

Towards a New National Cultural Policy

Submission from First Languages Australia



Australia is home to over 800 distinct Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages that have been spoken for tens of thousands of years and through countless generations (First Languages Australia, 2026). Each language carries its own knowledge systems, holding our lore, kinship, spirituality, connection to Country and identity. Our languages are our culture, and are deeply embedded and expressed through dance, songlines, stories, ceremonies, kinship structures and our ways of knowing, being and doing.

Yet the current trajectory is catastrophic: without urgent intervention and support, almost all of these languages will fall silent within the next 50 years. Of the more than 800 languages spoken before colonisation, only approximately 120 are spoken today (The Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, 2020). Of those, only a small number are the language people first learn as children. And regardless of the number of current speakers or the perceived ‘strength’ of any particular language, all Indigenous languages in Australia are under threat.

We are in a race against time. Immediate action is required to help turn the tide, and see our languages strong into the future.

First Languages Australia has a vision for the future where all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages are living, strong and vibrant - spoken across generations in homes and communities, embedded in education and public life, and respected, supported and celebrated by all Australians. First Languages Australia submits that our vision for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages should be embedded in and supported by the next National Cultural Policy.

However, for this vision to be achieved, the commitment of significant and dedicated support from the Australian Government is required. A whole-of-government approach to supporting vital and urgent community language work is needed, an approach that is grounded in self-determination and built on respectful relationships and engagement.

This requires Indigenous languages to be embedded throughout the National Cultural Policy, and not just within *Pillar 1: First Nations First*. It also requires a shift in the way that languages are framed within the Policy, which currently is referred to alongside terms such as ‘safeguarding’ and ‘protecting’. This terminology implies that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages are static artefacts to be preserved, rather than living and constantly evolving forms of communication and holders of deep knowledges which are actively being strengthened by communities and families.

The next National Cultural Policy must use strengths-based terms when discussing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages.¹

In this submission, First Languages Australia makes nine key recommendations, all of which are intended to ensure that our vision for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages is embedded within and supported by the next National Cultural Policy.

1. Centre First Nations people and communities
2. Implement the forthcoming Languages Sector Strengthening Plan.
3. Prioritise actions towards language collections access and management for people and communities engaging in language revitalisation, maintenance and strengthening, and endorse and implement the recommendations in the forthcoming National Collections Strategy.
4. Acknowledge and recognise the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as set out in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
5. Commit to partnering with First Languages Australia on a process of consultation and co-design towards national Indigenous languages legislation
6. Continue to progress the Languages Policy Partnership's national priorities and urgent actions
7. Reform the Indigenous Languages and Arts Program
8. Continue and increase support for the First Nations Languages Education Program
9. Continue to promote and prioritise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages throughout the International Decade of Indigenous Languages

First Languages Australia looks forward to working in partnership with the Australia Government to ensure that the central place of First Nations languages is recognised in the new National Cultural Policy, and that the recommendations made in this submission are implemented to ensure that our vision for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages can become a reality.

For further information on anything contained within this submission, contact FLA's Legal Policy Advisor by email at [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
Annalee Little

First Languages Australia

¹ For guidance, refer to *Notes to assist reporting on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages* <https://www.firstlanguages.org.au/notes-to-assist>

Recommendations

First Languages Australia makes the following recommendations, all of which are intended to ensure that our vision for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages – a future where all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages are living, strong and vibrant - is embedded within and supported by the next National Cultural Policy.

1. Centre First Nations people and communities

The National Cultural Policy is structured around five interconnected pillars, the first of which is *First Nations First*. This is an important recognition of the crucial and central role of First Nations arts and culture, including language. Our languages are our culture, and are deeply embedded and expressed through dance, songlines, stories, ceremonies, kinship structures and our ways of knowing, being and doing.

Language cannot exist without people. First Languages Australia acknowledges that whilst there are a number of urgent actions needed to ensure the strength of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages, the most important component is people. Language revitalisation, maintenance and strengthening cannot happen without Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people being supported to lead this vital work.

In recognition of this, the next National Cultural Policy should ensure that all actions related to languages ultimately support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to work on their languages. First Nations people must be first in any approach to strengthening arts and culture, and thus languages.

This is also identified as a priority action within the Languages Sector Strengthening Plan, which calls for immediate action to directly fund Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to work on their languages.

Recommendation: Centre First Nations people and communities throughout the next National Cultural Policy, particularly in any actions related to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages.

