

A SUBMISSION FROM KARINA LESTER

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Submission to the Revive National Cultural Policy Consultation

A call for change — from a global vantage and a Yankunytjatjara grounding, aligned with UNDRIP

About this submission

I make this submission as a Yankunytjatjara woman and as an **Indigenous organisation representative on the Global Task Force for the International Decade of Indigenous Languages 2022–2032** (the Decade). In that role I work alongside Indigenous representatives from across the world, and alongside UNESCO and Member States, to shape how the Decade is implemented globally and how Member States — including Australia — translate their international commitments into action.

This submission is informed by both perspectives: the global vantage of the Task Force, and my grounding as a Yankunytjatjara woman with a lifelong involvement in Aboriginal language work. They are not separate views. The international frameworks Australia has endorsed are an extension, not a replacement, of the inherent rights of First Nations peoples in this country.

My call

I call on the Australian Government, through the First Nations First pillar of Revive, to commit to:

- recognition of First Nations language rights as inherent — not granted;
- guaranteed use of First Nations languages in public life and services;
- First Nations-led governance and funding oversight;
- stable, long-term investment insulated from political cycles; and
- community-led design rooted in self-determination.

These calls align directly with Australia's obligations under the **United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples** (UNDRIP) — particularly Articles 13, 14 and 16 — and with the global framework of the Decade itself. They are not novel asks; they are Australia's existing international commitments, made domestically real.

What these changes would mean — from a global vantage and from home

1. Inherent rights — already affirmed internationally

Australia has endorsed UNDRIP. Australia has joined the Decade. From the Global Task Force vantage, the central question is not whether Member States have signed up to these frameworks, but how they are implementing them. Recognition of First Nations language rights as inherent — not granted — is the foundation that everything else rests on. It would bring Australia's domestic policy posture into alignment with the position it has already taken internationally.

2. Long-term, decade-scale investment — what the Decade actually means

The Decade is a ten-year framework, agreed by the international community, in recognition of the fact that language revitalisation cannot be achieved within shorter horizons. Member States that are taking the Decade seriously are committing funding architectures whose timeframes match the framework itself. Funding cycles measured in months are not commensurate with the commitment Australia has made. I am calling for stable, multi-year, indexed funding insulated from political cycles — at minimum the duration of the Decade, and ideally beyond.

3. First Nations-led governance — the international standard

From the Task Force, one of the clearest patterns across the global experience of the Decade is this: the national responses delivering the most for Indigenous language speakers are those that have transferred genuine governance authority to Indigenous peoples and their representative organisations. Consultation alone, however well-intended, is not governance. The framework Australia commits to should build First Nations-led decision-making into its structures — at national, regional and community level — not as an advisory layer, but as the locus of authority.

4. A Yankunytjatjara grounding

These calls are not abstract for me. I have grown up with our language, taught our language, fought for our language, and watched what short-term, fragmented funding does to community language work over time. What I am calling for from this submission is the same thing I would call for from my own family table: a settled understanding that our languages are ours to hold, that the State's role is to enable rather than to grant, and that the investment available to us reflects the timescale and the seriousness of the work.

In closing

I urge the Australian Government to use the First Nations First pillar of Revive as the moment to commit to these changes. Doing so would meet Australia's international commitments domestically; it would meet First Nations peoples in this country on the terms they are owed; and it would put Australia in the company of those Member States that are taking the Decade seriously. I would welcome the opportunity to discuss this submission further with the Minister and the Department.

Yours sincerely,

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Yankunytjatjara

Indigenous organisation representative

Global Task Force for the International Decade of Indigenous Languages