



Friday, 22 March 2026

Submission to National Cultural Policy Public Consultation 2026

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input to the development of a new National Cultural Policy.

Who we are

We make this submission as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers at Yardhura Walani, the National Centre for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Wellbeing Research, housed at the Australian National University (ANU). Yardhura Walani's research focuses on the most significant health and wellbeing factors that impact Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' lives including culture, racism, tobacco, cancer, and chronic disease. Our National Centre's work is underpinned by deep community partnerships, with representation from all states and territories, ensuring research agendas are set by community and we build research capacity at grassroots level.

'Yardhura Walani' is Ngunnawal language for 'strong, healthy place', a name gifted to us by Ngunnawal Elders through the Winanggaay Language Group, comprising all Ngunnawal families. As a Centre we are charged with ensuring we honour this meaning throughout all our work, which is driven by our purpose to strengthen the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

What our research says about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages and wellbeing

Our research supports what Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have long known: culture is fundamental to our health and wellbeing. In particular, our analysis of data from *Mayi Kuwayi: The National Study of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Wellbeing* shows that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language use is associated with positive wellbeing outcomes [1]. For example, speaking any amount of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander language (even a few words) is associated with a significantly higher prevalence of good to excellent general health [1]. Participating in a language program is also associated with improved wellbeing outcomes: good to excellent general health is 9% more common, high levels of happiness are 5% more common, and high life satisfaction is 8% more common among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults who have participated in a language program compared with those who have not [1]. Furthermore, speaking language, learning language, and participating in a language program are all strongly associated with never feeling disconnected from culture: for example, never feeling disconnected from culture is 40% more common among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults who speak any Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language, even a few words, compared to those who speak no language [1]. These wellbeing benefits underscore the importance of supporting the use of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages within and beyond arts and cultural policy.

What this means for the National Cultural Policy

We welcome the inclusion in the National Cultural Policy of *Pillar 1: First Nations First*, which recognises the centrality of Aboriginal and Torres Strait cultures and stories within Australia's arts and cultures. Beyond this, we believe the next National Cultural Policy must also recognise the centrality of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and languages to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and wellbeing, and the Policy

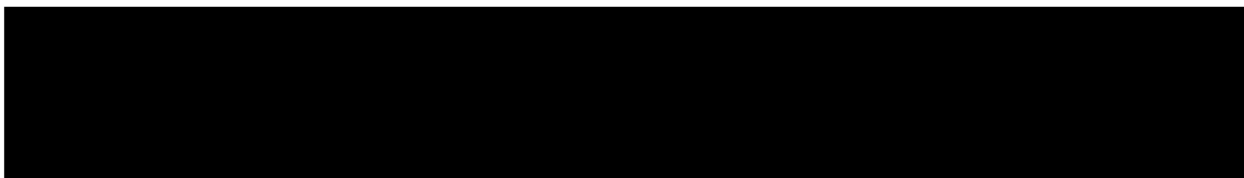


National Centre for
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
Wellbeing Research



should ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and languages are supported and resourced commensurately with their central place in enabling our health and wellbeing. This includes investment in community-led language centres, programs, and educators; ensuring access to language materials and activities on Country; support for speaking and using languages in all areas of life, including intergenerational transmission of languages; and raising visibility of the importance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages among the Australian public and policy makers across all levels of government. For further details of community-identified actions to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages, we point you to First Languages Australia: www.firstlanguages.org.au. It is imperative that any such investments and resources to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages are directed and controlled by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in accordance with their own self-determined priorities.

Sincerely



Fiona Cornforth
Director, Yardhura Walani
The Australian National University

Professor Ray Lovett
Director, Mayi Kuwayu Study
Associate Director, Yardhura Walani
The Australian National University

Dr Bronwyn Wilkes
Research Fellow, Yardhura Walani
The Australian National University

References:

1. Wilkes, B., Hasan, M., Colonna, E., Brinckley, M., Montgomery, S., Sedgewick, M., Thurber, K.A., Lovett, R. 2024, Research Update: Exploring links between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Language Use and Wellbeing. Yardhura Walani. Available at: https://mkstudy.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Summary_MKFLA_language-wellbeing_240829.pdf



Australian
National
University