2. Implement the Languages Sector Strengthening Plan

Under Priority Reform Two of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, the languages sector was identified as a priority for joint national strengthening efforts. This was in recognition of the importance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages, the critical endangerment faced by all languages, and the need for immediate action to turn the tide and see our languages strong into the future.

In 2024, First Languages Australia as the national peak body for languages was tasked with developing a Languages Sector Strengthening Plan. The development of the Plan has been informed by significant national consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals, families and communities across the country working to make their languages strong.

In partnership with local language centres and communities, FLA planned and delivered 32 full-day consultation workshops in 23 locations around Australia throughout 2024 and 2025. FLA also shared an online survey with the language network, to make sure those who could not attend in-person consultation could have a say on the development of the Plan.

The Plan has a vision of a strong, community-controlled languages sector that supports Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to do the critical language work needed to increase the strength of our languages and ensure they are ‘strong, supported and flourishing’. To achieve this vision, the Plan sets out actions in eight key areas: workforce, capital infrastructure, Country, service delivery, governance, funding, peak bodies, and legislation. These actions have been developed based on what was heard during national consultation about the needs, priorities and aspirations of language communities, as well as the seven national priorities of the Languages Policy Partnership and the five over-arching themes of *Voices of Country – Australia’s Action Plan for the International Decade of Indigenous Languages 2022-2032*.

As a priority first step, the Plan calls for immediate action to directly fund Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to work on their languages. This is in recognition of the fact that a strong languages sector fundamentally requires supporting, resourcing and making space for language communities to increase the number and strength of their language speakers. The Plan calls on governments to work in partnership with language communities, community-controlled organisations and peak bodies in their jurisdictions to develop clear implementation plans, based on the needs and priorities of language communities, as well their own policies, budget priorities and timeframes.

The Plan is currently in the process of being finalised and is intended to be submitted for endorsement by the Joint Council on Closing the Gap in November 2026. The Australian Government, as a party to the National Agreement, should work with language communities, community-controlled organisations and First Languages Australia as the national peak body to develop a clear plan to implement the Languages Sector Strengthening Plan, once endorsed. Progress towards implementation of the Plan should be reported on annually.

Recommendation: Include an action in the next National Cultural Policy to implement the forthcoming Languages Sector Strengthening Plan.

3. Endorse and implement the recommendations in the forthcoming National Collections Strategy

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities accessing language collections held in Galleries, Libraries, Archives, Museums and other collecting institutions across the country needs to become a national priority.

Language materials held in these institutions are critical to language revitalisation, maintenance, strengthening and ultimately to cultural resurgence. However, too often these materials are inaccessible and unusable to communities due to complex access conditions, poorly described collections, lack of Indigenous data governance and lack of targeted resourcing.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities engaging in language revitalisation, maintenance and strengthening deserve:

- clear access pathways to their materials;
- discoverable materials that are well described, with built in pathways to respond and improve the metadata;
- embedded Indigenous Data Governance and cultural authority;
- Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property and Indigenous Data Sovereignty policies that improve community access to materials;
- allocated, targeted funding to support people and communities to engage in this work.

A national approach is needed to address these gaps. For this to be realised, policy and funding need to be available specifically to address this. Institutions need to engage in Indigenous Data Governance for the management and stewardship of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language data. Language materials need to become accessible, and where possible repatriated, as a priority to *stop the loss*.

Priority Reform Four of the National Agreement is about shared access to data and information. Measures towards collections access and management are essential steps towards Priority Reform Four for our sector.

First Languages Australia will be releasing a National Collections Strategy in the coming year, and the recommendations of this strategy should be taken up in full.

Recommendation: Include an action in the next National Cultural Policy to endorse and implement the forthcoming National Collections Strategy.

4. Acknowledge and recognise the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

First Languages Australia recognises and supports the inherent and inalienable rights of Indigenous peoples, enshrined in the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (UNDRIP). For all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages to be strong, the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, including in relation to their languages, must be respected and upheld, and this must be recognised and acknowledged in the next National Cultural Policy.

