

Senate Standing Committee on Economics
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Innovation, Industry, Science and Research Portfolio
Budget Estimates Hearing 2008-09
2-3 June 2008

AGENCY/DEPARTMENT: AUSTRALIAN INSTITUTE OF ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER STUDIES

TOPIC: Indigenous Australians

REFERENCE: Written Question – Senator Eggleston

QUESTION No. BI-5

Indigenous leader Warren Mundine has put forward his view that all indigenous children should be taught English. Such a laudable task obviously faces many barriers including barriers of a cultural nature, so could you tell me whether you have been approached by the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations on this proposition and what work has AIATSIS done in the area of English language learning for indigenous Australians?

ANSWER

It is our understanding that all children in Australian schools are learning English and it is not within the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) functions to become directly involved in instruction in schools. The Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations has not made any formal approach to AIATSIS regarding teaching English to Indigenous children. However, in keeping with the Institute's functions to research, promote, and publish the results of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander studies and encourage understanding, in the general community of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander societies, the AIATSIS collections and personnel serve as a resource for the community including teachers and education departments. For example, the Institute holds resources that could assist teachers of English to non-English speaking background Indigenous Australian children to understand points of linguistic contrast and identify cultural barriers that may impact on Indigenous children's capacity to learn English.