

MEDIA RELEASE



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ANTaR backs call for urgent action on languages

ANTaR has today welcomed the release of a Parliamentary Report recommending urgent national action to preserve, maintain and revitalise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages.

“Today’s Parliamentary report recognises the perilous state of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages and the urgent need for action. With many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages critically endangered, we must act now before it is too late,” said Jacqueline Phillips, National Director.

“Australia is home to some of the oldest surviving languages in the world, but these languages are disappearing faster than any other Indigenous languages globally.”

“Despite their importance in our national history and cultural heritage, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages have no official status in Australia and there is little coordinated national action to maintain, preserve or revitalise them.”

“ANTaR calls on all major parties to accept the recommendations contained in today’s report to ensure the future of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages.”

ANTaR strongly supports the Committee’s call for bilingual education in communities where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages are the first languages spoken.

“Evidence from around the world indicates that bilingual teaching models in fact supports both mother-tongue and English language learning.”

We also support the call for national recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages within the *Closing the Gap* strategy but stress the need to for this to be complemented by coordinated national action.

“Language preservation and promotion provides a connection to culture and history and strengthens identity and belonging. It has also been shown to promote resilience, better health and economic opportunities – all vital to closing the gap.”

“However, existing language initiatives around the country are fragmented and uncoordinated, with inconsistent approaches to funding and no common set of policy or program principles. A nationally coordinated approach is urgently needed.”

“ANTaR is disappointed that that Committee has rejected calls by key peak bodies for a National Indigenous Languages Centre. We believe that such a centre could play a key role in achieving national coordination and providing resources and support to regional and local language initiatives.”

“Importantly, it would also be a mechanism for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership and direction over national language policy and programs.”

The Committee also backed changes to the Constitution to recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages in our nation’s founding document.

“Constitutional recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages would be an official statement of pride and respect for the importance of these languages to our cultural heritage.”

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