This includes the rights of Indigenous peoples to:

- self-determination, autonomy and self-government (Articles 3 and 4)
- not be subjected to forced assimilation or destruction of their culture (Article 8)
- revitalise, use, develop and transmit their languages to future generations (Article 13)
- establish and control their educational systems and institutions providing education in their own languages (Article 14)
- the lands, territories and resources they have traditionally owned, occupied, used or acquired (Article 26)
- the conservation and protection of the environment (Article 29)
- maintain, control, protect and develop their cultural heritage, traditional knowledge and traditional cultural expressions (Article 31)

While Australia has endorsed UNDRIP, it has not yet been implemented into domestic legislation. FLA advocates for the immediate implementation of UNDRIP in Australia, and for respect, recognition and protection of the rights of Indigenous peoples by the Australian legal system. Rights should be enforceable if breached and should not be able to be unreasonably limited or overridden.

The recognition and acknowledgement of language rights and the implementation of UNDRIP in Australia are both addressed in the Languages Sector Strengthening Plan, discussed above.

Recommendation: Acknowledge and recognise the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the next National Cultural Policy and include an action to implement the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*.

5. Commit to partnering with First Languages Australia on a process of consultation and co-design towards national Indigenous languages legislation

First Languages Australia calls for the introduction of stand-alone Indigenous languages legislation at the state, territory and national levels, as a means of addressing the devastating historical impacts and ongoing pressures on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages. Legislation, and what it seeks to achieve at various levels, must be self-determined and driven by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

There has been a strong call for the introduction of languages legislation in Australia and internationally:

- The *Global Action Plan of the International Decade of Indigenous Languages (2022-2032)* (UNESCO, 2021) directly calls on Member States to recognise Indigenous languages “within their legal systems and legislation”, and to support them “with comprehensive language-related laws and policy frameworks”.
- *Voices of Country—Australia's National Action Plan for the International Decade* (First Languages Australia and Commonwealth of Australia, 2023) has a recommendation to “Design and implement government legislation, policies, services, strategies and programs in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to protect and strengthen languages”.
- The Languages Policy Partnership identified languages legislation as one of its seven policy priorities and made recommendations to Joint Council in July 2024 noting the need for urgent action to progress towards it (Languages Policy Partnership, 2025).
- Throughout national community consultation undertaken by FLA throughout 2025 to develop the Languages Sector Strengthening Plan, languages legislation was identified as an important priority for communities. The Languages Sector Strengthening Plan includes actions related to languages legislation.

Languages legislation has been successfully implemented in many other jurisdictions, both domestically and overseas, and has led to a wide range of benefits for Indigenous languages. These include recognition of the importance of Indigenous languages, increased, coordinated and secure funding, and greater awareness of and sustained action on Indigenous languages.

Any proposed legislation must be the subject of genuine and robust consultation and co-design with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, based on the principles of free, prior and informed consent and self-determination. First Languages Australia as the national peak body should be funded to lead this process, to ensure that the interests and needs of language communities and the fundamental positions and diversity of languages are reflected in any proposal for languages legislation.

Recommendation: Include a commitment in the next National Cultural Policy to partner with First Languages Australia on the development of a comprehensive process of co-design and consultation towards national Indigenous languages legislation.

6. Continue to progress the Languages Policy Partnership's national priorities and urgent actions

Australia's current National Cultural Policy has provided for the establishment of a 'First Nations Languages Policy Partnership between First Nations representatives and Australian governments to improve outcomes for First Nations peoples'.

From this provision, the Languages Policy Partnership (LPP) was established in 2023 under Priority Reform One of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap to create a shared approach to progress and achieve Outcome 16 and Target 16.

Outcome 16: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and languages are strong, supported and flourishing.

Target 16: By 2031, there is a sustained increase in the number and strength of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages spoken.

The LPP has members representing all Australian commonwealth, state and territory governments, alongside Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisation and independent community language members. The partnership is co-chaired by the CEO of First Languages Australia, as the national peak body for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages, and the Deputy Secretary of the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communication and the Arts (the Office of the Arts).

As the Commonwealth Government's lead agency for Target 16 and the Commonwealth representative on the LPP, the Office for the Arts must make significant inroads with each Commonwealth department and agency to remove systemic barriers and transforming government (Priority Reform Two) to achieving Target 16. Achieving Target 16 requires a whole-of-government approach, with the coordination of this approach the responsibility of the Deputy Secretary of the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communication and the Arts.

