



## Language learning in Indigenous communities

The role of Indigenous languages in Closing the Gap and improving outcomes for Indigenous communities is the subject of a new inquiry by the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs. The inquiry will examine the benefits of giving recognition to Indigenous languages, and how Indigenous languages can be used in education to improve competency in English. In addition, the inquiry will examine current maintenance and revitalisation programs for Indigenous languages.

This is the first parliamentary inquiry to examine the direct contribution that the learning of Indigenous languages can make to overcoming disadvantage and achieving competency in English language. The Chair of the Committee Mr Shayne Neumann MP stated, 'This is a topical inquiry to be launching during NAIDOC week – a week in which we celebrate the history, culture and achievements of Australia's Indigenous people. Language is such an important part of a person's culture and identity. By examining how we can give attention and proper recognition to Indigenous languages in Australia, we are also walking the path of reconciliation by giving attention and proper recognition to Indigenous cultures and identities.'

Mr Neumann added, 'Our Committee's recent report into the overrepresentation of Indigenous youth in the criminal justice system, *Doing time – time for doing*, found that self-healing and connection to culture programs have been highly effective in getting people back on track. Additionally we found that Indigenous language interpreting and translating services were inadequate, particularly in remote communities.'

There seems to be a belief in Australia that we are a monolingual nation and that only Standard Australian English can benefit a person, both educationally and vocationally. If we look outside of Australia, the evidence is overwhelmingly to the contrary. The benefits of being able to speak multiple languages are tangible, particularly in Europe. The Committee aims to look at what's working, as well as looking for innovative measures to improve competency in English in communities where English is a second language.'

The Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs and the Minister for the Arts have asked the Committee to inquire into and report on language learning in Indigenous communities. The Committee will broadly examine the benefits of giving attention and recognition to Indigenous languages, with a focus on:

- The contribution of Indigenous languages to Closing the Gap and strengthening Indigenous identity and culture
- The potential benefits of including Indigenous languages in early education and measures to improve English competency and education outcomes in Indigenous communities
- The effectiveness of current maintenance and revitalisation programs for Indigenous languages, and
- The effectiveness of the Commonwealth Government Indigenous languages policy in delivering its objectives and relevant policies of other Australian governments.

The Committee invites submissions to the inquiry by **19 August 2011**. For the full terms of reference and advice on making submissions see the Committee's website at [www.aph.gov.au/atsia](http://www.aph.gov.au/atsia) or contact the committee secretariat on **(02) 6277 4559**.

**For media comment**, please contact the Committee Chair Mr Shayne Neumann on (07) 3201 5300. **For background information**, contact the Committee Secretariat on (02) 62774559 or [atsia.reps@aph.gov.au](mailto:atsia.reps@aph.gov.au)