

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Languages Policy Partnership Meeting 20-21 March 2023

Meeting report

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Languages Policy Partnership (LPP) held its first meeting on 20 – 21 March 2023.

The partnership formally establishes a joined-up approach between all governments and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, to work towards the achievement of Target 16, ensuring that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and languages are strong, supported and flourishing.

The first LPP meeting aimed to

- Formally establish the LPP
- Discuss the importance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages
- Begin to identify systematic barriers in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages sector
- Discuss jurisdictions' commitments and efforts to meet Target 16
- Begin to identify specific measures to achieve Target 16 and determine a path forward for the LPP

LPP representatives considered the draft LPP Agreement to Implement and collaboratively workshopped enhancements to the document. The draft Agreement will be finalised out of session and signed at the second LPP meeting in June 2023.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives shared their language experiences and expertise and talked about what it means for languages to be 'strong, supported and flourishing'. Key messages included the importance of taking a holistic approach to languages; centring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the experts, trainers and service providers; the need for increased investment in languages and communities, and greater support for Indigenous language centres.

The Co-chairs facilitated a discussion on priority reform one under Closing the Gap 'partnership and shared decision-making'. Discussion included the importance of addressing power dynamics to achieve and maintain balance within the partnership; and Indigenous data development and sovereignty.

The group then reflected on the pre-meeting workshops discussing partnerships and coordination, the importance of tangible outcomes in communities and the longevity of the partnership. The group has a strong focus on process integrity, broader community awareness of the LPP, and opportunities for participation, including the development of a communication and engagement strategy.

The group was provided with an overview of the ongoing international and national policy work of the Directions Group under the International Decade of Indigenous Languages. The group discussed the importance of distinguishing and not duplicating efforts, coordination and leveraging work, and

accountability of governments.

The second day of the meeting the group were presented with the relevant jurisdictional implementation plans for Target 16 under the National Agreement. The plans include information on total funding amounts, priorities, programs. The group then discussed respective relationships and opportunities to improve policy approaches. Key messages included direct investment in communities, and language policy needing to be responsive to the identified needs, priorities and capacities of local communities.

The group discussed LPP operational and governance needs, including the need to develop information sharing tools for informed decision-making, coordination (internal and external) and the development of a communications and engagement strategy.

The group then workshopped guiding principles of the LPP, including:

- increased value of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages
- diversity of language circumstances
- restorative justice and rights
- cross-sector relevance – language as holistic and inter-disciplinary
- transformation of government
- the future and longevity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages

The group then workshopped high-level priorities, including:

- language sector strengthening
- increased and targeted funding
- national languages legislation
- language retrieval and repatriation (decolonising processes)
- national languages week
- Access to country

The final session of the group included overall meeting reflections from the members.

Meeting attendee list

Coalition of Peaks representatives	
Heather Sculthorpe	Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre
Karen Paterson	First Nations Media
Karina Lester	Mobile Language Unit
Vicki Couzens	Victorian Aboriginal Corporation for Languages
Beau Williams	First Languages Australia, Co-Chair
Independent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives	
Patsy Ngalu Beford	Independent
Daryn McKenny	Independent
Leitha Assan	Independent
Samantha Armstrong	Independent
Gulwanyang Moran	Independent
Government representatives	
Jennifer McGrath on behalf of Erin Gauntlett	Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries, Western Australian Government
Clare McHugh	Aboriginal Languages Trust, New South Wales Government
Kathy Parton	Department of Seniors, Disability Services and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships, Queensland Government
Stephen Fraser	Department of Education, Victorian Government
Camille Lew Fatt	Department of Chief, Minister and Cabinet, Northern Territory Government
Christopher Riley on behalf of Jodee Wilson	Department of Education, Children and Young People, Tasmanian Government
Deonne Smith	Department of Education, South Australian Government
Brendan Moyle	Executive Branch Manager of the Office of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, ACT Government
Stephen Arnott	Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communication and the Arts, Commonwealth Government