The LPP has identified seven national priorities to guide progress towards achieving Target 16 of Closing the Gap (Languages Policy Partnership, 2025):

1. **Speaking and using languages:** For languages to be strong and flourishing, they must be used every day, everywhere – in all the ways community wants them to be used.
2. **Supporting the people, groups and organisations who work in languages:** For languages to be strong, the people working in languages must be supported. There must be more opportunities, resources, and support for those working or wanting to work in languages. Our people, families, and future generations should always be able to work in languages.
3. **More funding that goes where communities need it:** To do the work, communities need more funding. All governments have a responsibility to work with communities and support this work. This includes increasing funding to existing Indigenous language centres and programs and expanding the language centre network.

4. **Languages legislation:** Support and celebrate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages through laws. These laws should help all communities and create a safe future for languages.
5. **Bringing language home to the people and communities:** Language materials must be returned to their Country and people. Getting language materials back can be difficult for Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people who are the rightful custodians. New ways and systems are needed so that communities can access and manage these materials themselves.
6. **Access to Country:** Languages and Country are deeply connected. Languages carry and teach knowledge. Languages should be able to be taught, yarned, and sung on Country. Together with Country our languages will be strong.
7. **Help people understand the importance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Languages:** Raise awareness about the importance of and benefits of speaking Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and to the broader Australian public.

The LPP has delivered these priorities to the Joint Council on Closing the Gap, alongside three urgent actions that will have an immediate and significant positive effect towards addressing the state of emergency facing Aboriginal languages and Torres Strait Islander languages:

1. Commence consultation on the establishment of national legislation to protect and support Aboriginal languages and Torres Strait Islander languages.
2. Explore mechanisms to create or expand community-controlled funding pools and grant programs across jurisdictions to address the immediate risks of loss of languages.
3. Provide additional support to grow the community-controlled languages sector, including supporting the creation and resourcing of a languages Peak in each jurisdiction.

The LPP's seven national priorities and three urgent actions have been incorporated into the Languages Sector Strengthening Plan, discussed above, and will continue to be progressed through implementation of that Plan.

There have been a range of positive developments for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages and language communities that have resulted from the establishment of the LPP.

They include:

- developing a [Data Policy Position](#), which provides guidance on how to define and measure what a ‘strong, supported and flourishing’ language is;
- approving the development of the forthcoming Languages Sector Strengthening Plan, and providing ongoing guidance on the direction of the Plan through a dedicated Working Group;
- commissioning the development of the forthcoming ‘National Collections Strategy’;
- commissioning the development of the forthcoming ‘National Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Translating and Interpreting’;
- commissioning research into and the development of the Languages Economic and Investment Framework.

First Languages Australia submits that the operation of the LPP should continue to be funded as an important mechanism for partnership and collaboration towards the sustained progress and achievement of Target 16 and Outcome 16 of Closing the Gap.

However, there is an urgent need to bridge the vision that has been established and articulated with action that makes substantive progress towards structural reform in language policy making. For the LPP to be an effective vehicle for change, the Australian Government, as a member of the LPP and party to the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, must continue to take meaningful action towards progressing the LPP’s national priorities and urgent work areas, through a whole-of-government approach. This will primarily occur through implementation of the Languages Sector Strengthening Plan, which as discussed above should be included as an action in the next National Cultural Policy.

Recommendation: The Australian Government should implement a whole-of-government response to progress the seven national priorities and three urgent actions identified by the Languages Policy Partnership, through implementation of the Languages Sector Strengthening Plan.

7. Reform the Indigenous Languages and Arts Program

The National Cultural Policy has an action to ‘Continue support for First Nations peoples to express, preserve and maintain their culture through languages and the arts, under the Indigenous Languages and Arts program’.

The Indigenous Languages and Arts (ILA) program invested over \$47 million in 2025-26 to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to express, conserve and sustain their cultures through First Nations languages and arts activities.

Research commissioned by the First Peoples’ Cultural Council in 2018 compared global expenditure on Indigenous language revitalisation, with government expenditure in Australia ranking low in comparison to other countries (Bliss, 2018). See Table 1 extracted from this research below.

