Language diversity (including dialects) had to be respected. The Minister (and the Government's) role is to facilitate, support, provide funding, and promote and foster languages.

Teaching languages in schools improves student attendance, behaviour and engagement, and also better engagement of parents. The Strategic Plan should promote language learning (such as accredited language-specific courses), should build the language teaching workforce (such as qualifications of language tutors), and should retain knowledge and authority within Aboriginal communities.

Aboriginal languages should be celebrated through greetings cultural events, signage and dual naming. This should be a priority for local government. There are also employment opportunities such as Aboriginal linguists and cultural tourism. A state-wide gathering could share stories of language revival, digital resources to share language.

The Centre for Aboriginal Languages of NSW should not be within Aboriginal Affairs. A mobile unit working with all languages rather than a physical centre. Its specialists should be accountable to community.