

COMMUNIQUE

Redfern – National Centre for Indigenous Excellence (NCIE)

14 June 2017

The workshop commenced with a Welcome to Country and a cultural performance with a children's choir. The Hon. Sarah Mitchell MLC, Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, spoke about the importance of the Bill. The Minister added that the Bill is about communities and government working side by side, that the control of languages belongs with communities, and government's responsibility is supporting and enabling communities.

Participants at the workshop said that not using the term 'Aboriginal' could mean loss of connection, and the Bill has to fit with other Acts including Aboriginal Land Rights Act and Aboriginal Housing Act. The term "revival" not supported because not all languages are at that stage and "renewal" is a better term, and "protect" needs to be defined to allay fears of losing ownership. Better words are needed to describe ownership and custodian, words with meaning to Aboriginal people. Tendency to focus on spoken language, however language includes other forms of cultural expression such as song, dance and music.

Bill has to acknowledge Aboriginal ownership of language, and connection to land and culture. Language should be controlled by communities, not governed by a government agency. A state-wide board with geographical representation to control the legislation. Government should not manage the language centre. Government's role is to assist community with revival and development. Minister to discuss cross-border issues with other States and Territories. Aboriginal Affairs should monitor program delivery.

In the past, non-Aboriginal people created cultural spaces through historical records. Colonisation changed languages and linguists recorded adapted versions, risking their linguistic quality. There needs to be serious linguistic analysis of language families and discussion at the community level about contemporary language revival. Aboriginal people to design and implement this work.

Kinship and protocol protects language from misuse and misappropriation of language, such as using an Aboriginal name to mask non-Aboriginal business or service. Teaching languages in an institutional setting, such as TAFE, comes with risks including the protection of intellectual property rights, recognition of linguistic diversity, and for Aboriginal students to learn it first. Importance of local Elders being involved in teaching language. Care must be taken to ensure genuine community ownership of programs, maintaining language integrity, and not creating competition for limited resources.

Minister's function is funding language activities and working collaboratively with Aboriginal peoples. The Centre for Aboriginal Language should be an independent authority with the powers and resources of a government agency. The Centre, through its board, should prepare the strategic plan and perform the functions currently assigned to the Minister. The Centre should promote and share models of successful language centres, and link people up with language centres and resources.

The Bill has to work together the Aboriginal Land Rights Act and the Aboriginal cultural heritage reforms. There should be a state-wide meeting on the proposed legislation.