Table 1. Government expenditures on ILR (in CAD)

Country	Per-capita (Indigenous)	Per-capita (total)	Percentage of GDP
Spain	\$1,329.77	\$58.37	0.1690%
Norway	\$783.38	\$8.14	0.0082%
Scotland	\$526.45	\$8.45	0.0180%
New Zealand	\$267.06	\$40.25	0.0787%
Wales	\$108.85	\$19.58	0.0594%
Brazil	\$47.83	\$0.20	0.0018%
Sweden ¹	\$29.03	\$0.09	0.0001%
Australia	\$18.82	\$0.51	0.0008%
United States	\$5.64	\$0.14	0.0023%
Mexico	\$0.09	\$0.02	0.0002%

While the Australian Government has increased funding of Indigenous languages since the publication of this research in 2018, community consultation held for the Languages Sector Strengthening Plan made it clear that this funding still falls significantly short of the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language communities. FLA heard that funding is not working the way communities want and need it to. It is short-term, time-limited and project-based, and does not address the long-term needs and priorities of language communities. Funding is also competitive and not distributed equitably, with some languages receiving more financial support than others. The ILA program also funds languages together with arts projects, meaning that vital work to revitalise, maintain and strengthen languages is often required to compete with arts-based projects for funds.

Community consultation made it clear that a new approach to funding is needed for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages. In response, the Languages Sector Strengthening Plan includes an action to design and implement a national funding model for languages, in which funding is primarily focused towards supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities directly to do vital language work.

The Plan proposes that funding for languages should be:

- long-term and consistent;
- community-controlled and managed;
- directed solely to languages, and not included with funding for arts or culture;
- focused on resourcing jobs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to do critical language work to increase the strength of their languages;
- accessible to all language communities, regardless of location or language status;
- based on principles of restorative justice;
- designed to respect Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property rights.

First Languages Australia submits that a new national funding model for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages should be developed in partnership with the Australian Government and all State and Territory Governments, which focuses on resourcing jobs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to do critical language work to increase the strength of their languages.

Recommendation: Include an action in the next National Cultural Policy to continue and increase funding for First Nations peoples to revitalise, maintain and strengthen their languages, under a new national funding model to be developed in partnership with First Languages Australia.

8. Continue and increase support for the First Nations Languages Education Program

The National Cultural Policy has an action to ‘support sixty primary schools around Australia to teach local First Nations languages and cultural knowledge in schools’.

The First Nations Languages Education (FNLE) Program was established as a 2022 election commitment, and it remains one of the Australian Government’s most significant investments toward achieving Target 16 of Closing the Gap.

The initial \$14 million one-off investment has:

- supported 28 projects across the country;
- enabled work with 46 language communities;
- engaged more than 160 trainees partnered with more than 100 schools;
- resulted in 49 language educators leading school-based language classes in its first 12 months;
- employed more than 100 First Nations people;
- supported over 600 adult language learners.

The Program has far exceeded its initial expectations, supporting more communities, educators and schools than originally imagined. It is the only national program actively cultivating the next generation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language educators ready to work in schools. The Program, delivered in partnership with the Commonwealth Department of Education, was deliberately designed to meet all four Priority Reform Areas of Closing the Gap as well as Target 16, with additional benefits to Targets 5, 6, 7, 8 and 14.

The model works. Now it needs stability and scale. A commitment of \$14 million to continue supporting existing FNLE projects for another two years is needed, to embed skills, training pathways and language teaching within local schools and community structures. Additional funding of \$20 million is also required to expand the program up to an additional 30 language communities that are ready to participate but are currently unfunded.

The FNLE Program was allocated \$2.2 million in the recent 2026-27 Federal Budget. Whilst these funds are welcomed, they fall far short of meeting community and program needs, putting the government at risk of discontinuing the Department of Education’s only action towards Target 16. Sustainable language programs in schools require sustained support.

As the Commonwealth’s lead agency for Target 16, the Office for the Arts should advocate for and ensure the continuation of the FNLE Program, and work collaboratively with each of the Commonwealth Departments and Agencies to establish programs within their portfolios that meet local community needs and increase speaker numbers in line with Target 16.

Recommendation: Include an action in the next National Cultural Policy to continue and increase funding for the First Nations Languages Education Program, to support community language learning activities that have been proven to increase the numbers of language speakers and educators.

9. Continue to promote and prioritise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages throughout the International Decade of Indigenous Languages

The National Cultural Policy has an action to ‘Develop a National Action Plan that identifies priority areas that will preserve and safeguard First Nations languages, as part of the UNESCO International Decade of Indigenous Languages 2022–2032’.

The United Nations General Assembly declared the period from 2022 to 2032 as the International Decade of Indigenous Languages. The United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) was invited to serve as the lead agency for the International Decade, and developed a *Global Action Plan of the International Decade of Indigenous Languages (2022-2032)* (Global Action Plan).

