

COMMUNIQUE

Wagga Wagga – Tolland Community Centre

16 May 2017

The workshop commenced with a Welcome to Country.

Wiradjuri language has been recorded for over 30 years, through dictionary, grammar and other publications. Elders wanted everyone to learn the language. Language belongs to people, and belongs to the land. Learning language is healing, and restores health and collective identity. Legislation must acknowledge past language revival efforts.

While there was support for legislation, there were also concerns with the intention of protection. Historical distrust of legislation remains and a future government could dismantle the Act. A treaty could be a better alternative or a first priority. The draft legislation gives the Minister many powers, but ownership and control of Aboriginal languages must be held by Aboriginal people and communities.

Languages are protected through people learning the language. However, there were concerns that Aboriginal languages were being institutionalised by favouring academic effort over work in communities. Local elders still have to be source of authority on teaching language. The importance of involving grandparents in teaching languages was also discussed.

There was support for 'First Languages' or 'First Nations Languages' but not 'Aboriginal'. When making specific references, Wiradjuri was preferred. The legislation should recognise that each nation group is unique.

Each nation group should have its own Aboriginal language centre, to develop cultural knowledge and provide a platform for teaching language in schools. The centre cannot be centralised or bureaucratic and must match community aspirations. A federation of nation-based centres could resolve common issues and share expertise, knowledge and resources. The centre, or gathering place, does not need to be a physical building but resources to bring people and ideas together.

Legislation should provide resources for employment and workforce development in Aboriginal language sector, and give Aboriginal Affairs ability to hold other agencies accountable for their actions. Strategic Plan (or 'Framework for Action') should be underpinned by Aboriginal authority, ownership and control. Wider appreciation of languages, such as placenames and signage, needs to have respectful dialogue.

Aboriginal people must be involved in developing the final Bill, including during Parliamentary debates, and for feedback on current consultations. It was critical that people were properly consulted on the Bill even if doing so causes delay.