In response to the Global Action Plan, the International Decade of Indigenous Languages Directions Group was established by the Office for the Arts, and worked in partnership with the Australian Government to develop *Voices of Country – Australia’s Action Plan for the International Decade of Indigenous Languages 2022-2032* (First Languages Australia and Commonwealth of Australia, 2023). *Voices of Country* is framed through five inter-connected themes, which articulate Australia’s high-level strategic focus for the International Decade of Indigenous Languages.

The Australian Government must continue to leverage the international spotlight that is currently on Indigenous languages, and ensure that immediate action is taken to support the vital and urgent work being of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people around the country to revitalise, maintain and strengthen their languages. This will primarily occur through implementation of the Languages Sector Strengthening Plan, which as discussed above should be included as an action in the next National Cultural Policy.

Recommendation: Continue to promote and prioritise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages throughout the International Decade of Indigenous Languages.

Conclusion

The development of a new National Cultural Policy presents a unique opportunity to recognise and highlight First Nations peoples, stories, cultures and languages as central to Australia's arts and culture sector. Our languages are our culture, and this must be recognised and embedded throughout the next National Cultural Policy.

First Languages Australia has a vision for the future where all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages are living, strong and vibrant - spoken across generations in homes and communities, embedded in education and public life, and respected, supported and celebrated by all Australians.

However, for this vision to be achieved, the commitment of significant and dedicated support from the Australian Government is required. A whole-of-government approach to supporting vital and urgent community language work is needed, an approach that is grounded in self-determination and built on respectful relationships and engagement.

First Languages Australia looks forward to working in partnership with the Australian Government to ensure that the central place of First Nations languages is recognised in the new National Cultural Policy, and that the recommendations made in this submission are implemented so that our vision for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages can become a reality.

References

- Bliss, H. (2018). *A Global Perspective on Costing Indigenous Language Revitalization*. First Peoples' Cultural Council.
- Calma, T. (2009). *Social Justice Report 2009*.
- Commonwealth of Australia. (1997). *Bringing them home: Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families*.
- First Languages Australia. (2015). *Junyirri: A framework for planning community language projects*.
- First Languages Australia. (2015). *National Indigenous Languages Collections Strategy*.
- First Languages Australia. (2021). *Yakilla: Training Tracks*.
- First Languages Australia. (2023). *Timeline of Contemporary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Languages Advocacy*. Retrieved from Jarrak: Our languages journey: <https://jarrak.com.au>
- First Languages Australia. (2023). *Yalbilinya: National First Languages Education Workforce Strategy*.
- First Languages Australia. (2026). *Gambay: First Languages Map*. Retrieved from <https://gambay.com.au>
- First Languages Australia and Commonwealth of Australia. (2023). *Voices of Country - Australia's Action Plan for the International Decade of Indigenous Languages 2022-2032*.
- First Languages Australia, Queensland Teachers' Union and Independent Education Union - Queensland and Northern Territory branch. (2024). *Industrial Guidelines: Employees Delivering First Nations Language and Cultural Education Programs*.
- Joint Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs. (2023). *Inquiry into the application of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in Australia*.
- Languages Policy Partnership. (2025). *Identified priorities of the National Languages Policy Partnership*.
- Maiam nayri Wingara and the Australian Indigenous Governance Institute. (2018). *Indigenous Data Sovereignty Communique*. Retrieved from Maiam nayri Wingara: <https://www.maiamnayriwingara.org>
- Mayi Kuwayu and First Languages Australia. (2024). *Research Update: Exploring links between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Language Use and Wellbeing*. Retrieved from First Languages Australia: <https://www.firstlanguages.org.au/wellbeing>
- The Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies. (2020). *National Indigenous Languages Report*.
- UNESCO. (2021). *Global Action Plan of the International Decade of Indigenous Languages (2022-2032)*.
- United Nations General Assembly. (2007). *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*.

About us

First Languages Australia (**FLA**) is the national peak body working to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages are living, strong and vibrant, spoken across generations in homes and communities, embedded in education and public life, and respected, supported and celebrated by all Australians.

As the national peak body for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages, we strengthen and connect the languages sector, advocate for effective policy and investment, and empower communities to speak, sustain and grow their languages on their own terms.

First Languages Australia is a member of the Coalition of Peaks and co-secretariat of the Languages Policy Partnership established under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap. First Languages Australia also chairs Australia's International Decade of Indigenous Languages Directions Group, and is one of the three Pacific members of the Global Taskforce for the Decade of Indigenous Languages.